

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES



Experiences from Mexico – Diana Hammer Tscheschlok

14 people from Fond du Lac County led by Denise Retzleff, Marie Stafford, & Diana Tscheschlok participated in a cultural immersion experience in Cuernavaca, Mexico, in August. Below is the description two participants wrote about our first day.

On Sunday we went shopping for essential grocery items to compare prices and availability in two different settings, a bustling people's market and a supermarket of the type commonly found in the US. Our three teams were provided shopping lists of essential grocery items, maps of the city, and 50 pesos (about \$5), the Mexican minimum daily wage. We could not spend any of our own money as we attempted to purchase our food. To add to the challenge, we had to communicate as best we could with our limited Spanish.

The people's market was well named as it was packed with vendors and customers jammed together underground. In individual stands, vendors sold fresh produce, unrefrigerated fish and meats, flowers, backpacks by the score, school supplies, clothing, sandals, souvenirs, and commercial foods such as boxed milk and bottled oil. Women called "Marias" who could not afford stands wandered the crowded passageways selling wares such as prickly pear cactus ears, small fruits, and flowers. Far more indigenous people shopped at this market than at the supermarket. (Continued on back)



Understanding Poverty, Building Relationships – Nan Baumgartner

Poverty is complex. There is no one thing that causes it and there is no one solution to end it. Certainly, poverty is not just about choices of the poor. Yet many people carry assumptions about the poor that keep them at the bottom of the economic ladder. All of us learn to do things in a way that makes sense in the family, neighborhood, community or region in which we live; it's not right or wrong – just different. We learn these things without necessarily thinking about it or understanding it. In Fond du Lac County, UWEX and the Department of Social Services offers a day-long training for local agencies and organizations that work with or serve individuals in poverty. The training explores assumptions participants may have about people who live in an economic class different from their own, it focuses on what helps families and individuals get ahead by creating an awareness of the resources, other than money, people need to thrive and it identifies strategies for building understanding and relationships with individuals regardless of socio-economic status or social class. Thirty-five individuals participated in the training in October. In an end of session evaluation, 100% said the workshop met their expectation, 96% indicated they will use the information shared in the workshop in their own work and 81% said some of their assumptions about social and economic class were challenged.

AGRICULTURAL PROFITABILITY



Field Days and Moisture Testing – Mike Rankin

Nearly 200 farmers attended the annual Fond du Lac County Agronomy Field Day in late August. It was held at the Ed Montsma farm along Highway 151 near Lamartine. The event is jointly co-sponsored by UW-Extension and AgriLand Co-op. Participants who attended the field day viewed numerous field research and demonstration trials and attended one-hour educational sessions that repeated throughout the day. Educational sessions were presented by county Extension agents, state Extension specialists, and experts employed by private industry. Many of the discussions focused on high input prices and decision-making for the 2009 crop year.

To help farmers make informed decisions on corn silage harvest timing, the Fond du Lac County Forage Council once again coordinated three corn silage moisture dry down events in the county. A machine is used to chop whole plant corn samples for moisture determination using laboratory procedures. Whole plant moisture is the only way to determine optimum harvest timing for corn silage. Harvesting corn either too wet or too dry can result in significant economic consequences. In total, 115 corn samples from farm fields were chopped and analyzed. Moisture results are reported via telephone voice recording, on the Fond du Lac County Agronomy web site, and on Extension radio programs.



Experiences from Mexico- continued

The supermarket, on the other hand, was brightly lit and offered wide aisles well stocked with name brands -- Nabisco, Nestle, Gillette, Palmolive, Ponds, Libby, etc. Here, we found mostly packaged products vs. the fresh found in the people's market. Advertisements featured white models rather than Latino. Fish, meat and dairy products were refrigerated and workers around fresh foods wore masks and hairnets. The baggers, all teenagers, were "volunteers" who earned only tips.

Our groups found it nearly impossible to buy the four or five items on their lists with the 50 pesos allotted. One group, hoping to buy one kilo of beans, wound up purchasing only a half kilo. Another group had to return their onions and tomatoes when they discovered they didn't have enough money at the checkout counter. In short, it's extremely difficult to live on the wage earned by as many as 70% of Mexico's workers.

This table describes the economic reality described above. It was a powerful experience to see how much of a typical shopping list can be purchased with the Mexican minimum wage compared to the American or Canadian minimum wage.

	Average Minimum Wage	8 hr. day (USD)	Annual Wage (USD)	1 lb of meat	% of daily wage	Time worked to earn that much
Mexico	49.50 pesos/day	\$4.95	\$1287	\$3	61%	5 hours
Canada	\$7.25/hour	\$58.00	\$15, 080	\$3	5.2%	25 min.
U.S.	\$6.55/hour	\$52.00	\$14, 168	\$3	5.9%	28 min.

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