

EXTENSION *in Action*

SUCCESS STORIES FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-EXTENSION | FALL 2005

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in confronting difficult
issues

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JIM GILL

UW-Extension helps people make informed decisions

Faced with complex issues and difficult choices, Wisconsin citizens turn to UW-Extension for accessible education, practical research and reliable information.

UW
Extension
Learning for life



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Through the University of Wisconsin-Extension, all Wisconsin people can access university resources and engage in lifelong learning, wherever they live and work.

An EEO/Affirmative Action employer, University of Wisconsin-Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming, including Title IX and ADA requirements.

On the cover

Wisconsin Public Radio (WPR) Acting News Director Brian Bull, right, interviews Thajying Lee, executive director of United Refugee Services of Wisconsin, about the preservation and integration of Asian-American culture in Wisconsin. See pp. 4-5 to learn how people rely on WPR and Wisconsin Public Television for programming tailored to their information needs.

Tough issues, informed choices

University of Wisconsin-Extension educators regularly confront emerging social, environmental and economic issues. Even when issues become contentious, Extension's role is to help people make informed choices based on objective research. Interim Chancellor Marv Van Kekerix discussed this topic with Tom Still, a former journalist and a member of UW-Extension's Board of Visitors.



Marv Van Kekerix,
interim chancellor,
UW-Extension

What's the university's role in helping people confront difficult issues? "The UW has long been involved in the tough issues facing our state, nation and world. This year's 70th anniversary of the founding of Social Security is a good example. Three UW-Madison professors played a pivotal role in getting that started, helping the nation confront a tough issue at a very trying time in our nation's history.

"UW-Extension's role today is more important than ever. There are many issues that demand attention from the university, and the Extension is an important way for citizens to learn more about those issues. Land use and conservation are excellent examples. Everyone wants to embrace economic growth. It will be important for people and markets to work together to measure the effect of that growth on land, water and wildlife resources."

Does rapid technological innovation create new challenges?

"Yes. Genetically modified crops are an example. They represent a major advancement for farmers and consumers. Some can increase yields, preserve the land and feed hungry people. The university can help us move beyond scare tactics, toward true science.



Tom Still, president,
Wisconsin Technology Council

"Our economy is changing. Historically, Wisconsin evolved from a wheat-producing state to a dairy state, in part because of UW innovations. Biotechnology and nanotechnology might be the cash crops of the future. UW-Extension's Small Business Development Centers represent a rejuvenation of the Wisconsin Idea, working with the technical colleges, WiSys Technology Foundation and others to build a more entrepreneurial economy."

Our educators try to remain objective. As a journalist, was this a challenge for you?

"All journalists are biased, because all people are biased. In good news coverage, the goal is fairness – to examine different angles of the story. Good reporters don't frame stories as one extreme versus the other. Instead, they frame stories from the middle, from a perspective that resonates with the average citizen. It's easy to do a black-and-white story and call it balanced, but that misses all the gray tones in the middle."

Building relationship skills helps combat poverty

The UW-Fond du Lac Office of Continuing Education pilots a program to **address** the issue of **childhood poverty** in Wisconsin.

According to the Children's Defense Fund, nearly 14% of Wisconsin's children live in poverty, ranking the state eighth nationwide. This finding comes at a great cost. The state spends considerable tax dollars on public assistance programs for the poor each year, and the cost to the children themselves is high.

Poverty often leads to poor nutrition, unhealthy living environments, social stress and inadequate health care. Reducing the number of children living in poverty means less strain on hospitals, schools, public health systems and the juvenile justice system.

Increasing poverty

Over the last 20 years, the city of Fond du Lac has experienced a 25% increase in poverty. In response, the University of Wisconsin-Fond du Lac Office of Continuing Education and the Fond du Lac School District offered "A Framework for Understanding Poverty" in-service, based on Ruby K. Payne's book of the same name, to 830 school district employees. An outcome of the program is that all public schools in the city created poverty-improvement plans.

Mentors make a difference

Because Dr. Payne's research shows one of the best ways to combat poverty is to help the poor build personal relationships, Lakeshore

Elementary School instituted a student mentoring program. UW-Fond du Lac students who attended the "Framework" training paired up for a few hours each week with low-income elementary school students.

In a post-session evaluation, the mentors reported building strong relationships with the children. "I was happy that my mentee started recognizing me and accepting my presence, and that he began to use me as a resource," said one mentor. "The teacher let him know that I was there for him, and that I could help him." Another mentor stated,

"[My mentee] didn't even want me there the first day. But by the last day, she was asking when I would come back...."

Expanding opportunities

The mentor program has expanded to include two additional elementary schools and more than 20 UW-Fond du Lac students. Last year the UW-Fond du Lac Office of Continuing Education raised nearly \$10,000 from area organizations and a fundraiser to provide scholarships for low-income youth to attend programs that will help them continue to build their relationship-building and academic skills. —Amy Pikalek

For more information: UW Colleges Interim Director of Continuing Education and Extended Services Leanne Doyle, (920) 929-3622, ldoyle@uwc.edu

College student Elizabeth Rose, right, a participant in the UW-Fond du Lac – Fond du Lac School District mentor program, provides valuable support to the youth she mentors.



UW-FOND DU LAC OFFICE OF CONTINUING EDUCATION

Wisconsin Public Radio and Television inform citizenry

For hundreds of thousands of state residents, [Wisconsin Public Radio \(WPR\)](#) and [Wisconsin Public Television \(WPT\)](#) provide valued [news](#) coverage and in-depth [analysis](#).

People rely on the mass media as important sources for news and information about things that affect everyday life: pocket-book, political and policy issues, and more. With broadcast networks that cover the entire state, WPT and WPR provide reliable information on a variety of topics.

And when it comes to coverage of political elections and other civic matters, this multifaceted coverage contributes to a more-engaged citizenry.

A more useful service

In a world burgeoning with cable channels, niche print publications and online blogs, people can feel overwhelmed by a cacophony of mass-media voices. Treating the

entire state and its regions as “local” media markets, WPR and WPT program producers work to offer a different, more useful, service.



Joy Cardin

“Listeners tell us we matter because we do provide in-depth information on issues that are important to them. We provide information and perspectives they can’t get anywhere else,” says Joy

Cardin, WPR director of Ideas Network talk programming. “We provide a forum for discussion, serving as a sort of liaison between listeners and their elected officials.”



Kathy Bissen

Kathy Bissen, WPT executive producer for news and public affairs, says, “We bring people information on what’s happening around the state in a very personal way. We want them to know how the news today will impact them.”

Viewers and listeners value the approach

“I’m passionate about public television. If I am watching TV, more than likely it’s tuned to public television,” says Camille Haney, a former top official with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, who says news and public affairs programming on public television is her top reason for tuning in. “You’re going to get consistently high quality and you get a balance.”

But even the most balanced news coverage won’t necessarily make everyone happy. Mass media research conducted at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and elsewhere shows that people with strong opinions will typically find fault with news stories that give any attention to opposing points of view.



Brian Bull

WPR Acting News Director Brian Bull has a practical way of measuring this “perceived hostility” effect,

STATS & FACTS

- Nearly 575,000 households tune to Wisconsin Public Television (WPT) each week.
- Nearly 415,000 households tune to Wisconsin Public Radio (WPR) each week.
- Almost 28,000 visitors accessed wisconsinvote.org during the 2004 election season.
- WPT received Walter Cronkite Awards for Excellence in Television Political Journalism for election coverage in 2002 and 2004.
- WPT programs “Here and Now” (first place) and “In Wisconsin” (second place) were honored as the best public affairs programs in Wisconsin by the Milwaukee Press Club in 2005.

saying “If we manage to get criticism from all sides, I know I’m doing my job.”

In-depth election coverage

Both broadcast services have won numerous state and national awards for providing outstanding election coverage. In addition to standard news reports, WPT and WPR devote considerable on-air time to debates and joint candidate appearances.

In addition, a special Web site (wisconsinvote.org) offers detailed background information on candidates and referendum issues.

On WPT, candidates are given the opportunity to speak directly to voters in an unedited manner through broadcasts called “Candidate Statements.” During the 2004 election, 22 candidates vying to represent seven U.S. House of Representative

districts and a U.S. Senate seat took advantage of the offer.

Tim Peterson, who ran as a Libertarian in Wisconsin’s Fifth Congressional District, says, “It was one of the bright spots of the campaign. ‘Candidate Statements’ allows candidates to get their views out in an unfiltered and unedited way to voters.”

Bissen explains that at an early stage in races WPT provides extensive coverage of third-party candidates to introduce citizens to as many office seekers and viewpoints as possible. Often, these candidates struggle to garner attention from commercial broadcasters.

Tools for critical thinking

What’s in the future for WPT and WPR? Headliners for 2006 include races for governor and U.S. Senate.

“It’s always invigorating and always challenging to cover the elections,” says Bissen.

Furthermore, Bissen notes and Bull concurs, there’s a whole new world emerging on how to deliver the news – from podcasting to datacasting – both of which further harness the communication potential of the Web, radio and television. What remains unwavering at WPT and WPR is a commitment to offering Wisconsin citizens information and tools for critical thinking.

WPR and WPT are services of UW-Extension and the Wisconsin Educational Communications Board.
—Maira Harrington

For more information about Wisconsin Public Radio: wpr.org

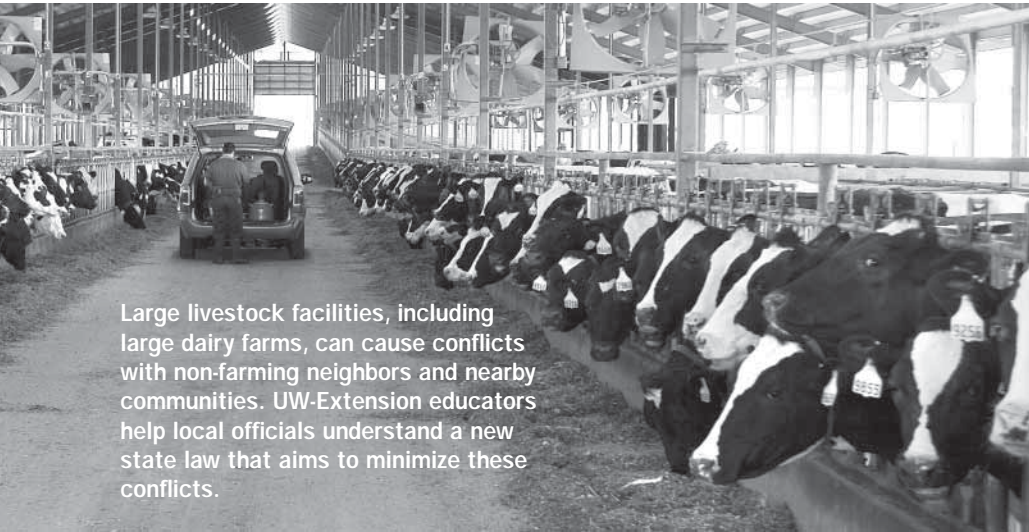
For more information about Wisconsin Public Television: wpt.org



During the 2004 campaign, anchor Frederica Freyberg explained the format of WPT’s unmediated debate among Republican U.S. Senate candidates, from left to right, Bob Welch, Robert Gerald Lorge, Tim Michels and Russ Darrow.

STEVE APPS/ WISCONSIN STATE JOURNAL VIA MERLINNET.COM

Providing answers to tough questions



Large livestock facilities, including large dairy farms, can cause conflicts with non-farming neighbors and nearby communities. UW-Extension educators help local officials understand a new state law that aims to minimize these conflicts.

WOLFGANG HOFMANN

As Wisconsin's population grows, [suburbs](#) and [rural subdivisions](#) are being developed in what used to be an exclusively [agricultural environment](#).

At the same time, some livestock producers are considering expanding their operations. It's a situation that can lead to conflicts between farmers and their non-farm neighbors.

New state law

Wisconsin's new Livestock Facility Siting Law sets up requirements and restrictions about where large livestock operations can be established.

Now local governments must re-examine their rules in light of the new law.

Because the law is complicated, and because of concerns that the new law would result in a loss of local control, University of Wisconsin-Extension offered workshops in six locations in April and May. At the workshops local officials learned the ins and outs of the new law and got answers to difficult questions.

Workshops inform

Keith Langenhahn, chair of the Marathon County Board and a dairy farmer, says the workshops reassured him that the new state law would not usurp local control.

"Our township had exclusive agricultural zoning for 20 years, and we were concerned about the issue of local control. We had done a land-use plan, and a survey of residents that showed overwhelmingly that people want agriculture here, but 90% do not want operations bigger than 90 cows," Langenhahn says.

Dan Fischer, Manitowoc County executive, says the large facility issue has been controversial. A proposal to put a facility for 5,000 cows in the county was defeated by a 3-to-2 vote after heated debate. The community of Centerville is opposing a proposal for a 4,000-cow dairy, citing concerns that the operation would smell bad.

"The workshop was excellent," Fischer says. "We got a lot of insight into the issues of odor and waste management and about what we need to do next."

Local involvement

The state law sets criteria for controlling odor and protecting water quality, but allows local governments that adopt the standards to make decisions about whether to allow large facilities and where they can be built, explains Greg Blonde, Waupaca County UW-Extension agriculture agent and an organizer of the workshops. —*Mary Ellen Bell*

For more information: Agriculture Agent Greg Blonde, greg.blonde@ces.uwex.edu, (715) 258-6230

WORKSHOP IMPACTS

- More than 500 local officials from 47 counties learned about the state's new livestock facility siting law.
- 80% of 306 participants who responded to a survey said the workshop would help them make better decisions when weighing the interests of farmers with those of their non-farm neighbors.
- 69% of respondents said they learned to identify resources for managing conflicts about land-use and agricultural issues.
- 68% said they would take local action concerning the adoption of the livestock facility siting law.

Responding to critical community issues

Approximately 160 University of Wisconsin-Extension county-based educators and administrators throughout the state have participated in conflict-resolution training, increasing their capacity to respond to community issues. Here are just two cases where Extension educators facilitated consensus building and problem solving, and assisted communities in protecting the health of individuals and families.

Improving food security

Toni Rogers and J.P. Ploetz, nutrition coordinators in Oneida, Langlade, Vilas, Florence and Forest counties, launched the Hope for the Hungry Task Force in 2003 with the goal of increasing community involvement and making food more accessible for families.



ONEIDA CO. COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

“Until UW-Extension did a survey, many people in the region didn’t realize that their neighbors were hungry. By bringing together public- and private-sector groups, we are now able to provide food security and protect the health of our children, adults and seniors.”

—Toni Rogers, Wisconsin Nutrition

Education Program coordinator, Langlade and Oneida counties

TASK FORCE IMPACTS

- Second Harvest food distribution was improved and expanded.
- A farmers’ market was initiated in Vilas County. WIC (Women, Infants and Children) Program participants and seniors in Oneida and Vilas counties received vouchers to use at the market. In Oneida County arrangements were made for transfer of excess market produce to pantries.
- The number of community- and church-sponsored events to raise money for pantries increased.

For more information: Wisconsin Nutrition Education Program Coordinator Toni Rogers, toni.rogers@ces.uwex.edu, (715) 365-2750

Raising awareness of drinking-water quality

In response to concerns about groundwater quality, Paul Ohlrogge, community resource development educator in Iowa County, worked with Iowa County town boards, plan commissions and the board of supervisors to launch a countywide water-testing program in 2004.



IOWA CO. COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

“In a 1999 Iowa County Cooperative Extension Office needs assessment survey, groundwater was at the top of environmental issues. The work done by UW-Extension, towns, and county, state and federal organizations will help determine the most vulnerable aquifers and what precautions should be taken before development proceeds.”

—Paul Ohlrogge, Community Resource Development educator, Iowa County

PROGRAM IMPACTS

- Drinking-water education programs were developed and attended by 164 people in seven towns. Of those who participated, 94% said they gained a better understanding of groundwater sources and how to protect themselves from contaminated groundwater.
- More than 850 wells were tested, 24% of rural home wells in Iowa County.
- Groundwater guidelines are now included in the Iowa County Smart Growth plan.
- Iowa County has co-funded one of the most sophisticated groundwater-mapping studies in the state, conducted by the Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey (a unit of UW-Extension).

For more information: Community Resource Development Educator Paul Ohlrogge, paul.ohlrogge@ces.uwex.edu, (608) 935-0391

—Jo Futrell



UW-Extension research informs decision making

When an [ethanol manufacturer](#) sought a permit to construct a plant with high-capacity wells in [Winnebago County](#), many residents were concerned about the effect on the [quality](#) of their [drinking water](#).



Hydrologist Madeline Gotkowitz of the Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey (a unit of the University of Wisconsin-Extension) provided research that helped county board members make an informed decision about constructing an ethanol plant in Winnebago County.

At a series of intense public meetings Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey (WGNHS) hydrologist Madeline Gotkowitz “spoke for the groundwater.” She presented her research that showed that if the plant were to construct the wells to draw water from a deeper aquifer, the proposed water use would not exacerbate an existing problem with naturally occurring arsenic in the shallow aquifer. In addition, Gotkowitz provided practical advice as to how the wells could be constructed for maximal environmental protection.

In March 2002, the Winnebago County Board of Supervisors voted to allow the plant to be built. Today the Utica-based plant, which provides Wisconsin farmers with another market for their corn, employs 32 workers and produces 52 million gallons of renewable, corn-based fuel annually.

For more information: WGNHS Hydrologist Madeline Gotkowitz, mbgotkow@facstaff.wisc.edu, (608) 262-1580



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