NEWS FROM EXTENSION
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Planning for Progress: How Strategic Planning, Community Visioning and Consensus Building Create Stronger Organizations and Communities

by Kayla Rombalski, Community Development Educator

One of my primary roles as a Community Development Educator with Extension is facilitating planning efforts. While every plan looks different, whether it is a strategic plan for an organization, an economic development strategy, or a comprehensive plan for a municipality, the purpose is the same: helping people move from where they are today to where they want to be in the future.

At its core, planning brings people together to understand current realities, identify priorities, build consensus, and create a practical path forward. These skills are at the heart of much of my recent work.

This spring, I completed an eight-month strategic planning process with the Wood County Health Department, resulting in its 2026-2028 Strategic Plan. Through staff engagement, goal setting, prioritization, and action planning, the process established a shared vision for strengthening public health services and organizational effectiveness.

Building on that work, I recently began facilitating a similar strategic planning process with Edgewater Haven through the Wood County Human Services Department. I am also wrapping up a strategic planning process with Feeding Our Community with United Services (FOCUS). In both cases, the goal is to help leadership identify priorities, align resources, and create a roadmap for the future.

Planning is not limited to organizations. Earlier this year, I led a comprehensive planning activity with students in the Pittsville After School Program. Students explored land use, zoning, and community design before creating their own model towns. The activity introduced key planning concepts while encouraging students to think critically about how communities are organized and grow over time.

Because successful planning depends on strong facilitation skills, continuous learning is an important part of this work. Later this month, I will participate in Technology of Participation (ToP) Facilitation Methods training. The training focuses on helping groups move from differing perspectives and competing priorities toward shared understanding, consensus, and commitment. These tools can be applied across nearly every planning effort.

Looking ahead, planning work will continue to be a major focus. Wood County is preparing to update both the Economic Development chapter of the County Comprehensive Plan and the Wood County REDI (Rural Economic Development Initiative) Plan, helping guide future economic development decisions and investments throughout the county.

Whether developing a strategic plan, engaging stakeholders in community visioning, or updating a countywide strategy, the same transferable skills remain essential: engaging stakeholders, facilitating productive conversations, analyzing information, identifying priorities, building consensus, and translating ideas into action. A good plan is more than a document on a shelf. It is a tool that helps organizations and communities make meaningful progress toward a shared vision for the future.

Dairy Educational Opportunities Improve Knowledge

by Matt Lippert, Regional Dairy Educator

A Pasture Walk focusing on Organic Dairy production was held in October. Grazing is a requirement for organic certification. The economic opportunities for organic milk production run in cycles and is currently very favorable for transitioning to organic milk production. We focus on this to improve economic viability of dairy farms, in this case generally smaller dairies. This program also promotes sustainable perennial production systems providing high quality forage. The program had over fifty participants and was held on site on an organic dairy. In the morning there were presentations on utilizing legumes in grazing systems, revitalizing older forage stands, and pasture fertility. In the afternoon the group toured the operation observing the dairy cows, the use of lanes and the various forage stands being grazed.



Pasture Walk participants listen to a presenter.

Save a Calf, Save a Cow was held in October. This program focuses on calving time and nutrition and management practices that promote healthy safe calvings for both the calf and the mother. This program had about twenty participants. Both beef and dairy producers. The program was held over the weekend to make it accessible for smaller producers that have outside work commitments during the week.

A feature of the program is a model cow and fetus that can be positioned to show different birthing presentations that may require assistance. It is very realistic and helpful for producers to visualize the calf birthing process prior to calvings they may need to assist with.

Both of these programs were evaluated and featured positive scores for improved knowledge on the topics.



Save a Calf, Save a Cow participants work with a model cow.

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