

COMMUNITY NEEDS REPORT



Extension
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON



Agriculture Programming for Manitowoc County, UW-Madison Division of Extension

Community Forum: Identified Community Needs & Gaps

Top Challenges



**Farm Succession
Planning**



Mental Health

Stress, isolation, financial
uncertainty



Workforce Retention



Farm Viability

Income pressures, market
access, marketing innovation

Building on Strengths

➤ **Strong Agriculture Legacy**

Generational Pride

➤ **Allied Industry Supports**

Vets, agronomists, and
nutritionists

➤ **Established Processing
Infrastructure**

Dairy, meats, & vegetable
processing

Moving Forward Together



**Increased Research &
Data-driven Impact**



**Support for Resilient Farmers &
Farm Families**



**Education & Farmer
Groups**

On January 13, 2026, Manitowoc County hosted a Community Needs Forum with representatives and partners across local community organizations. Our county has a strong agricultural legacy rooted in generational pride, established processing infrastructure (dairy, meat, and vegetable processing), and allied industry support (vets, agronomists, and nutritionists). There is also a willingness within the community to adapt and change when data and research lead the way. This collaborative spirit is an asset as we face emerging challenges and opportunities. We also have strong support from various agricultural groups, including the Manitowoc County Farm Bureau, the Manitowoc Dairy Promotions Committee, and the Manitowoc Holstein Association.

Forum Discussion Summary

Several key priorities emerged that influence both the long-term viability of agriculture and the well-being of those who work in it. Farm succession planning and workforce development remain essential. Access to bilingual legal services and dependable community resources is crucial for retaining workers who support dairy operations and seasonal crop production. Mental health challenges are growing across all farming sectors, particularly for farmers navigating transitions and financial uncertainty. The county benefits from the strong presence of the University of Wisconsin – Madison Division of Extension educators, peer-to-peer farmer groups, agribusiness support, and educational opportunities. There was strong interest in expanding farm diversification and strengthening direct-to-consumer marketing efforts. Moving forward, progress depends on fostering strong connections through communication, education, and mutual respect.

Identified Community Needs and Gaps

Analysis of the forum data revealed several key needs that align with the scope of agriculture programming:

- Frame conversations around economic impact and data-driven messaging.
- Support resilient farmers and farm families.
- Encourage and amplify farmer-led research efforts.

Extension Alignment

Manitowoc County is a powerhouse in the dairy industry, boasting 60,000 milk cows on 134 dairy farms. (USDA National Ag Statistics).

Informal needs assessment conversations have revealed a need for programming related to forage options for dairy cattle and feed quality metrics, all while improving alfalfa management and timing to harvesting high-quality corn silage. In addition, there is a need for data management, technology, farm transition planning, costs to raise youngstock, and best practices for caring for calves to increase the completion rate of heifers into the milking herd. Furthermore, there are opportunities to train employees and use a translator. Therefore, the Bovi-Noticias team from UW-Madison Extension has started a bilingual production newsletter covering seasonal and timely information in conjunction with the Farm Management team. Examples can be found here: <https://dairy.extension.wisc.edu/bovi-noticias/>

As a result, the UW-Madison Extension dairy educator has focused their efforts on supporting farmers in these spaces. Some activities include:

- Alfalfa Harvest Quality Project - monitoring the first crop of alfalfa to identify optimum harvest value to meet dairy forage goals.
- Corn Silage Harvest Management project - partner with local agribusinesses to monitor whole plant corn silage moisture to target the optimum harvest.
- Collaborate with the Manitowoc County Forage Council, the Seven Rivers Soil Cooperative Producer-Led Watershed Group, agency staff to support ag producers to implement Extension research and recommendations at local field days and events, and work with the Manitowoc Soil & Water Conservation Department.

Additional Extension Resources to support Manitowoc County Farmers:

- Farm transition and succession planning resources; <https://farms.extension.wisc.edu/article-topic/farm-succession-estate-planning/>
- Encourage and amplify farmer stories by promoting agriculture to both consumers and producers through a farmer-led watershed group; <https://www.sevenriverssoilcooperative.com/>
- Supporting mental health, labor stability, and community connection.
- VITAL; go.wisc.edu/VITALmtg
- Badger Dairy Insights; <https://dairy.extension.wisc.edu/badger-dairy-insight/>
- Manure 101; <http://go.wisc.edu/2026Manure101>
- Peer-to-Peer mentorship meetings
- Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza; <https://manitowoc.extension.wisc.edu/agriculture/>
- Hay Market Report; <https://manitowoc.extension.wisc.edu/agriculture/alfalfa/>
- Local Radio, television, monthly newsletter, website, articles, and mailings.

At its core, this work is about being a trusted resource partner to farmers, employees, the community, and future generations. UW-Madison Extension supports farm succession, shares research with local producers, addresses mental health, and ensures agriculture remains economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable for generations to come.

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