

# Greg Blonde

UW-Extension  
Department of Agriculture & Life Sciences

Tenured Faculty Review

April 5, 2013

**Position:** Agriculture Agent  
Waupaca County  
1984 – Present

**Rank:** Professor  
2003 - Present

## **I. Major Programs (Development/Implementation/Impact)**

### **Conservation & Land Use**

**Situation:** Waupaca County approved its first ever comprehensive plan land use plan in 2007. Preservation of farmland was included in just 13 (59%) of the townships. Collectively, less than half (44%) of all existing cropland and only two-thirds (67%) of all private forest land in Waupaca County was identified as the preferred future land use.

Consequently, a group of farmers and rural community leaders organized (Waupaca County Partners for Working Land) and asked for continued educational leadership and support from local UW-Extension educators. A prior UW-Extension survey of more than 20,000 local landowners during public input phase of the comprehensive planning process found broad support for preserving farm and forest land to help protect agriculture, forestry and quality of life in Waupaca County. Specifically, there was strong interest in pursuing permanent conservation easements as a local implementation tool, something discovered through previous UW-Extension Land Use Study Tours in several eastern states.

**Response:** In 2008, Blonde wrote a grant (**Exhibit 1**) to develop a county based voluntary conservation easement donation program. The goal of the grant was to establish a framework that would allow local landowners the option of voluntarily protecting eligible crop and forest land from future non-agricultural development.

In 2009, Blonde worked with local CRD educator Mike Koles and WI Counties Association attorney Andrew Phillips to develop an ordinance that established the Waupaca County Working Farm & Forest Land Preservation Program. Local conservation and IT staff were also engaged to develop a computer-based landowner evaluation system consistent with local ordinance provisions. The GIS based program was then used to identify eligible landowners and invite them to attend one of three UW-Extension informational workshops. Blonde developed a 10-step landowner guide and presented it during workshops offered at three different locations to help interested landowners learn how conservation easement donations actually work. Conservation compliance was also discussed as the local easement program requires that cooperating landowners develop and maintain approved nutrient/forest management plans.

In 2010, Blonde worked with the very first local landowners who donated perpetual conservation easements on their property to host two “open house” educational programs. Other eligible landowners were invited to attend and learn first-hand “why and how” to voluntarily donate a perpetual conservation easement on their property. Blonde also developed a fact sheet and display for the 2010 UW-Extension All-Faculty Conference at the Monona Terrace in Madison. That same year the state introduced a purchase of agricultural conservation easement (PACE) pilot program. Because a local program for evaluating and holding conservation easements was already established in Waupaca County, farms eligible for the local easement donation program were also eligible for the new statewide purchase of agricultural conservation easement (PACE) pilot program. During 2010-2011, Blonde and local LCD employees worked with six farms to develop detailed applications for the first round of PACE funding, and nine additional farms for round two of PACE funding.

(continued)

**Outcomes:** The \$75,000 grant Blonde received in 2008 through the American Transmission Company (ATC) high voltage power line county mitigation fund established the Waupaca County voluntary conservation easement donation program, the first of its kind in WI for permanent preservation of prime crop and forest land. It also led to the establishment of a local Conservation Easement oversight committee, including county supervisors and staff from UW-Extension, Land & Water Conservation, Register of Deeds and Corporate Council.

A local GIS layer was then developed to support the grant project which helped identifying over 1,000 eligible landowners who then received a letter and a fact sheet to help explain the program (**Exhibit 2**). In addition, more than 100 attended at least one of the educational workshops or “open houses” offered in 2009-10. Evaluations from those programs helped identify twenty-one landowners interested in exploring a conservation easement donation on their property with three (different townships) eventually donating easements on their property.

In addition, Waupaca County had more than a third all statewide PACE applications (6) and a majority of all land (58% or 3,379 acres) land accepted in the first round of the statewide pilot purchase program.. Based on final appraisals, the six Waupaca County farms collectively agreed to be paid nearly \$3 million (approximately 40% of the appraised development value) to permanently preserve their farmland from any future non-ag development. In addition, each local PACE farm then used the sale proceeds to reinvest in their farm using like-kind-exchanges to avoid capital gain taxes. Moreover, the remaining value (approximately 60%) not paid for by the PACE sale was then donated to the Waupaca County Conservation Easement program creating a charitable contribution to a qualified entity thereby allowing each farm to claim remaining value from their PACE sale as a charitable donation to qualified entity and thus eligible for enhanced state and federal income tax deductions for sixteen years, or until the total value of their donation has been deducted, whichever comes first. Waupaca County is a co-holder of the easement with the state and agrees to monitor compliance and mediate any future claims or disputes to the easement.

DATCP used narrative descriptions developed by Blonde for the Waupaca County PACE farms as examples for the second round of PACE applications. Nine more local farms covering more than 7,000 acres of additional farmland in Waupaca County applied for round two PACE funding. However, with election/appointment of new state leadership and a change in funding priorities, DATCP eliminated all financial support following the initial round of PACE pilot funding in 2010. Since then, six more Waupaca County landowners have donated conservation easements on their property. To date, the program has helped sixteen farm families (9 donations, 6 PACE) establish a permanent conservation easement on more than 4,000 acres of prime farm and forest land in Waupaca County. According to USDA-NRCS data, Waupaca is now one of the leading counties nationwide (top 1%) for number of acres of farm and forest land permanently protected.

In 2011, Blonde received the Waupaca County Land and Water Conservation Department Educator of the Year award. In 2012, he helped organize and host a statewide farmland preservation celebration program at a local PACE farm. More than 250 people from several different counties attended; many, including several from Waupaca County, remain active both locally and statewide supporting permanent farmland preservation through conservation easement donation and purchase programs.

(continued)

## **Dairy/Farm Business Management**

**Situation:** Dairy is still the leading farm commodity in Waupaca County accounting for two-thirds of all farm sales. Record high milk prices in 2008 were followed by a sudden and dramatic drop in milk price in 2009, while farm expenses remained very high. Consequently, most dairy farms experienced severe cash flow shortages. Local farm lenders were forced to extend emergency credit and equity in most farms declined significantly.

As milk prices recovered, grain prices also rose dramatically. With record low interest rates from the “great recession”, competition for land was high among surviving farms looking to grow. By 2011, land rent had skyrocketed, especially for fields with better soil and higher farm concentration. In addition, with nearly 50,000 acres (25-30%) of all cropland in Waupaca County rented (2007 USDA Ag Census). “How much should I charge/pay for rent?” was a frequent question with no local data to either support or deny the rumors.

**Response:** In January, 2009 the annual Cow College program series featured feeding strategies to help dairy farmers survive low milk prices. A panel of Ag lenders and dairy farm management professionals also discussed financial management strategies. In February, Blonde helped initiate a statewide UWEX response (Farming in Difficult Times) and volunteered to lead a Debt/Financial Management workgroup. Blonde worked with Bruce Jones (Ag Economist, UW-Madison) and Frank Friar (Farm Financial Advisor, DATPC Farm Center) to develop a fact sheet (**Exhibit 3**) and news release on how to calculate and evaluate farm financial ratios and benchmarks. The fact sheet was also featured in Blonde’s countywide Ag newsletter in March 2009 while other newsletters that year also focused on understanding dairy farm finances and alternative financing options.

During the growing season in 2009, local annual Extension programs to improve forage quality like PEAQ monitoring and corn silage moisture testing were especially important and popular to help control feed costs. Blonde also worked with other Extension Agents to organize the spring and fall regional conference for lenders and farm managers to help address the financial crisis. In November, Blonde organize and presented a program for local dairy farmers and lenders “Deal or No Deal: Managing Thru the Mess”. Topics included calculating and analyzing production costs; tax implications of selling assets, and WI Farm Center counseling services. Lenders helped promote and fund the program.

By 2010, animal welfare became an emerging issue. Restrictive farm legislation was proposed in other mid-western states based on growing activity and influence by the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). That spring Blonde worked with several colleagues to organize and host the first annual UW-Extension WI Dairy & Beef Industry Animal Welfare state conference.

In 2010-2011, Blonde also facilitated several LGM-Dairy marketing classes in response to recent price volatility. He also facilitated five dairy farm management teams through the Grow WI dairy grant program. In 2012, Blonde conducted a countywide cropland rent survey of both farmland owners and renters in each township with at least 15 acres of cropland using the GIS layer developed in support of the conservation easement donation program. That spring, Blonde also hosted a statewide Ag Lease webinar. In November, a coordinated “farm call” effort was initiated to help support dairy farms affected by the drought and promote upcoming programs.

(continued)

**Outcomes:** Blonde's quarterly newsletter in 2009 helped increase awareness and understanding of the financial challenges local farms and lenders were facing. His financial ratios/benchmark fact sheet and news release (Balance Sheet Can Signal Which Way To Turn) were published on the statewide ANRE website (<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/ag/farmingindifficulttimes.html>) and became one of the most frequently viewed/downloaded postings. Several county agents also asked to reprint the material. One lender sent an Email indicating how helpful the factsheet was to him and his farm customers.

DATCP Farm Center specialist, Paul Ditman, said *"your program "Deal or No Deal: Managing Thru the Mess" was the best attended program I saw all year, a testament to the cooperation and support you have developed with local lenders"*. A farmer who attended the program also called a few weeks later and said the program help helped prepare him, both mentally and financially, to survive. Evaluations from the program also identified additional interest in price risk management, which lead to a series of local LGM dairy workshops in 2010-11.

Written evaluations from farmers and crop insurance agents (n=36) who attended the initial local LGM Dairy revenue insurance training indicated their awareness and knowledge nearly doubled, although the evaluation showed most only had a moderate level of understanding with this new risk management tool (average rating of "2" before and "4" after training, with a scale of 1-low to 7-high). Consequently, additional local webinar trainings were held in 2010-2011 with at least two local farms and insurance agents becoming regular users of LGM Dairy margin insurance. The successful webinar effort led UW-Extension dairy marketing specialist Brian Gould to invite Blonde as a project collaborator for a multi-state LGM-Dairy webinar grant project through a North Central Risk Management Education Center grant proposal in 2012 (pending approval in the 2013 farm bill).

In 2010, nearly 350 people from 51 WI counties and two neighboring states (IL, MN) attended the first annual WI Dairy & Beef Industry Animal Husbandry Conference. Evaluations showed participants significantly increased their knowledge or understanding by 20-40% for each of the topics covered. Sixty-two veterinarians received continuing education credits and one replied, *"over the course of my veterinary career I have attended many continuing education seminars, and this was one of the finest"*. The conference has become an annual Extension event rotating between different regions and was helpful establishing the first-ever UW-Madison Dairy Science Department Extension Dairy Cattle Wellbeing Specialist position.

2012 local rent survey results from 350+ fields by 200+ landowners found county rental rates varied from \$10 to \$175 per acre in 2011-12. Using the local GIS layer developed for the conservation easement program helped expand inclusiveness and reduced potential survey bias of under-reporting by farmers and over-reporting by no-farmers. A summary report (**Exhibit 4**) was presented as part of the local Ag Lease webinar program. A written post-webinar program evaluation showed participants gained both knowledge and understanding of local rental rates, as well as written agreements.

The local farmland rent survey report is now a frequently requested publication and an important teaching aid, especially for rural non-farm land owners to help improve their knowledge and understanding of all the variables affecting local land rent and the importance of a well written lease agreement.

(continued)

The impact of working with individual local dairy farms was documented as part of a statewide Extension Dairy Team evaluation project in 2008. Seven Waupaca County dairy farms that worked with UW-Extension to modernize said herd size more than doubled (82 cows before vs. 203 cows after) and production was up by more than 1,300 lbs per cow (an estimated \$200/cow or nearly \$25,000 per farm more income). More recently, Blonde also helped facilitate five DATCP Grow WI Dairy Management Team (\$2000 grant/team). Results of those educational efforts range from \$25,000 annual increase in milk quality premiums for one farm, to a \$100,000 building addition for another. One farm chose voluntary liquidation based on a “stop-loss” strategy developed by the team. Last fall, Blonde initiated a scheduled farm call outreach pilot program. Of the 100+ dairy farms contacted, 40 (34%) scheduled an appointment on their farm and more than half (57%) included the farm wife or a female herd manager, much higher gender diversity and inclusion when compared with phone consultations or Extension meeting attendance.

### **Agronomy / Horticulture**

**Situation:** With feed costs up dramatically for dairy and livestock farms, so is the importance of improved forage quality, production and management practices. Forage crops account for nearly half (48%) of all cropland in Waupaca county, primarily alfalfa (67%) and corn silage (33%). Higher grain prices and recent drought conditions also renewed interest in corn production, storage and marketing practices. The Waupaca County Forage Council remains a primary avenue for local UW-Extension forage and corn management programs. Interest in locally sourced foods and improved school nutrition also began to emerge in 2008.

**Response:** Over the past five years, Blonde has been actively involved with local and statewide field research examining use of foliar fungicides as a new management practice for corn (grain and silage), and most recently alfalfa, with grant funding through the Midwest Forage Associating (MFA). He also received a \$1000 MFA grant in 2010 for a multi-year alfalfa/grass field demonstration project. Cooperation with other statewide demonstration projects also included alfalfa sulfur deficiency, and effectiveness of Bt corn hybrids.

Each year, Blonde helps plan and present the Waupaca County Forage Council annual winter meeting and coordinates the countywide first crop alfalfa (PEAQ) and corn silage (dry down) harvest management programs. Since 2009, Waupaca has been a host site for the statewide UW-Extension Crop Decisions webinar series. In 2010-211 Blonde worked with local emergency responders to offer on-farm rescue training for grain and forage storage/handling facilities. Last year, Blonde worked with ANRE Forage and Grain Teams colleagues to help respond to severe drought conditions by developing and/or updating two corn silage publications.

Blonde also worked with local Extension Family Living and Youth Development colleagues to explore and promote locally grown foods in area schools and communities by identifying and surveying fresh market farms. In addition, local training and ongoing support is provided to help sustain and expand the Waupaca County UW-Extension Master Gardener organization, including three youth/community gardens as their primary volunteer activity.

(continued)

**Outcomes:** In 2008-2009, Blonde identified and surveyed nine local fresh market growers to help UWEX office colleagues establish a Farm-to-School program. He also worked with one of the growers to develop a successful CSA (Triple-B Produce), which continues today. As a result, local food and nutrition education is now provided in three out of seven school districts in Waupaca County.

From 2008-2010, local field research trials found limited and inconsistent corn/silage yield or quality benefits from foliar fungicide. Local silage trial results were published in the March 2008 MFA multi-state Forage Focus magazine (**Exhibit 5**) and presented at several local forage council meetings/field days in 2008-09. Results were also presented at the 2009 MFA Annual Symposium in WI Dells and regional WI Corn Growers Association Conference in Waupaca. Grain trial results were also published in a statewide multi-year research summary poster at the 2010 UW-Extension All Faculty Conference. Blonde also participated in a multi-state alfalfa fungicide project in 2012 with similar results (data from that project recently published at the 2013 WI Crop Managers Conference, and in MFA Forage Focus article).

Data from the 2010-12 MFA grant project on mixing alfalfa/grass in the same stand found: total annual yield (DM/A) from mixed alfalfa/grass always equaled or exceeded pure alfalfa; established alfalfa produced as much or more “milk/acre” than grass/alfalfa; higher digestible fiber alfalfa/grass mixes may be more useful in high energy (corn silage) diets, as well as dairy herds with higher lameness and/or dairy heifer and beef cattle diets. Results were also published through MFA and presented at the local forage council annual meeting this winter. The Waupaca County Forage Council grew from 32 members in 2002, to 46 in 2007, to 57 members in 2012.

Since 2009, Blonde has also hosted several UWEX Grain Team Crop Decisions webinars further developing and/or expanding relationships with local grain producers and agronomists. The following email was sent by a young corn grower Blonde worked with this past growing season:

*Dear Greg...just wanted to let you know how your time and expertise were invaluable to my success this year...you responded with very valuable and useful information via email and also in face to face meetings...and I was able to get a fairly accurate estimate of corn production costs ...each step of the way, you were always willing to answer my questions and provide very useful information and links to articles. You were able to help me better understand how to grow corn from evaluating my soil test results, to choosing the most appropriate starter fertilizer, to nitrogen application and most recently, corn pollination. Even with the drought, thanks to your help, I have made the best cropping decisions possible.*

In 2012, Blonde also worked with two Extension specialists (Shaver/Hoffman) to develop a guide to help farmers evaluate, harvest and feed drought stressed corn silage. It was posted on the statewide UWEX Drought Resource website. He also worked with Joe Lauer to update a publication on pricing drought stressed corn silage. In 2012, Blonde’s Buying & Selling Corn Silage publication was the second most frequently downloaded file (6,700) on the UWEX Team Forage website. UWEX Forage and Grain Team members received the ANRE Leadership Award for their collective drought response in 2012.

(continued)

## **II. Educational Activities and Teaching Events (2008-2012)**

### **Land Use**

Waupaca County Conservation Easement Donation Landowner Eligibility (2008-09)  
Leadership Waupaca County Annual Ag Program & Farm Tour (2008-present)  
Waupaca County Partners for Working Land (2008-present)  
Waupaca County Farm/Forest Land Conservation Easement Committee (2009-present)  
Farmland Conservation Easement Workshops (3) - (2009)  
DATCP / DNR Joint Board Meeting & Farm Tour (2009)  
UWEX All Faculty Conference Display (2010)  
PACE Information Meetings (2) & Conservation Easement Open House (2) - (2010)  
PACE Farm Narratives (15) - (2010-11)  
“Like-Kind Exchange” training/support for six farms with \$3M+ PACE proceeds (2011-12)  
PACE/Easement Donation Program Update, Annual County Board Tour (2012)  
Statewide PACE recognition & celebration program (2012)

### **Dairy & Farm Business Management**

Annual Cow College Series (2) & Farm Tour (2008-present)  
Farming in Difficult Times “Managing Thru This Mess” local seminar (2009)  
Babcock Institute German Dairy Farmer Tour (2009 – present)  
UWEX Annual WI Dairy & Beef Industry Animal Husbandry Conference (2010)  
Monthly LGM Dairy Webinar Trainings (2010-2011)  
Dairy farm (5) management teams (2010-2012)  
Agriculture & Local Roads (2010-present)  
Farm Accident Rescue Training (2011)  
OSHA LEP Dairy Farm Webinars (2011-12)  
Dairy Farm-Call (40+) Outreach Pilot Program (2012)

### **Agronomy/Horticulture**

Waupaca Community Garden Tour for State WACEC Convention (2008)  
Forage Council Annual Meeting (2008-present)  
Forage Council Field Days (4) (2008-present)  
Annual First Crop Alfalfa Monitoring Program (2008-present)  
Annual Whole Plant Corn Silage Moisture Monitoring Program (2008-present)  
UWEX Crop Decision Webinar (3) (2008-2009)  
Tomato Late-Blight Site Assessments (2009)  
Manure Spill Response Demonstration/Training (2009)  
Master Gardener General Training (2009, 2011, 2012)  
WFTD Forage Council/Shredlage Display (2012)  
Pricing/Harvesting Drought Stressed Con Silage Factsheets (2012)  
UWEX Forage/Grain Team Drought Response Team Award (2012)

## **III. Applied Research / Publications (also, see Exhibits referenced above)**

UWEX Dairy Modernization Evaluation (2008)  
Top Dairy Herd Ration Evaluation (2008)  
Local Fresh Market Grower Survey (2008)  
Conservation Easement Donation Program \$75,000 grant & Landowner Guide (2008-09)  
UWEX Foliar Fungicide Corn & Alfalfa Field Research (7) - (2008-present)  
Local Master Gardener Buckthorn Control \$300 Demo grant (2008-present)

Farming in Difficult Times Financial Benchmark factsheet (2009)  
UWEX Corn Rootworm GMO Trait Field Study (2009)  
Alfalfa/Grass Field Demonstration Grant Project (2010-2012)  
UWEX Alfalfa Sulfur Deficiency Field Demo (5) - (2011)  
UWEX Dairy Manure Starch Digestibility Study (2011-2012)  
Waupaca County Farmland Rent Survey (2012)  
Loss of Farmland Economic Impact Analysis from proposed local sand mine (2012)

#### **IV. Contributions to the University / Profession**

UWEX Dairy & Forage Teams (2008-present)  
WACEC State Convention Community Garden Tour Host (2008)  
UWEX Central District Recruitment Video (2008)  
UWEX University Committee (2008-2010)  
UWEX Area Animal Science Days (2009)  
UW-Center for Dairy Profitability Review Team (2009)  
UWEX Central/Eastern District Scholarship In-Service Planning Committee (2009)  
Academic Department Mentor Team (Dyke, 2008-10; Behnke 2010-12)  
Academic Department Scholarship Committee / Scholar Profile (2010 - present)  
Academic Department Chair (2011-present)  
UWEX Ag Service Provider Study (2011 UWEX NE Ag Lenders Conf)  
WI Farm Technology Days 2008 & 2012 Education Committee

#### **V. Administration of Educational / Research Programs**

Waupaca County Forage Council Secretary/Treasurer (2008 - present)  
PEAQ/Corn Silage Moisture Monitoring Programs (2008 - present)  
Waupaca County Quarterly Ag/Agribusiness Newsletter (2008 - present)  
Waupaca County Master Gardener Training Coordinator/Advisor (2008 - present)  
Pesticide Applicator Training (2/year) (2008 - present)  
Youth Livestock/Dairy Project Advisor/County Fair Coordinator (2008 - present)  
MAQA / Market Animal Project Sale Advisor (2008-present)  
Rural Health Initiative Board of Directors, UWEX Rep (2012 - present)  
UWEX North Central Region All Faculty/WACEC Presentation (2013)  
Waupaca County Local Emergency Response Planning Committee (2008-present)  
Waupaca County FSA Crop Loss/Disaster Assessment (2008-present)  
Waupaca County NRCS EQIP Allocation Advisory Committee (2003-present)  
UWEX Civil Rights Review (2012)

#### **VI. Continued Professional Development**

UWEX ANRE Annual Conference (2008-present)  
UWEX Dairy & Forage Team In-services (2008-present)  
UWEX Update for Farm Managers & Ag Professionals (2008-present)  
UWEX Annual PAT, Pest Management & Agronomy Updates (2008-present)  
UWEX LGM Dairy Revenue Insurance Training Webinar (2010)  
WI Emergency Management E-Responder Workshop (2011)  
American Council on Education Department Chair 3-day Orientation (2011)  
UWEX Sexual Harassment Training Webinar (2012)  
UWEX Nonviolent Communication, Central District Conference (2012)  
UW-Vet School Positive Pressure Dairy Ventilation Systems (2012)

## **FIVE-YEAR PROFESSIONAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

- **Self-directed Professional Development Activities...** These activities are identified by individuals and may be offered by Cooperative Extension or other universities, organizations, agencies or businesses. The primary source of funding will be district (for county faculty and staff), program area and departmental funds (for integrated faculty and staff). Grants and other support should also be identified and combined with internal funding. My professional development plans in this area for the next five years include:

- ... NACAA Convention
- ... WI Crop Manager Conference
- ... PDPW Annual Meeting

- **Institution and Program Area Professional Development...** These activities are offered by program areas or Cooperative Extension to faculty and staff in Cooperative Extension. They include such activities as state program area meetings, district meetings and statewide Cooperative Extension Faculty and Staff Conference. My professional development plans in this area for the next five years include:

- ... UWEX Faculty and Staff Conferences (annual)
- ... UWEX Ag/Natural Resource Extension (ANRE) Conference (annual)
- ... UWEX North Central regional meetings (Fall & Spring)
- ... UWEX Blog/Web site design & management
- ... UWEX Webinar design & delivery
- ... Google+ Hangout & Other Educational Tools
- ... YouTube Educational Video design & publication

- **Program Specific Professional Development...** These activities are developed and conducted by program areas, issue teams and the program development and evaluation unit. They are intended to increase knowledge of specific program initiatives. These offerings are elective. My professional development plans in this area for the next five years include:

- ... UWEX Pesticide Applicator & Agronomy Annuals Update Meetings
- ... UWEX Soil & Water / Fertilizer Dealer Annual Meeting
- ... UWEX Horticulture Team Wisline Updates
- ... UWEX Dairy/Forage Team In-service Training
- ... UWEX Farm Management Team Updates
- ... other related professional development opportunities to address local needs