
Cooperative Extension served more than 1 million Wisconsin residents last year through a variety of statewide and community-specific educational programs. Constituents of the 31st Senate District are an essential part of those served. The following are a few brief examples of Cooperative Extension programs in your district.

Western Wisconsin Rural Immigration Summit helps people learn about immigration issues

The labor force in Western Wisconsin is changing. Employees on dairy farms and in many factories are increasingly of Hispanic origin. Large increases in the Hispanic population are being seen in many small towns in Western Wisconsin, including in Jackson, Trempealeau and Eau Claire counties.

As with any change, this has brought many challenges to the area. Some local community members are not always receptive to people who have different traditions, eating habits, and cultures. The immigrant population also looks quite different from the locals. Many local people are upset about their new neighbors, saying they are taking our jobs, using our social systems, not paying taxes, and are always in trouble with the law. One local community has made national news regarding statements made by elected officials in response to the rising Hispanic populations.

Cooperative Extension was aware of the tension in some of the towns in Western Wisconsin. To address the issue, a team of agents applied for a grant from the Wisconsin Humanities Council to offer a program to help local people understand why Mexicans would want to immigrate to Western Wisconsin. The program was titled the Western Wisconsin Rural Immigration Summit. The topics of the full day event included a history of immigration in Wisconsin, Rural Wisconsin and Latino labor, the impact of Emigration on Mexican Communities, families and emigrants, Federal immigration policy, Life of the Latino immigrant in Wisconsin, and the economic impact of immigration in Wisconsin communities.

The keynote speaker traveled from Mexico to participate in the summit. More than 250 people attended the event, with people from all walks of life represented, including farmers, lenders, clergy, local elected officials, high school Spanish class students, local utility employees, college students, and agency personnel. Evaluations results indicated that an average of 80% of respondents said all the presentations helped them gain a better understanding of immigrant life in rural Wisconsin.

As a result of the summit, several other efforts, such as community study groups, discussion groups and group meetings, have been, or are currently being organized as a direct result of the Summit.

Prepared for
Senator Kathleen Vinehout
31st Senate District

In Your District:

A part of the Black River Correctional Center educational program includes Personal Financial Management for 56 inmates in 2007. The financial management tools that were introduced included goal setting, tracking spending, wants and needs, spending and savings plans, credit information, debt collection, and record keeping. Following the financial education program the Correctional Center teacher led the inmates through the activities more in depth to reinforce the successful use of the tools. The goal was to expand on what was started when the Family Living Agent presented and each individual completed an individualized financial plan. Of the 56 participants, evaluations indicated the following: 100% increased knowledge of tracking strategies 100% increased knowledge of what is included in a spending plan 88% identified a short term goal and long term goal 92% increased their awareness of the role of communications strategies in developing a successful spending plan and examples of strategies. A follow-up event is the Parenting Resource Fair which was held two times in 2007 with a total of 90 participants each time. The presentations included the topics of parenting, financial management, youth group opportunities, nutrition, school services.

