

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY



National Groundwater Awareness Week – Diana Hammer Tscheschlok

While many of us do not pay attention to our water source until we believe it's threatened or contaminated, there is never a bad time to think about groundwater. When we shower, cook, wash our hands, do laundry, flush a toilet, water our lawn, or take a drink, 75% of Wisconsin residents (including 95% of municipalities) are relying on groundwater. Groundwater also provides almost all of the water for the state's agricultural industry--irrigation, livestock and dairy operations, nearly one-third of all industrial uses, and half of the commercial interests that use water. Groundwater also supplies most of the water to our state's lake, river and wetland ecosystems--resources that not only add to the state's high quality of life, but are critical to Wisconsin's popular tourism industry.

This month take some time to think both about your own usage of groundwater, and its quality. This is particularly important if you have your own well. **You** are the primary person responsible for maintaining the well, testing it routinely, and seeking assistance if there is a contamination issue. WDNR is available for resources (<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/water/dwg/>) and some assistance with contamination and clean-up, but they DO NOT regulate privately-owned wells and DO NOT require homeowners to stop using a well that has been contaminated. Fond du Lac County Health Department (920/929-3085) is able to test for the two most common groundwater concerns, nitrates and bacteria. You are also welcome to use a local or state certified water lab to get your water tested. Because varying weather conditions and environmental factors can impact water quality, it is recommended that homeowners test their water at least **once each year** and at different times of the year each time. Dairy farms fall under this category of rural well owners also, and in addition to the recommended practices for homeowners, have Farm Permits and/or Grade A Permits that require them to sample water a minimum of every two years to ensure proper sanitation of the milking equipment. (continued on back page)

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES



"Science for Young Thinkers" and Other Training Programs for Child Care Providers – Nan Baumgartner

Young children are scientists at play. They may not realize it, but their encounters with nature help them develop ideas about the world based on experiences with real things. And the adults who care for them can nurture this exploration and help instill a love for discovery and wondering. Why? How? Where? When? That is what the March "Better Kid Care" program was all about. Over 40 Fond du Lac County child care providers met at the Extension office to explore how they can spark a young child's interest in science. Providers learned how to support a child's explorative play by giving children the time, space and equipment needed for investigating the world around them. "Science for Young Thinkers" was one of five training programs offered to child care providers annually in Fond du Lac County. The workshop is part of a statewide Better Kid Care professional development program produced by Penn State Cooperative Extension and downlinked via satellite to local providers. UW-Extension serves as the host for this valuable training opportunity because caregivers who are kind, nurturing, and responsive to children's needs make quality possible. High quality early education is critical for children. Professional development provides the needed education, information, and strategies to link to quality child care and education. UW-Extension actively provides professional development opportunities to local providers to help maintain and support quality child care in the county.

AGRICULTURAL PROFITABILITY



A Few Winter Highlights from the Crops and Soils Department – Mike Rankin

- Crop production programming focused largely on economics. Although crop commodity prices are at record or near record highs, so are inputs and land charges. Presentations dealing with crop economics were given at four local meetings attended by over 200 crop producers and consultants. Economic topics were also addressed extensively in the media.
- 2008 was a big year for certifying Private Pesticide Applicators. Over 100 producers attended training sessions and were certified to apply restricted use pesticides.
- UW-Extension and the Fond du Lac County Land and Water Conservation Department again teamed to teach a Nutrient Management Planning class for farmers.
- Fourteen youth became certified in the 24-hour Wisconsin Tractor and Machinery Safety Certification Program taught by UW-Extension and a number of county volunteers.
- A 36-hour General Master Gardener Training Program was offered for individuals who have an interest in becoming certified Master Gardeners in Fond du Lac County. Twenty-four individuals are taking the program that will conclude in mid-April.

Groundwater Awareness - continued

If you have municipal water in your home, your water is tested regularly by the municipality for any contaminants. If there are unsafe levels of any contaminant, the Health Department and DNR require the municipality to notify residents. Several municipalities in Fond du Lac County require residents to report the existence of old dug or drilled wells within city limits. This is because unused wells can act as a funnel, allowing contaminants and unsafe materials to enter the aquifer from which current functioning wells are pumping. Fond du Lac County Land Conservation (920/923-3033) administers a cost-sharing program to assist homeowners with proper well abandonment. This is something that is equally important regardless of whether you are an urban or rural resident or how long the well has been unused.

There are certain private wells that are used by larger numbers of people on a short-term basis throughout the year such as churches, restaurants, taverns, campgrounds or other businesses. These wells are tested for bacteria and nitrates every year and inspected once every five years by Fond du Lac County Health and Code Enforcement Departments. If the water is found to be bacteriologically unsafe in these wells, there is a notice posted and corrective actions mandated. Follow up samples are taken to ensure that these measures have worked before use of the water by the public resumes. If these wells have elevated nitrates above 10.5 parts per million (ppm), a notice is posted and operation can continue. If the nitrate level is more than 20ppm, a notice is posted and corrective action resulting in safe samples is required before operation can continue.

As is so often the case, being proactive is the key to keeping our water sources safe. Contact UW-Extension for more ideas and information, and remember that the hot shower, the green lawn, the clean clothes, and tonight's meal and beverage are brought to you by safe groundwater and a maintained well.

FOND DU LAC COUNTY UW-EXTENSION

Room 227, Administration/Extension Building

400 University Drive

Fond du Lac, WI 54935

Phone: (920) 929-3170/748-7565/324-2879

Website: <http://fonddulac.uwex.edu>

Nan Baumgartner, Family Living Educator

Paul Dyk, Dairy and Livestock Agent

Mike Rankin, Crops and Soils Agent

Denise Retzleff, 4-H Youth Development Educator

Shelley Tidemann, Family Living Educator

Diana Hammer Tscheschlok, Community, Natural
Resource & Economic Development Educator

ak 3/31/08