



from the director

INVEST STRATEGICALLY; INVEST IN UW-EXTENSION

—Mark D. O'Connell, Executive Director, Wisconsin Counties Association

As stewards of both the public trust and the public purse, counties continue to strive to make the best use of scarce financial resources. It is important for counties to be strategic and work to receive the biggest return on their investments. Counties work to balance that with the need to plan for the future and protect the great resources currently within county government.

In each of our counties, there is a resource that is an outstanding return on investment, as well as highly valued. That resource is our University of Wisconsin-Extension county offices. These offices bring value by improving production of farmers and profits of businesses. UW-Extension enhances economic development, strengthens families, improves health through nutrition education and supports the future by working with youth on leadership and life skills. All these efforts bolster Wisconsin counties' economic vibrancy and pave the way for a prosperous tomorrow.

Counties deal with budget challenges daily and through every budget cycle. Bayfield County Administrator Mark Abeles-Allison points out, "Every year, the budget presents a greater challenge. We ask ourselves how we will handle it. We could cut services. But that would only achieve short-term savings and risk long-term quality of life. UW-Extension is a resource we often call upon to offer financial education for households and businesses, nutrition information for low-income

families, energy and water quality education, unbiased information for farmers and life skills development for youth. UW-Extension provides practical information to serve as the foundation for county improvements."

Anyone would be thrilled with a 10% return on an investment. Because of the unique funding partnership counties share with UW-Extension, the return on investment is at least 300%. In smaller counties, every dollar the county provides to UW-Extension is matched with \$3.00. In larger counties that return is as great as \$12.00 when factoring in other grants and revenue. Benefits of programming to county residents further increase that return.

County assets need to be maintained. UW-Extension is no exception. UW-Extension's county employees should be recognized for their passion, continued

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hard work, excellence and dedication to making our counties a better place to live and work. Fond du Lac Executive Allen Buechel says, "In Fond du Lac County, UW-Extension educators provide educational programming related to strategic planning, team development, conflict management and more. In addition, our investment in Cooperative Extension allows us to have a federally-funded Nutrition Education Program, improving the nutrition and lives of more than 2,000 low-income Fond du Lac County residents. UW-Extension educators provide cost-saving and beneficial resources in partnership with county departments, local governments, non-profit agencies and communities. We also save dollars by not hiring outside consultants."

Cooperative Extension Dean and Director Richard Klemme has made a commitment to retain quality UW-Extension educators by modestly increasing employee salaries. He is asking for the counties' support of this commitment as county governments construct their budgets for 2015. Cooperative Extension is willing to cover an increase through the end of 2014. However, counties will need to consider adding funds in their 2015 budgets to realize this increase starting January 1, 2015.

"UW-Extension is an integral part of county government and the community," says Walworth County Administrator David Bretl. "We work together to tackle challenges, find solutions and tap into valuable resources. We get an outstanding return on this investment. I consider UW-Extension to be an important asset, and we can't take any asset for granted. If we are to continue to receive high-quality service, we must ensure that our state partner has the ability to recruit and retain the outstanding professionals who serve our communities so well."

I urge you to consider investing strategically in the future of your county and the state by investing in UW-Extension. 

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