

Aug. 20, 2014

Dear colleagues,

I just returned from spending four days biking through Trempealeau County, riding up and down its coulees. For the geologically uninitiated (including me, until several months ago) coulees are what's left once the glaciers drained, in this case into the Mississippi. Lots of riding up ridges to beautiful views in all directions, then swooping down into valleys and riding up onto another ridge. We stayed in Whitehall, and rode through much of the middle and lower part of the county: Independence, Arcadia, Dodge (where Mary, of Mary's Creamery Bar, gave us ice cold pickles), Trempealeau, Centerville, Ettrick, Hegg, Blair, Coral City and Pigeon Falls.



Whitehall hosted Beef and Dairy Days the weekend we were there, which included a parade Sunday led by Bucky Badger and the UW Marching Band. When I talked with people we met, I made sure to say I was from UW-Extension and UW Colleges, which immediately made me a friend.

Amish country in the east part of the county, and lots of corn and dairy farms in the west. Lots of corn, soybeans, and cattle everywhere, actually. It was amazing to see how resourcefully the farmers cultivated the land, which was quite rolling and even steep in places. Everything looked to be thriving and productive.

One of the biggest issues throughout the county is the new economy related to frac-sand mining. In town and in the country, there were lots of signs expressing passion on both sides, and it's easy to see why. What's harder to see is how the county might change over the next 10 years, with two productive economic drivers competing for the same land. I was proud to see that UW-Extension was right in the mix and was recognized as a trusted provider of clear, timely and useful information widely respected by everyone. In fact, two people cited two studies UW-Extension shared, one about economic impacts and another about environmental impacts.



As I pedaled through rural Wisconsin, I was reminded of how easily we – and I mean both UW Colleges and UW-Extension – embody the Wisconsin Idea: bringing the resources of the UW to people statewide and beyond, whether they're raising crops, raising kids or raising the level of discourse on issues critical to our future.

Thank you for what you all do so well and with such grace, and here's to these last glorious weeks of summer.

Aaron

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