



WISCONSIN FARMERS UNION NEWS

UNITED TO GROW FAMILY AGRICULTURE

January/February 2022



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Change the Lens

My youngest son has a nervous tic that causes him to do a quirky series of rapid-fire squints when he's anxious. It's rather endearing but became concerning last month when paired with daily headaches and eye pain. A trip to the eye doctor revealed farsightedness was causing strain.

Maybe it is the contemplativeness of the season as the year comes to a close, or just my undying love for drawing analogies, but the ordeal has me thinking about the parallels to the headaches we see in agricultural policy.

Recently, I watched a documentary on the dairy crisis that was filmed beautifully but had a frustrating lack of solid solutions. The film captured stories of struggling rural communities, an auctioneer, and a farmer who'd had to sell his herd, among others. It painted a sorrowful picture. But a stream of interviews pointed to a need for farmers to "diversify," "innovate," "modernize," and "adapt."

That rhetoric feels nearsighted in ways. Hell, the greater American agricultural community has hung our hat on buzz words like that for decades. Add "sustainability" and "resiliency" and you've got the whole kit and caboodle.

Some farmers are doing those very things, as evidenced by the Wegmueller Family Farm feature on page 16, and I applaud that. But I wish the industry's answer wasn't always for farmers to manage better or work harder.

I'm only 14 years into my career in Wisconsin agriculture, with that time split equally between ag journalism and advocacy work. But in that time, I've had the chance to learn about the herculean efforts of farm advocates of yesteryear. The call to action to save family farms isn't new. And knowing how hard others fought for little change is frustrating.

It feels as though we need to sharpen our focus. In my relatively short career, Wisconsin has lost 7,824 dairy herds and has led the nation in farm bankruptcies. More often than not, potential solutions get mired in political stalemates, leaving us to the cyclical nature of the struggles in agriculture, as though we're stuck on repeat.

Recently, Secretary Vilsack was in Wisconsin touring a Farmers Union member farm, when he stressed the need to get dairy groups to reach a consensus on potential solutions. In some ways, he's right. Farm groups must organize their power if they expect change. But in other ways, his comment felt like another false cry for a kumbaya that may never come. Let's face it, the American food system needs an overhaul. If we're looking at it with 20/20 vision, we have to see that there are some big players who are never going to line up to support change when it dips into their bottom line – even if that's what consumers are asking for and what family farmers need to carry on.

I'm grateful that Farmers Union is looking at the big picture and sees the need to address systemic issues, like monopolization in agriculture, a lack of market transparency, and practices that put profits over people, the environment, and family farms. We also recognize that some players won't like that push for fairness.

Our strength as an organization rests in the grassroots membership, so I hope you'll lend your voice to this work and share in the vision of a stronger future for Wisconsin agriculture. Maybe we'll see you at the virtual WFU State Convention on January 29th or at Farm and Rural Lobby Day in Madison on February 17th. Or find more ways to engage on the following page.

It's time to take a look at the future of Wisconsin agriculture through a new lens – one that takes into account how we truly want our food and agriculture to look moving forward.

– Danielle Endvick
Communications Director

WISCONSIN FARMERS UNION NEWS

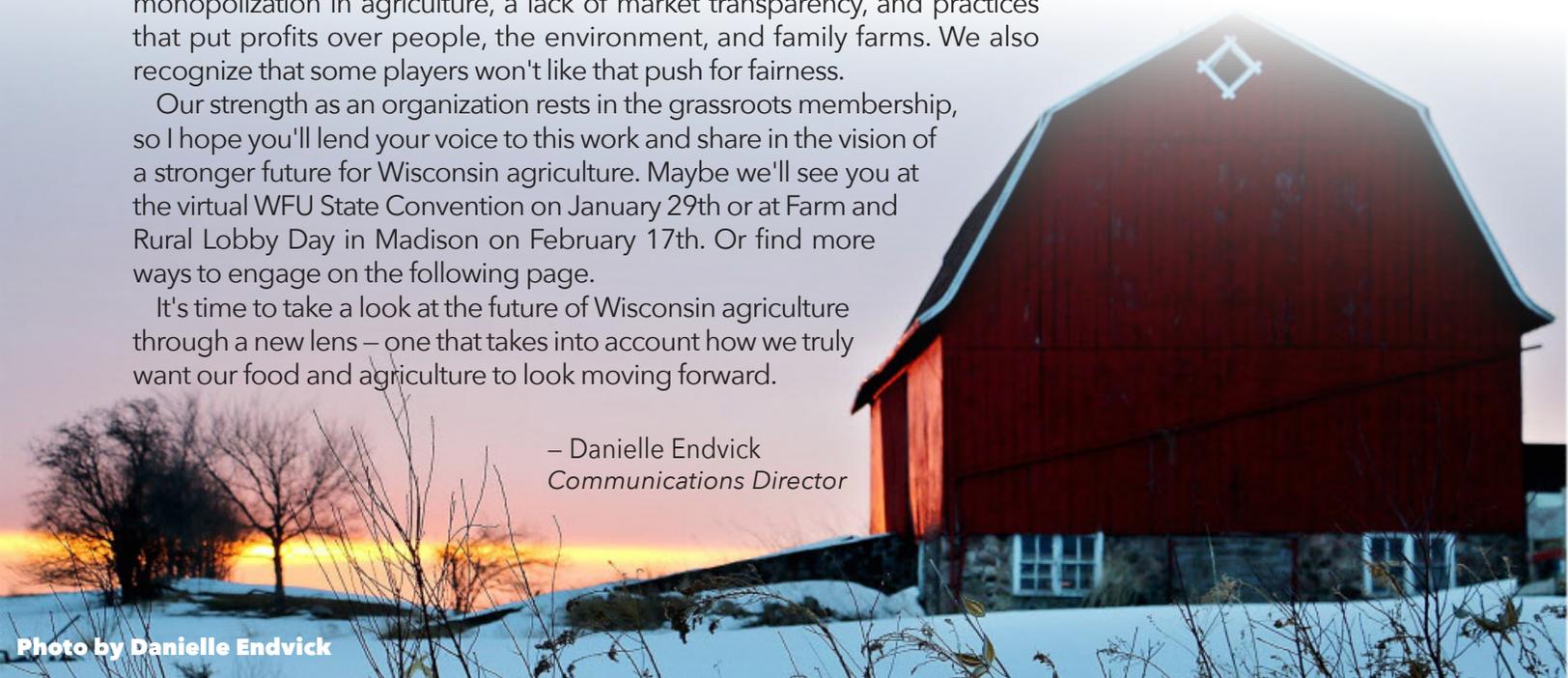
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Farmers Union member
Rachel Bouressa's herd takes
a sunrise stroll at Bouressa
Family Farm in New London.**

Each cover of the *WFU News* features member-submitted photos. Win a free Farmers Union hat if yours is chosen!

Have a great shot to submit?
Vertical photos preferred.
Send to Danielle at dendvick@wisconsinfarmersunion.com
or via text to 715-471-0398



Ways to Engage in WFU



Julie Keown-Bomar
Executive Director

If you are searching for a way to make a difference, you are not alone. Just being a member of Farmers Union, you have opened the door to many avenues to engage:

Hone your Skills – WFU offers many opportunities for members to improve themselves. Farm and Rural Lobby Day teaches how to effectively communicate our values and issue positions to elected officials. Get your walking shoes out and be ready to be heard at the Capitol February 17th!

Or take advantage of WFU scholarships offered to members to attend a conference, or take a class in butchery or farm finances, for example. The National Farmers Union Women's Conference is coming to Nashville in January (see page 21) and past attendees have learned so much from this supportive peer-to-peer event.

Volunteer with a Local Group – Stepping up and taking a role as a coach, mentor, coordinator or officer helps that group thrive. Sometimes the time commitment is only a few hours a month, but helping a local WFU chapter make a go of it, sitting on the board of a non-profit, or helping a kid learn to kick a soccer ball all have enormous pay-it-forward benefits. Volunteerism creates community impact, but also ties individuals to one another and to the issues facing their community.

Join an Issue Campaign and Organize – Members identify issues and concerns through our policy process, but to actually make those changes happen, we have to organize. Organizing enables people to turn the resources they have into the power they need to make the change they want. Right now we have our longstanding dairy reform campaign, Dairy Together, as well as several new local organizing efforts available to join. By helping people build capacity for community organizing, we are building grassroots power. If you want to learn more about community organizing, contact WFU Organizing Director Bill Hogseth at bhogseth@wisconsinfarmersunion.com.

Amplify Your Voice – WFU offers many ways to be heard, including opportunities to lobby, testify at committee hearings, host an elected official on your farm, write op-eds, record a video, and more. Our organization is more powerful when the grassroots are vocal. We are always looking for people to share their story.

Involve the Next Generation – WFU has long understood that young people are the key to our future. Our founders built that into the WFU mission and resourced it. Sending your child to Kamp Kenwood ensures they learn skills like public speaking, cooperation, sharing, teamwork, and more civic virtues. Youth civic engagement sticks around for a lifetime. When young people develop healthy civic habits, skills and commitment, our democracy and communities prosper. I love that this organization offers multi-generational learning opportunities.

Consider Running for Office – Running for a local office is a great way to make a difference in your community. We need rational and reasonable people in decision-making seats. Not only our political offices, but also cooperative boards need capable, community-minded people. It can be intimidating to put your name on the ballot, but just by stepping up, you can change the conversation. Recently WFU sponsored a Run for Office training. Learn more on page 20.

We also want our WFU district director races to be competitive. As I write this, no one has put their name in to run for the at-large district and at least one incumbent is running unopposed. Consider taking a seat at the WFU Board of Directors. See details on page 10.

As we roll into a new year please make a resolution to get involved and get others involved. We need wise, reasonable people taking responsibility in our communities. WFU can open many doors, all you have to do is step up.



Farm & Rural Lobby Day February 17th, 2022

Save the Date!



Reflecting on 2021 & a Look Ahead

Darin Von Ruden
President

As with so many past years in Wisconsin agriculture, 2021 was a year of highs and lows. There were setbacks but signals of hope, too.

As I settle in to write this, we've just weathered a series of storms that in one pass left a foot of snow and then followed with tornadic activity. Certainly not the norm for Wisconsin in December, but another reminder of the shifts in our climate. Throughout Wisconsin, farming communities have been hit by extreme weather in varied ways this past year. Here on my Westby farm, we've seen excess moisture, with flooding events dropping as much as 17-plus inches of rain over just a couple days. Other regions of the state were parched and designated drought areas. Those weather patterns have made farmers struggle on both ends of the spectrum. Thankfully, as you'll see on the following page, we've seen movement on climate change approaches, and WFU will continue to lift up farmers' voices in that conversation in the year ahead.

Even with Mother Nature's fury, harvest for most crops went smoothly, wrapping up ahead of schedule in most regions, and there's some optimism about an uptick in prices for corn, soybeans, and beef. National Farmers Union launched a Fairness for Farmers campaign calling for fair, transparent markets. Farmers have been grateful for pandemic relief programs that helped us get through the downturns, but we also have stressed that we'd rather have fair, reliable prices from the marketplace than a reliance on insurance programs and government subsidies.

As a nation, we learned many lessons throughout the pandemic. The struggles have come with silver linings, as consumers and policymakers are realizing what farmers have known for years – the wealth of this nation is rising to top of the supply chain, while those at the bottom pay the price. WFU has been a voice for farmer-labor solidarity and will continue to call for fair wages for workers and a fair share of the food dollar for farmers. We've seen hopeful signals that the Biden Administration is actively working on addressing antitrust and the lack of competition we see when agricultural inputs are controlled by only a handful of corporations.

WFU has long stood for a diverse structure of agriculture, and the pandemic proved how critical it is that we have a resilient food system that won't shut down due to supply chain issues. We've seen over the last year and a half the direct results of allowing production to become too consolidated. From pricing manipulation to bare shelves, farmers and consumers alike suffered.

As we head into 2022, WFU remains focused on strengthening the food system and addressing the structural issues



in the agriculture industry. We're laying a strong foundation as we look ahead to the 2023 Farm Bill and policies we can push forward to address challenges, especially in helping dairy farmers receive a fair price and recover production costs. Groups are aligning around the Dairy Revitalization Plan, and we look forward to educating members, media, consumers, and legislators more and sharing members' stories, as we continue the work of Dairy Together.

As we dug in on pandemic relief and recovery efforts, a large part of WFU's work focused on sharing needs around rural infrastructure. The passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act will put money into rural Wisconsin, and we must be ready to share the facets of how that funding can best be put to use in our communities.

Some days working in farm advocacy feels like one step forward and two steps back. In July, WFU celebrated the Wisconsin Supreme Court's decision to allow the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to impose operating conditions to protect public resources. The decision allowed the DNR to consider the cumulative environmental impacts of high capacity wells when deciding whether to grant permits. Later in the year, though, the DNR announced it was abandoning efforts to develop regulations to reduce nitrate pollution in drinking water, claiming "the statutory process and associated firm timelines established by the Legislature for rule-making do not allow adequate time for the department to complete this proposed rule."

But there were victories this year, too, perhaps the largest of which was greater attention and resources devoted to meat processing infrastructure in Wisconsin, an issue members called for and WFU pushed forward through programming, storytelling, and policy efforts throughout the state budget process.

The following page shows progress made on WFU's Special Orders of Business, which are set each year by our grassroots members. That progress wouldn't be possible if it weren't for the many members who step up as chapter leaders, who share their stories, and who inspire all of us here at WFU to keep up the good fight.

The pandemic served as an awakening to the importance of our self-reliance and strength as a nation. In many ways, it united us. Coming out of it, I hope we don't forget the lessons learned. We've heard a lot of promises over the past year. As we shift into 2022, it is my hope we can continue to move beyond the words and into action.

SPECIAL ORDERS OF BUSINESS

Below is some of the progress made on Special Orders of Business adopted by delegates at the annual convention. Find the Special Orders and full WFU Policy Book at wisconsinfarmersunion.com/policy.

DAIRY POLICY REFORM

- Laid the groundwork for strong coalitions leading into the 2023 Farm Bill.
- Hosted educational events and worked with partner organizations to educate farmers and policymakers about the Dairy Revitalization Plan.
- Organized Dairy Together coalition calls with participants from throughout the country.
- Participated in the UW Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems (CIAS) dairy policy work group.
- Continued changing the narrative around supply management, as evidenced in media tone, bipartisan efforts, and the national conversation.

CONCENTRATION IN THE AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY

- Launched the ongoing Fairness for Farmers campaign in collaboration with National Farmers Union and other state Farmers Union organizations. The nationwide campaign is fighting for stronger enforcement of antitrust laws and breaking up the corporate monopolies that use their size to unfairly take advantage of farmers and ranchers while forcing consumers to pay higher prices at the grocery store.
- Joined the national conversation around taking on monopolies, including meeting with Andy Green, senior advisor on Fair and Competitive Markets. Green will serve as the 2022 WFU State Convention keynote.
- Elevated the White House's Executive Order on Promoting Competition in the American Economy through op-eds, media engagement, and policy conversations.
- Engaged members in a film project focused on how increasing monopoly power in agriculture affects their business' bottom line and our ability to keep family farms on the land. The short film is set to launch as part of WFU's educational programming in early 2022.
- WFU Special Projects Director Lauren Langworthy teamed up with Austin Frerick, deputy director of the Thurman Arnold Project at Yale University, to present "Understanding & Fighting Monopoly Power in our Food System" at the MOSES Organic Farming Conference.

FAMILY FARMERS SHAPING CLIMATE CHANGE

- Created a WFU member Climate Change Committee to gather input, draft policy, and propel the issue
- Launched Wisconsin Women in Conservation with a coalition of partners, led by the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute. The program engaged 1,337 participants with 17 Zoom events and 5 field days, as well as 2,300 on social media.

- Coordinate educational events for farmers in the western Wisconsin watershed network. Seven events were held between May and November reaching 175 people.
- Shared WFU members' stories about climate change and WFU's stance through continued circulation of our short film "Agriculture & Climate Change" which has reached 7.6K views on YouTube.
- Participated in a press conference with Assembly & Senate Democrats on Climate Change bills.
- Completed third year with Chippewa County Land Conservation and Forestry Management partnership on water quality education at WFU Kamp Kenwood.
- Advocated for programs and policy around soil carbon incentives and managed grazing.

MEAT PROCESSING INFRASTRUCTURE

- Organized a "Meat-ings" educational series on challenges and opportunities for meat processing capacity.
- Convened a Meat Processing Task Force of members and staff to develop a network analysis and collect resources to further address issues within meat processing.
- Hired a meat processing intern to help gather perspectives of farmers, processors, and industry stakeholders.
- Met with state legislators, DATCP, WEDC, UW-CALS, Extension, and farm organizations to discuss solutions.
- Released a Meat Processing Report that shares the challenges, stakeholder insights, resources, and potential solutions through policy reform, local collaboration, cooperative models, mobile processing, and more.
- Successfully lobbied for resources to modernize and expand processing facilities. Among the wins for meat processing this year were programs for processing expansion grants at the state and federal level.
- Offered scholarships to the Modern Meat Butchery Program at Madison College and continue to encourage efforts to train the next generation of butchers.
- Invested in and continue to pursue ways to increase regional processing.

PANDEMIC RESPONSE & RECOVERY

- Provided input on the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and helped educate members on accessing resources.
- Served on coalitions, presented at roundtables, and devoted time to elevating infrastructure in organizational and media outreach.
- Hosted USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack at WFU members Duane and Tina Hinchley's farm for a discussion on rural infrastructure.



Vilsack visit targets infrastructure, dairy

Farm tour highlights need for collaboration on policy reform

Danielle Endvick
Communications Director



CAMBRIDGE – U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack’s December 16th stop at a Wisconsin dairy farm highlighted investments in rural infrastructure and improvements to the Dairy Margin Coverage program. USDA’s sign-up period for the Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) program and new supplemental coverage began on December 13th.

The visit to the farm of Dane County Farmers Union members Duane and Tina Hinchley and their daughter, Anna, aligned with a USDA announcement that Wisconsin communities will receive \$114.5 million in infrastructure funds.

“It was good to hear from Secretary Vilsack on issues ranging from DMC to trade and exports to research and rural broadband,” said WFU Government Relations Director Nick Levendofsky. “Rural resilience was a key theme in Vilsack’s comments, and the investments USDA is making in agriculture and rural America will ensure continued resiliency as we weather the challenges of COVID-19, weather, and global markets.”

The Hinchleys noted that they also appreciated hearing Sec. Vilsack’s insights on the need for farmers to diversify and for farm groups to unify around priorities in the lead-up to the next farm bill.

“When the elephant in the room came up – a question about when USDA will have a hearing again on dairy pricing – the Secretary was very straight-forward about the need to get dairy groups to work together and push for a consensus, incorporating different regions within the United States dairy industry,” Duane Hinchley said.

Tina Hinchley, who has been active in the Dairy Together movement to unify dairy farmers, promote growth management, and stabilize prices, agreed with the importance of that message. A growing coalition of Dairy Together allies has united around the Dairy Revitalization Plan, which is based on research by the UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems.

Regarding updates to the DMC, WFU President Darin Von Ruden noted “The Dairy Margin Coverage program has been a valued safety net, and new changes to the feed cost calculation will help producers receive more payments. The program can be a helpful tool in managing low price cycles; however, we hope to see other tools added to farmers’ toolboxes, too, including meaningful dairy policy reform in the 2023 Farm Bill. While this money will help farmers and comes at a key time as they clean up year-end books, it doesn’t address the systemic issues that are forcing dairy farmers out of business. Most farmers would much rather receive their paycheck from a fair marketplace than from government handouts.”

Earlier in the day, a stop in northwestern Wisconsin highlighted the infrastructure investment and the broader Build Back Better agenda that will expand access to clean drinking water.



Left: WFU District 6 Director Sarah Lloyd poses a question about the challenges in dairy. Right: The WFU team at the event, including, from left, Vivienne Kerley-de la Cruz, Nick Levendofsky, Kirsten Slaughter, Alicia Razvi, with Sec. Vilsack.

WFU Releases Meat Processing Report

Member-led Effort Includes Resources, Stakeholder Insights on Wisconsin Meat Processing Shortage, Potential Solutions

Danielle Endvick

Communications Director

A new report investigates the effects that consolidation in meat processing has had on family farms, small and mid-scale processors, and consumers.

Earlier this year, Wisconsin Farmers Union (WFU) convened a Meat Processing Task Force that developed a series of webinars and panel discussions to explore the complexity of the issue and potential solutions. Task force members helped develop a network analysis and collect resources to address issues in meat processing.

Findings from those efforts have been compiled in WFU's report "Meat Processing in Wisconsin: Challenges and Opportunities." The publication includes viewpoints and resources collected from key stakeholders, including state agencies, national partners, impacted farmers, small-scale processors, and labor organizations.

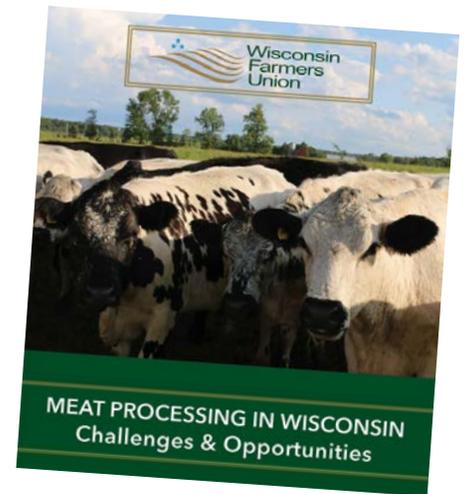
"It has been so wonderful to work with farmers, small- and mid-scale processors, and labor groups and find so much common interest in resolving the issues present in this part of our food system," says WFU Director of Special Projects Lauren Langworthy.

"Understanding the issues that impact everyone along the chain from farmers to eaters helps us build coalitions focused on resolving concerns."

As the report notes, "In recent years, a trend toward fewer and larger (often multinational and many vertically-integrated) corporations in the meat processing sector has worsened. The dominant corporations in the industry have been under scrutiny for price fixing, labor rights infringements, misleading labeling, and other unsavory practices. During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, the fragility of this highly-consolidated system and the plight of the farmers and laborers who work within it all became much clearer."

Only 50 meat plants slaughter and process 98 percent of the U.S. meat supply. Meanwhile, the Farmer's Share of the retail food dollar is only 14 cents.

"Investing in meat processing is an investment in rural America and the security of our food supply," said WFU President Darin Von Ruden. "Expanding processing capacity opens the door for farmers to regain some control by marketing animals directly to consumers. However, we also need to increase competition and fairness in the marketplace and address mis-



leading labels. This report offers a slew of solutions and policy priorities to improve the situation for farmers and consumers."

WFU members identified Meat Processing Infrastructure as a Special Order of Business in 2020 and 2021. WFU was a vocal advocate for support for meat processing infrastructure in the state budget and backed initiatives from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection to help processors expand, modernize, and grow capacity.

The report also calls for action to address market manipulation, invest in infrastructure, and strengthen antitrust enforcement in the meat industry.

Learn more about WFU's ongoing work around this issue and view the report at www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com/processing

Dairy Margin Coverage Update Provides Additional \$47M to Wisconsin Dairy Farms

The U.S. Department of Agriculture began issuing additional payments in early December for dairy producers who enrolled in 2020 and 2021 coverage through the Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC). USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) updated the feed cost calculation by using 100 percent premium alfalfa hay rather than 50 percent premium hay in determining the monthly margin, which means an additional \$47,409,000 for dairy producers in Wisconsin. Payments will be retroactive to Jan. 1, 2020. Dairy operations with 2020 and 2021 contracts will be paid automatically for the applicable months.

"Updating feed cost calculations for DMC to include 100 percent premium hay will help producers to receive more payments," FSA State Executive Director Gene Schriefer said. "This update builds on other efforts of the Biden-Harris Administration to improve DMC and other key USDA dairy programs."

In addition to updating the feed cost, USDA announced other dairy-related updates, including the start of the 2022 DMC signup as well as the new Supplemental DMC. Both will run through Feb. 18, 2022.

To learn more or to participate in DMC, producers should contact their local USDA Service Center. To determine the appropriate level of DMC coverage for a specific dairy operation, producers can also use the online dairy decision tool; learn more at www.usda.gov.





91ST ANNUAL CONVENTION

January 29, 2022 - Virtual

WFU members will gather to set 2022 priorities. To be a *voting delegate*, please make sure your membership is up-to-date and register by *January 14th, 2022*

Thanks again to all members who participated in the robust virtual policy discussion last year, which led to a successful year. We hope to bring that same energy to this virtual convention as we again hold elections and set the course for a new year.

WFU is holding two conventions in 2022 as we shift to December conventions moving forward. Save the Date: Dec. 9-11, 2022, Chula Vista, Wisconsin Dells

At the January convention, members will decide WFU's 2022 "Special Orders of Business," items of utmost importance to the organization. You can view our current policy at: www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com/policy

Register and learn more:
www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com/convention

DATES TO REMEMBER

JANUARY 8

WFU County presidents meet virtually to review bylaw changes and Special Orders of Business prior to the convention

JANUARY 14

Last day to register as a voting delegate to represent your chapter or vote your own vote.

Deadline for WFU board and NFU delegate candidates to submit bio for delegate mailing & video intro.

JANUARY 26

10am & 7pm (choose one)
Join us for a quick run-through of the virtual convention platform. Learn about Attendify and how to get the most out of convention participation. For those attending the 7pm session, stick around for a Farmers Union social hour!

JANUARY 28

Deadline for non-delegate attendee registrations.

JANUARY 29

Virtual State Convention!



KEYNOTE: ANDY GREEN, FAIR AND COMPETITIVE MARKETS

Andy Green is Senior Advisor for Fair and Competitive Markets at USDA. Prior to that, he was Managing Director of Economic Policy at the Center for American Progress. He authored reports on financial regulation, corporate governance, trade, antitrust, agriculture policy, middle class economics, and the economy. Hear about the work happening to bust up monopolies, address antitrust, and restore fairness to the marketplace. Learn how WFU – and you – can have a direct impact on this issue at the state and federal levels.

SPECIAL GUEST: PATTY EDELBURG, VP, NATIONAL FARMERS UNION

Long-time WFU member Patty Edelburg serves as Vice President of the National Farmers Union. Edelburg, a graduate from the University of Wisconsin-River Falls and a dairy farmer in central Wisconsin, previously served as the Wisconsin Farm Service Agency (FSA) State Executive Director. Hear about the latest happenings at NFU, including the recently launched Fairness for Farmers campaign.



Sponsor the WFU Conventions in 2022

In 2022, Wisconsin Farmers Union will be hosting two conventions as we shift to December annual conventions moving forward. As such, we are offering sponsorship packages for two conventions at the price of one!

You can find our sponsor packet at www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com/convention

Farm to School Event on WFU YouTube

On Dec. 14, Wisconsin Farmers Union and the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection hosted a webinar, "Bridging the Gap: Connecting Farm to School." The event featured farmers and supply chain partners, who provided an overview on how schools and farmers can work together to enhance access to locally grown products.

A recording of the event has been posted on the WFU YouTube page, along with a number of other educational offerings, at www.youtube.com/user/WisFarmersUnion/

National Farmers Union Convention set for Denver, WFU to Elect Delegates

Registration is open for National Farmers Union's 120th Anniversary Convention February 27 to March 1 at the Grand Hyatt Denver, 1750 Welton St., Denver, Colorado.

Hear from policy makers and educators on topics ranging from market consolidation, to cooperatives, engaging the next generation, biofuels, and more! You will also have the opportunity to network with fellow Farmers Union members from across the country and Farmers Union leadership.

Elected delegates from Farmers Union state divisions will discuss and vote on the organization's policy positions and priorities. The resulting policy book guides the work that the National Farmers Union staff does in Washington, D.C. for the subsequent year. (See page 10 for details on how to run for a WFU delegate position.) Learn more about the NFU Convention and register at www.nfu.org/convention/

Agricultural Outlook Forum is Jan. 25th

The 2022 Wisconsin Agricultural Outlook Forum, which has the theme "Agriculture, Nitrogen and Water Quality in Wisconsin," is set for Tuesday, Jan. 25 on the UW-Madison campus. The in-person event runs from 10am-4pm in Varsity Hall in Union South, located at 1308 West Dayton Street, Madison. A reception

will be held following the forum.

The program, organized by the Renk Agribusiness Institute, starts with presentations on the status of Wisconsin's farm economy. Experts from the UW-Madison College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, UW-Madison Division of Extension and industry will discuss the current situation and outlook for dairy, corn and soybeans, livestock and meat, and specialty crops, as well as farm income.

The afternoon session will cover efforts related to understanding and mitigating impacts of agriculture - specifically nitrogen - on water quality in Wisconsin.

Forum registration is open now through Jan. 21. The \$50 registration fee covers the forum, lunch, snacks, and reception. To register, visit: <https://renk.aae.wisc.edu/2022-agricultural-outlook-forum/>.

Interested individuals who are unable to attend the forum in-person will have the option to watch a livestream of the event on the Renk Agribusiness Institute's YouTube page. No registration is required for this free, virtual option.

For more information, contact Jeremy Beach at jp-beach@wisc.edu or (608) 262-9485.

Register for GrassWorks Conference

The 30th Anniversary GrassWorks Grazing Conference is headed to Chula Vista in the Wisconsin Dells Jan. 20-22. With a theme of Celebrating the Resilience of Grazing, the event features an all-star line-up of speakers. Be sure to visit us at the WFU booth! Find details at www.grassworks.org.

Cover Crop Conference set for Feb. 24th

Registration is now open for the Wisconsin Cover Crop Conference. Save the date for February 24 in Rothschild. Farmers and agricultural professionals from around the state will come together to share & learn. Whether you're a seasoned cover cropper or an absolute beginner, there will be something for everyone!

Topics include creating new opportunities for in-season manure, managing equipment for planting green, adaptive rye management, incorporating cover crops in vegetable rotations, cover crops as forage, and more. Many of the presenters will be Wisconsin grain and livestock farmers speaking from experience about what has and hasn't worked in their Wisconsin conservation cropping systems.

Online and mail-in registration options are both available. Register at <https://cropsandsoils.extension.wisc.edu/events/wisconsin-cover-crops-conference/>



WFU members to elect directors, NFU Convention delegates

Delegates at the 91st Wisconsin Farmers Union State Convention, happening virtually on Saturday, January 29th, will elect directors to the board. Two delegates will also be chosen to represent WFU at the National Farmers Union Convention in Denver Feb. 27-March 3. Voting will be by paper ballot mailed to all registered delegates.

Four board seats are up for election in 2022: District 3, District 5, District 8, and the At-large seat held by a member in any area of the state. Current directors for these positions are Ed Gorell, Darin Von Ruden, Rick Adamski, and Sarah Korte, respectively. Korte has announced she will be stepping down; whoever is elected to the at-large term will complete the remaining one year of her term; it will then be up for election on the traditional cycle next year.

Board duties include quarterly board meetings, occasional issue-related meetings, ad-hoc committees, attending chapter meetings in the district, representing WFU at events, etc.

Below are bios submitted by those who have announced intention to run for the board in response to notices posted in the last WFU News and e-news. **It is not too late to announce intent; candidates may announce at convention or by sending a photo and bio (300 words or less) to Alicia Razvi at arazvi@wisconsinfarmersunion.com or 117 W. Spring St., Chippewa Falls, WI 54729. Those received by January 14th will be included in delegate packets.**

- Submit nominations (with name as it should appear on the ballot), a photo, and a brief statement of background, qualifications, etc. (up to 300 words total) by Jan. 14 for communications to delegates. Any paid member may self-nominate or be nominated by a chapter leader.

- Submit a 3 to 5-minute video by Jan. 14 introducing yourself and explaining qualifications. The video will be presented to the delegates during the virtual convention. This can be fairly informal and takes the place of candidate speeches that happen during an in-person convention. WFU staff assistance is available for recording the clip, if needed. Video clips should be taken horizontally.

Contact Alicia at 715-577-5778 or arazvi@wisconsinfarmersunion.com for more details.

DISTRICT 3

Chippewa, Clark, and Eau Claire Counties

Ed Gorell (Incumbent)

My wife Kristi and I have operated our farm in Eau Claire County since 1983. We started with a 320 head veal barn and a 50,000 bird broiler facility which we converted to transition steers onto feedlots. In 2018, we retired from full-time farming. I am now a part-time milk hauler.

We are also past 4-H members and have been leaders of our local club. I have received Farmers Union awards for membership and chapter building. I have also served and chaired a number of different committees. I have attended many National Farmers Union conventions and fly-ins to Washington D.C. I am the former president of the Eau Claire County Farmers Union and continue to be active in promoting WFU in the greater Chippewa Valley.



DISTRICT 5

Crawford, Grant, Iowa, Rock, Green, Lafayette, Richland & Vernon Counties

FL Morris

My name is FL Morris (she/her). I am running for District 5 Director. I am currently serving as South Central President and have been a WFU member for 6 years. I have been vegetable farming in the Upper Midwest since 2004 and I am a queer-identified, first generation farmer of primarily English, Scottish, and German descent.

I operate Grassroots Farm, LLC in Monroe in Green County. Our farm is 35 acres at the edge of the Driftless Region, where we produce mixed vegetables and fruits, pastured livestock, and Certified Organic CBD Hemp. Our farm is located on Ancestral Lands of the Ho-Chunk People. I have prior experience serving on Co-op and Non-Profit Boards and Committees, including as Board President, Treasurer, and Communications Director.

I appreciate and understand the benefits of using democratic structures and processes in decision-making while operating as a single body made of many diverse voices. The structure, purpose, and mission of Wisconsin Farmers Union has attracted a community of like-minded folks to collectively identify solutions to many pressing societal needs. I prioritize work within the following challenges/opportunities:

- Diversity & Inclusion in Local Food Systems & Agriculture
- Climate Change Action
- Cooperative Business
- Equitable Local Food Access

These issues of high importance are related and intertwined with one another, and I believe, all of us regardless of our personal demographics or whether we work with soil directly or engage in agriculture through our choices at the dinner table. I am committed to volunteering my time, skills and experience to increase equity and resilience within our local food system.

Serving as District 5 Director would be a unique opportunity to further engage with and learn from the members of my District, contribute fresh ideas, help diversify our membership, and to engage in critical work alongside other farmer-leaders.



Darin Von Ruden (Incumbent)

The Farmers Union has been an integral part of my life. I've been a lifelong member and grew up attending Farmers Union Camps and have served on the WFU Board of Directors in 2008. I also serve on the boards of the Wisconsin Farmers Union Foundation, Farmers Union Enterprises, and the National Farmers Union.



I am a third-generation dairy farmer and am presently farming in partnership with my son. I have been active with Farmers Union at the local, state and national levels and am a seven-time recipient of the Silver Star Award, which is National Farmers Union's highest recognition of membership development. I serve on the NFU Membership Committee, as well as the NFU Budget & Audit Committee. My wife, JoAnn, and I have two children. We have been enjoying spending time with our two grandchildren and have another on the way.

I'm proud to represent farmers as WFU President, a delegate at World Farmers' Organisation, on the Dairy Task Force 2.0, and as an advocate for fair prices for farmers with Dairy Together.

Looking forward, I hope to continue to lead WFU through the changing dynamics within agriculture. I recognize how important it is for farmers' voices to be heard, especially in the growing movement around antitrust enforcement and monopoly issues. We are at a critical time in the agricultural industry and Farmers Union is poised to make a difference in federal level efforts to create fairer, more transparent markets for farmers and hold monopolies accountable for their actions. I hope to continue to lead our big tent grassroots efforts to organize for change, fight for fairer markets, and create meaningful policy reform.

DISTRICT 8

Brown, Calumet, Dodge, Door, Fond du Lac, Forest, Florence, Kewaunee, Langlade, Marinette, Manitowoc, Menominee, Milwaukee, Oconto, Outagamie, Ozaukee, Shawano, Sheboygan, Washington, Waukesha, and Winnebago Counties

Rick Adamski (Incumbent)

My name is Rick Adamski and I am asking for your vote for District 8 Director. My wife, Valerie and I own and operate Full Circle Farm in Shawano County. The farm has been in my family since 1900. I took over the farm in 1984. The farm consists of 290 acres, and was certified organic in 2003. My family raises grass-fed beef, fresh vegetables, pastured hogs, and laying hens. Family-based agriculture has been the basis of my advocacy throughout this career. I have degrees in Soil Science and Resource Management from UW-Stevens Point.



I served on the board of the Wisconsin Rural Development Center, the National Catholic Rural Life Conference Board of Directors and the UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agricul-

tural Systems; Citizens Advisory Council, where I served over 5 years as the Chair. I believe I have embraced the principles of the Wisconsin Farmers Union for the past 10 years. I have served on the WFU Board of Directors for the past 6 years- 2 years as the Vice-President.

I believe the greatest problem that we face today can best be solved with more democracy. This is one of the best organizations to create the future that we want. I believe that we are experiencing very difficult times, and I want to be a part of leading us to a better future. Furthermore, I believe that the smartest person in the room is all of us. I am convinced that the future is better if we create a world of cooperation that replaces the prevailing model of competition. This is the ideal I see for this organization. This is the history I see created by those before us that allow us to create a future that our heirs will be proud of.

W. Michael Slattery

I, Michael Slattery, desire to serve on the WFU Board of Directors as District 8 member for the benefit of both members in the District and the state. My wife, Nancy, and I farm in Manitowoc County. We are average-size farmers in Wisconsin, have raised Holstein steers until five years ago, and now cash crop corn, soybeans, wheat, snap beans, and alfalfa and custom raise lambs, hogs, and broilers and maintain layers. We also have a moderate size orchard of apples, Japanese pears, cherries, plums, apricots, and small fruit. We have grown vegetables for CSAs and sold at farmers' markets. Our three children all live more than 1,000 miles distant.



I seek to assume both a leadership function and a representative function to advance the wants and needs of the District. Wisconsin and national agriculture are facing and will continue to confront monumental, systemic, and environmental challenges in the rest of the decade—changing demographics of farming, declining farm numbers and concentration in agricultural, climate and environmental issues, growing structural change where governments favor larger farms, etc.

WFU has also made significant changes over the past decade and will need to adapt and change within this setting. I have attempted to bring professional discipline to our organization and will seek to improve on that. Officially, I have represented WFU in many ways. I presently chair the Finance/Investment Committee, provide substantive value to the Grain Committee, and have focused on raising many farm-related issues. On social, political and religious issues, I have been an activist participant and my wife has volunteered and led organizations such as the League of Women Voters and an interfaith justice group. I seek to continue to bring value and dynamism to WFU to not just be a policy organization but an instrument of change.

AT-LARGE

At this time, there are no candidates. If you are considering a run, please reach out to Alicia Razvi.





Come see us at MOSES!

Wisconsin Farmers Union is sponsoring the MOSES Organic Farming Conference Feb. 24-26, 2022 in La Crosse. Now in its 33rd year, the MOSES Conference draws a diverse audience of farmers and food system professionals for five days of educational programming on a wide range of food and farming topics. The event also includes a two-floor exhibit hall—come see us at the Wisconsin Farmers Union booth! Learn more and register online at mosesorganic.org/conference.

WFU event encourages emerging leaders

WFU invites aspiring leaders within the membership to attend a Farmers Union Emerging Leaders Retreat (FUEL) on March 4-6 at Red Lion Paper Valley Hotel in Appleton.

FUEL is a great way to connect with other WFU members and take your leadership skills to the next level. Programming will include interactive presentations around leadership teams, building power, chapter development, issues facing rural WI, and more. Network with other WFU Emerging Leaders while developing the skills to help move our organization forward!

The cost for the workshop is \$20 per family. Childcare/youth programming will be available, and hotel accommodations and meals will be provided. Space is limited. We will be taking COVID precautions to ensure this is a safe learning and networking environment.

For more information, please contact WFU Communications Associate Tommy Enright at tenright@wisconsinfarmersunion.com.

FARMERS UNION HAPPENINGS

WFU County Presidents Meeting
Jan. 8, virtual
Info: 715-723-5561

National Farmer Union Women's Conference
Jan. 10-13 virtually and
Jan. 16-18, Nashville, TN
www.nfu.org/womensconference

Deadline for WFU board candidates to submit bio for delegate communications
Jan. 14
(Details on page 10)

Deadline to register as a WFU Convention delegate
Jan. 14

GrassWorks Grazing Conference
Jan. 20-22, Chula Vista Resort, Wisconsin Dells

WFU State Convention
Jan. 29, virtual
www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com/convention

Farm & Rural Lobby Day
Feb. 17, Madison
Register: www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com/events

120th National Farmers Union Anniversary Convention
Feb. 27 to March 1, Denver, CO
www.nfu.org/convention

WELCOME NEW FARMERS UNION MEMBERS!

New Membership

Michelle Feldman, Buffalo
Christine & Kevin Melby, New Richmond
Elizabeth & Jonathan Hoelter, Cottage Grove
Kacy & Drew Bresina, Chippewa Falls
Susie Gilbert, Hudson
Richard & Jeannette Bartz, Eau Galle
Zachary Whitehead, Kenosha
Maria Bamonti & Tommy Folden, Mondovi
Rebecca Christoffel & Andrew Williams, Madison
Anselm & Catherine Harrison, Argyle
Thad & Kathy Nelson, Argyle
Dwayne & Nichole Lurvey, Wonewoc
Ashley Olson, Osceola
Susan & Tom Nelson, Monroe
Nancy Beck & Jerry Sand, Saint Croix Falls
Zeb Strain, Mondovi

Recruited by

2021 Camp Program
St Croix County Farmers Union
2021 Camp Program
2021 Camp Program
St Croix County Farmers Union
Jerry Thompson Insurance Agency
Morgan Sisson
Aaron Ellringer
Kirsten Slaughter
Not Provided
The Pederson Agency inc.
Not Provided
Christine Burkhouse
Kriss Marion
Lisa Doerr
Jerry Thompson Insurance Agency

Submit chapter chatter to Danielle at dendvick@wisconsinfarmersunion.com.

MEMBERSHIP

Local Initiative Grants Available



Kirsten Slaughter
Membership & Education Organizer

The next deadline for Chapters to apply for the WFU Local Initiative Grant is Feb. 15. Now is a great time to start planning spring events with the support of the grant that is specifically for our chapters.

The Local Initiative Grant is funded by Farmers Union Enterprise to support the work of WFU Chapters.

The primary goals of the program are:

- To increase local WFU outreach and visibility
- Provide education and information on farm and rural issues, WFU activities and programs
- Expand participation and volunteer activity by WFU members
- Develop partnerships and activities with other organizations

Here are four ideas to showcase a few ways that the Local Initiative Grant could support your event. These do not represent the only ways the grant can provide support. Remember that staff is available to help and that a WFU booth can be provided for the day of the event.

Film Showing

Pick a film on a topic that is important to your members and your community. Hold a discussion after and share WFU policy.

The Local Initiative Grant could cover:

- Film showing rights
- Food for participants
- Promotion via postcards, newspaper, and/or radio

Issues Panel

Bring in one or two farmers and a local expert to talk about an issue affecting your community like broadband, water quality, or agritourism.

The Local Initiative Grant could cover:

- Mileage for speakers
- Room or building rental
- Promotion through postcards and advertising

Featured Speaker Event

Co-sponsor an event with a different organization. We have great partners across the state that are working on similar issues. Some chapters have had a lot of success in partnering with another group to cover the costs of a bigger event.

The Local Initiative Grant could cover:

- Half of the speaker fees
- Half of the room rental
- All of the food from area farmers

Farm Tour

Want to showcase one or two farms in your area? Host a farm tour to talk about what agriculture is like in your community. Maybe you want to focus on consumer education or maybe you want to highlight innovation to neighbors. A farm tour can be a great way to do both outreach and education in your area.

The Local Initiative Grant could cover:

- Transportation between farms
- Food for participants
- Promotional materials

Want to hold an event for your chapter but don't know where to start? Connect with your Regional Membership Coordinator to talk about options:

- Region 1: Shawn Bartholomew, sbartholomew@wisconsinfarmersunion.com
- Region 2: Alicia Razvi, arazvi@wisconsinfarmersunion.com

Shawn and Alicia can help you discuss options, issues, and ways that you can use this funding. The examples above are very typical for grants but there is room for imagination and we are excited to help you plan new ideas for your community.

Learn more about the application at www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com/chapters



SWAG STORE

New year, new swag! Order by January 16th.
Shop at <https://wfustore.itemorder.com/sale>



The False Choice Between Agriculture & Clean Water



Nick Levendofsky
Government Relations Director

In a state as abundant in water as Wisconsin, it's easy to take for granted the rich groundwater resources running below our feet. Our Great Lakes contain 20 percent of the world's fresh surface water, and there is more than enough water available for drinking, recreation, wildlife, and business. However, growing concerns over the public health and ecological impacts of agricultural and industrial pollutants in our water mean we must reevaluate how we manage water resources in Wisconsin.

Unfortunately, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) recently announced it is abandoning efforts to develop regulations that would reduce nitrate pollution in drinking water, claiming "the statutory process and associated firm timelines established by the Legislature for rule-making do not allow adequate time for the department to complete this proposed rule."

In 2020, Wisconsin Farmers Union (WFU) participated in a series of NR-151 Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meetings to address the issue in a way that took agricultural, environmental, and public health concerns into consideration.

WFU recognizes a need to safeguard our resources against bad actors. Wisconsin has over 1,500 impaired waterways, and many private wells in Wisconsin do not meet safe drinking water standards due to excess bacteria or nitrates. Excess nutrients in surface water cause toxic algae blooms, which threaten humans and wildlife and destroy the tourism and recreation industries.

Although certainly not the sole factor, we must acknowledge that agricultural runoff is a contributor to water pollution in this state. Many farmers are aware of this fact and are actively working to address it through improved conservation practices and collaborative educational efforts, such as farmer-led watershed councils.

Seymour farmer and WFU Vice President Rick Adamski served on the NR-151 advisory committee and responded to the DNR's abandonment of the rule with the following statement, "If we continue to do what we have always done and expect different results, we are doomed to fail. We must realize the place where we are today is due to actions of the past. Nitrogen fertilizers reduce the organic matter content in the soil, which in turn increases the



need for more fertilizer. The rising price for these fertilizers is inevitable, and the concentration of ownership of these fertilizer manufacturers allows no limit to the price increases. The best possible future for farmers rests with strategies to reduce this dependency."

WFU's member-driven, grassroots policy aligns closely with the work and recommendations of the advisory council. Our members support efforts to preserve the quality of all waters in Wisconsin. Furthermore, we support changes to NR-151 that will restrict manure and other waste application rates and the spreading of these materials on frozen soils in areas of the state deemed to be sensitive. These sensitive areas would include places with shallow soil depth above Karst bedrock, areas with sandy soils, or those where groundwater quality standards are not being met.

For too long, we have been presented with a false choice between agriculture and clean water. WFU believes it is possible to have clean water, thriving family farms, and vibrant rural economies, and that farmers can be champions in this effort for ourselves, our environment, and future generations. We challenge the Wisconsin Legislature, Governor Evers' administration, and all who care about water quality in this state to follow the recommendations set forth by the advisory committee and to recommit to protecting water for the future.

Levendofsky can be reached at nick@wisconsinfarmersunion.com.

FARMERS UNION PRODUCE SAFETY PODCAST

Want to learn more about food safety on your farm and the FSMA Produce Safety Rule? Check out the new Farmers Union Food Safety Podcast series at wisconsinfarmer-union.com/podcast.

The podcast was created with support from National Farmers Union's Local Food Safety Collaborative and the Food and Drug Administration.



MEMBER BENEFITS

Get the most value out of your WFU membership by taking advantage of the discounts available to you.

wisconsinfarmersunion.com/benefits
nfu.org/benefits



Questions? Contact
WFU at 715-723-5561



Airbnb Vacation Rental Saves Family Farm

Wegmuellers make dairy operation profitable by welcoming visitors

Editor's Note: This article, featuring South Central Farmers Union members Dan and Ashley Wegmueller, originally ran in the Dairy Star and has been reprinted with permission. Find more at www.dairystar.com.

Stacey Smart
Dairy Star Staff Writer

MONROE – People seeking respite from fast-paced city life are finding a trip to Wegmueller Farm to be the ideal escape. Those looking for a peaceful and relaxing getaway are flocking to the farm's Airbnb vacation rental not only to soak up the serenity of the countryside, but to immerse themselves in the farm experience. For many of the Wegmuellers' guests, it is the only time they will step foot on a dairy farm.

"Our goal is to connect consumers to agriculture," said Dan Wegmueller. "We have the opportunity to teach people where their food comes from and it's working exceptionally well."

Dan and his wife, Ashley, milk 40 Brown Swiss cows on their 350-acre farm near Monroe. The decision to transform his parents' former farmhouse into an Airbnb was instrumental in saving Dan's fourth-generation family farm.

"We started hosting groups at a time when we thought we were going to go bankrupt and have to sell," Wegmueller said.

Not only did the Airbnb turn the farm around financially, it created an opportunity to invite people on an educational adventure in agriculture.



Photo by Danielle Endvick
Ashley and Dan Wegmueller on their Monroe dairy farm.

"The educational component is driving our business," Dan said. "Having the opportunity to connect with someone who has never seen a cow up close or giving a little kid the chance to hand milk a cow has made it all worth it."

Guests of Wegmueller Farm love the experience so much that many come back time after time. The Wegmuellers have hosted some families a half-dozen times. For travelers looking for a quiet country retreat, the dairy becomes their home away from home.

The Dairy at the Wegmueller Farm, as it is listed on Airbnb, features four bedrooms and two bathrooms. The family-friendly accommodations sleep up to 11 people. Cozy touches of the farm are sprinkled throughout the home that Dan said is perfect for large groups. People bring their own food and cook their own meals while taking advantage of the many amenities the house has to offer.

People looking for a hands-on experience find it at Wegmueller Farm. Opportunities to interact with the farm's animals are plentiful. In addition to cows, the farm includes horses, chickens, potbelly pigs, donkeys and cats.

"Guests have a lot of access to the farm," Dan said. "The pigs are a huge hit, and we encourage people to feed



Photos by Stacey Smart

The Wegmuellers renovated this farmhouse where Dan grew up, turning it into an Airbnb rental in 2018. The four-bedroom, two-bath home sleeps up to 11 people.

them table scraps.”

Sharing their farm with a new family each week, the Wegmuellers are enjoying their role as proprietors, showering guests with hospitality. A gift basket filled with products like cheese, chocolate and beer from local businesses is waiting when people arrive.

Cow milking and calf feeding demonstrations are part of the fun, and guests have the opportunity to milk a cow by hand and bottle feed a baby calf. Some guests like helping with chores to the point they have milked cows alongside Dan. New at the Wegmueller Farm are equine experiences where people grab the reins and take a trail ride.

“Two years ago, there wasn’t a single horse on this farm,” Dan said. “Now we have 15, including two Shetland ponies. Many are rescue horses. Horseback riding is another experience we can give people and another offering we can profit from. It’s also one more opportunity for guests to connect with animals.”

Beyond keeping the farm afloat through economic hardship, Dan has experienced personal tragedy as well. Within a three-year time frame, he lost both parents unexpectedly. When his father died in 2014, the family spent a couple years figuring out transferring the farm from Dan’s mother to Ashley and himself.

“I believe ours is a success story of a generational transfer,” Dan said. “We did a farm buyout in 2016, and my mom received a payment that would compensate her for the rest of her life. I also bought out my three siblings who left the farm for non-ag careers. I’m really happy with the way we did it. I thought it was fair for everyone.”

After the passing of his mom in 2017, Wegmueller recognized the bottom was about to fall out of the ag economy.

“This was especially true for small, multi-generational farms like ours,” he said. “I noticed on our milk check the price of milk was going down while input costs were going up. We knew our days were numbered unless we made significant changes. The answer was not milking more cows; we needed to do something different.”



Photo by Stacey Smart

Dan Wegmueller sits atop one of his favorite horses, Chazz. Horseback riding is among the farm life experiences offered at the Airbnb.

The old farmhouse was sitting empty and Wegmueller saw it as an opportunity. He and Ashley made the decision to convert the house into a vacation rental, with the intent of targeting the Chicago, Madison and Milwaukee markets. Throughout 2017 and 2018, the Wegmuellers worked relentlessly to remodel the house.

“It was very outdated, and we spent a lot of money we didn’t have to fix it up,” Dan said.

“We took a huge risk doing this. I owed people a lot of money in 2018 because I wasn’t able to pay my bills. We were losing cash and not even getting by, so Ashley took a full-time job off the farm. Her paycheck bought diesel fuel, vet supplies and feed.”

But in September 2018, the Wegmuellers’ investment started to pay back. The first guest came from New Jersey – an attorney doing international legal work who brought his family to attend Cheese Days in Monroe.

Since then, the Wegmuellers have hosted people from all over the world, including Ecuador, Switzerland, Great Britain, Australia, Belgium, Poland, China, Japan, New York City, Washington, D.C., and California, as well from the cities Wegmueller originally set out to attract.

“My favorite group was from Rwanda,” Wegmueller said.

Like many businesses, the Wegmuellers took a hit from the coronavirus pan-

demia, and from February to June of 2020, they lost all their bookings. However, from July onward, the farmhouse was booked and had guests nearly every night this summer.

“We spend no money on marketing,” Wegmueller said. “Everyone finds us on Airbnb.”

From military veterans to college professors and other intellectuals, the Wegmuellers host people from all walks of life.

“We’ve hosted vegetarians and vegans – the people you think would be anti-ag – and we changed their perceptions,” Wegmueller said. “We haven’t had a bad experience yet, and we’ve never received anything less than a 5-star review.”

A typical booking is two to three nights, but a family from Belgium stayed for a month. People appreciate that the farm is an authentic working dairy.

“We talk openly about everything we do – how we care for animals, haul manure, etc.,” Dan said. “I don’t hide anything. If I call the vet for a sick cow, I invite people to come out and see. Same with if a cow is getting bred.”

The Wegmuellers had the support from the community of Monroe from the start.

“They believed in what we were doing,” Dan said. “Our success is directly tied to the quality of our community. We send people downtown to shop, eat, etc., as there are a lot of great choices close by.”

The Wegmuellers are bringing people together while representing agriculture – specifically the dairy industry – at the same time.

“Direct consumer relationships like these are what is going to save the family farm,” Dan said.

Providing more experience-based offerings and onsite events are goals of the Wegmuellers.

“Everyone needs a reason to get out of bed in the morning and find accomplishment at the end of the day,” Dan said. “This vacation rental broadened our revenue stream, which was necessary to keep the farm going, and it made farming fun again.”

Farmers Union Camp 2022 Dates Announced



Cathy Statz
Education Director

With many lessons learned in the past two years, Wisconsin Farmers Union is approaching summer 2022 with cautious optimism, gathering as much information as we can about best practices from the past two summers. We'll continue to integrate guidance from the CDC and local public health authorities, the American Camp Association, and the Association of Camp Nursing as we plan for 2022 Farmers Union Camps. COVID-19 may be with us in various forms for a while, so we'll need to be flexible. We expect to run camps closer to "normal" in 2022, updating risk-management tools as conditions allow. We cannot eliminate the possibility of COVID-19 at camp; we can only manage our approach carefully to reduce the likelihood. Vaccination against COVID-19 is expected for all staff and all campers.

This fall, Wisconsin Farmers Union's camp program at Kamp Kenwood completed a year-long process to become accredited by the American Camp Association (ACA). The accreditation means that we've undergone a thorough peer review of our operations – from staff qualifications and training to emergency management. ACA collaborates with experts from the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Red Cross, and other youth-serving agencies to assure that current practices at camps reflect the most up-to-date, research-based standards in camp operation. Camps and ACA form a partnership that promotes growth and fun in an environment committed to safety.

Look for Farmers Union Camp registration information later this winter. We look forward to engaging with Farmers Union camp families in a way that manages risk and reaches campers in safe, flexible, and accommodating ways.

Save the date! Summer 2022 Camp Dates include:

- Junior/Junior High 1 - June 14-17 (Tues-Fri)
- NFU All-States Camp - June 24-29 (Fri-Wed)
- Family Camp 1 - July 22-23 (Fri-Sat)
- Senior Camp - July 24-28 (Sun-Thurs)
- Senior Co-op Trip - July 28-29 (Thurs-Fri)
- Co-op Kids Camp - July 29-30 (Fri-Sat)
- Junior High 2 - July 31-Aug 4 (Sun-Thurs)
- Family Camp 2 - Aug 5-6 (Fri-Sat)
- Junior 2 - Aug 7-10 (Sun-Wed)
- Junior 3 - Aug 10-13 (Wed-Sat)
- Junior 4 - Aug 14-17 (Sun-Wed)



REGISTRATION OPENS SOON!
www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com

Make a Difference this Summer!

Do you love
the outdoors?
Enjoy spending
time with kids?



Seeking Summer Staff Applicants!

Employment available
Mid-May through August 2022

Each summer, Farmers Union hires motivated, energetic and co-op minded individuals for staff positions at our educational summer camp and for outreach at special events around the state. WFU Kamp Kenwood is near Chippewa Falls. Work and live in an outdoor setting at a beautiful lakeside camp facility. Camp counselor staff include specialization areas: assistant or associate director, lifeguard, medic, and cooks. Internships available.

Staff develop and lead educational lessons as well as recreation for youth ages 7-18. Staff training is in May/June and camps are in June, July and August.

To apply, contact Cathy at 715-214-7887
or cstatz@wisconsinfarmersunion.com

Meet Aaron Pape



Above: Aaron Pape sets up paddocks on his family's Peshtigo farm. Left: His wife, Erin Pape gets a warm greeting from the herd.

Alicia Razvi

Regional Membership Coordinator

Aaron and Erin Pape, along with newborn daughter Nora, farm in Peshtigo. Pape Family Pastures is a direct market farm that includes 53 head of grass-fed beef cattle, 25 pastured hogs and 3,000 meat chickens. Most chickens go to a wholesaler but the Papes are also the main chicken supplier for the SLO Farmer's Co-op.

The Papes belong to the Lake to Bay Farmers Union chapter, where Aaron served as president from 2019-21 and recently submitted a 2022 WFU Special Order of Business on PFAS.

Before 2018, Aaron didn't know much about Wisconsin Farmers Union. WFU Vice President and District 8 Director Rick Adamski introduced him to the organization, and he realized it met a lot of his values. "I liked that WFU supports small farmers, pasture-raised animals and conservation efforts that I value," he shared.

Like most farmers today, Aaron works off farm as an agricultural educator at Northwest Technical College (NWTC). Supporting small and medium sized farms is not just representative to his values, but advantageous to his career as well. "Essentially, I get paid based on how many farmers sign up to work with me through the ag program, and there are less farms on the land every year which means less farmers too." He also appreciates the work on consolidation in agriculture that

WFU has been doing. "The detriment to family farms is very much apparent. There is fierce competition for land. The rent is too high for land that isn't worth it. It's shameful to see what is happening to smaller and medium sized farms. I do work with CAFOs and there are many excellent farmers, but the system is stacked to favor those sizes." Aaron says

Over the years, WFU has broadened Aaron's point of view and the organization has expanded his knowledge base. "WFU opened up my eyes to the larger landscape to farm policy issues. I've learned a lot about dairy pricing and policy. Dairy Together really impacted me, and after attending the convention, I was glad to see the broader spectrum of agriculture that WFU supports," Aaron says. In looking toward the future, Aaron hopes WFU continues to focus on reducing consolidation, creating competitive markets, and improving conservation efforts with policy. In addition, he believes WFU needs to stay pretty focused. "We are not a conservation-focused group, for example, and that's okay because we do have the ability to collaborate those groups and can make a bigger impact when we work together."

If you are considering attending the WFU Convention, Aaron notes, "When we iron out farm policy, we are not singing 'Kumbaya' and holding hands, but we do come together, and there is a lot to learn from each other."





Never Thought About Running for Office?

This Is Why You Should.



Erica Roth
South Central Wisconsin Farmers Union

Never in a million years would the thought of running for any sort of office have crossed my mind ... until the day I was asked. Then the light bulb turned on. It started as a slow, faint flicker as I began to roll the idea around, trying it on and then dismissing it. But soon, and more rapidly than I could have imagined, the idea of running, representing, and being part of the process lit up my mind. I decided to do it and ran for county board.

Looking back, I am so glad I did. That was six years ago. I am at the end of my third term. Compared to some who have served for decades, I am not a long-term board member. Even so, the journey has taught me some truths about local leadership:

Running for and serving on a board, whether it is town, city, village, school, county, or other, is relevant work. The people and issues you work with are here and now, and can leave a lasting impression.

- Serving in an elected capacity is rewarding and impactful, not to mention educational.
- Your talents, and individual perspectives are an asset.
- You do not need to be an expert, just willing to learn and work together.

I have been spending a lot of time lately talking to people about running for County Board, the duties and responsibilities, the whys and why nots, and I still find it difficult to express why I feel so strongly about serving. It is an opportunity to make a difference, listen and be heard, work together with others to find solutions and help our very local government run as smoothly as possible, providing daily services to our community. Most of my fellow supervisors are there for the right reason with the best intentions at heart, doing the best they can for our county,

Did you miss WFU's Run for Office Workshop but want to know more? A recording and support group are now available to members. Contact Organizing Director Bill Hogseth at bhogseth@wisconsinfarmersunion.com

and there is something that tethers you, strengthens you, and makes you want to do the best you can for everyone.

There are a lot of similarities to Farmers Union values and success on a board - cooperation, reasoning together, equality, critical thinking, and justice to name a few. We need people with these values on our boards, with a diverse pool of talents and skills, who come from different backgrounds and life experiences.

We need these voices in the conversations that are shaping our local government and schools (in the case of school boards). I never thought my voice would matter. I didn't know anything about local government or county board when I ran, but I was wrong. I learned, and am continually learning, about county government and that my voice is an important part of the conversations. I take my role as a representative very seriously, making sure my constituents' voices are heard in those conversations and decisions as well.

Contrary to popular belief, local leadership can blend with your day-to-day life. Every board is different, so be sure to check with someone who is currently on the board you are considering, but with the committees I serve on, meetings, prep time, and travel, I spend an average of 10 to 15 hours per month on County Board activities.

If you have been asked to run, please consider it. If you want to run, please do it. Our boards and communities need voices, minds, and bodies to simply do the best they can. I promise you, you can do it.

Erica Roth and her family run Ewetopia Hill Farm and are members of the South Central Wisconsin Farmers Union chapter. Roth serves on the Green County Board.

Finding Community and Inspiration at the NFU Women's Conference

Conference builds lasting connections with women from across the country

Jessica Jurcek

*Kenosha-Racine-Jefferson-Walworth
Farmers Union*

My instinctive mental image of a “farmer” has always been a woman. This is no surprise, as I grew up farming with my mother and grandmother, who to this day are the primary operators on my family's grass-fed beef farm. Women of our present and previous generations are central to agriculture, and women farmers need opportunities to build community, learn from each other, and celebrate their collective successes.

The centrality of women in farming was never more apparent to me than when I attended the 2019 National Farmers Union Women's Conference. I met and learned from dozens of women from across the country who produced everything from vegetables to wool. These women came from diverse backgrounds and had expertise in different agricultural production systems, marketing, business management, artisanal product making, and so much more. While I learned a great deal from the scheduled sessions and workshops throughout the conference, I also learned so much from simply talking to other attendees at lunch, between sessions, and in the evenings.

Aside from gaining access to a wealth of agricultural knowledge, I also found a supportive community in the other attendees and organizers. I was just 18 years old when I attended the Women's Confer-



Photo by National Farmers Union

Above: Jessica Jurcek, at far left, beside her mother, Kirsten Jurcek at an outing at the 2019 NFU Women's Conference.

ence, yet despite my age, I felt recognized and appreciated as an equal by the other women present at the conference. These women were wise and encouraging, and I made connections with some of them that I still maintain today.

The 2022 Women's Conference is coming up Jan. 10-13 with great line-up of virtual programming.

The year I attended the conference, it was hosted in San Diego, California. While I certainly remember the warm weather and greenery that was a far cry from January in Wisconsin, the memories that are most clear are the stories told by other attendees. From farming through illness and family hardship to success growing a new fruit variety, I was struck by the conviction of the other women at the conference. I left feeling motivated and inspired by the accomplishments, creativity, and strength

of the women farmers I met in San Diego.

Women farmers have so much to share with agriculture as whole, but also with each other. The opportunity to build community with women farmers from across the country is a powerful experience. We need female role models, mentors, and collaborators who understand the unique challenges that women in agriculture face, and there is no better place to find that kind of community than at the NFU Women's Conference. As a previous attendee, I encourage women farmers of any age or background to attend the NFU Women's Conference in 2022. There is no better opportunity to learn from and celebrate women in agriculture.

Learn more about the 2022 Women's Conference at <https://nfu.org/womensconference/>



Protecting Immigrants and Farmer Citizen Interests

W. Michael Slattery

*Dodge-Fond du Lac-Sheboygan-Ozaukee
Farmers Union*

Presently it is thought that about 11 million undocumented immigrants reside, work, and participate in U.S. life. Some have been a part of our communities for decades. Of those, many immigrants are critical to the success of American agriculture and are essential workers who suffered more than most during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Wisconsin alone, an estimated 7,900 workers are the basis for much of Wisconsin milk production on approximately 900 larger dairy farms in the state, not to mention those employed by cheese and dairy processing plants. The dairy industry constitutes 14.4 percent of the state gross product (\$44 billion within \$305 billion) and these immigrants, are estimated to be the basis for as much as 11 percent of that state gross product.

Documented and undocumented essential workers have



Above: Wisconsin Farmers Union Government Relations Director Nick Levendofsky looks on as Cambridge dairy farmer and WFU board member Tina Hinchley speaks at a rally for immigrant rights. Below: Farmers Union members (L to R) Tina Hinchley, W. Michael Slattery, and Anna Hinchley, join a march through Milwaukee on Indigenous Peoples' Day.

also been heavily laboring in packing plants, custom butcher operations, and vegetable and fruit processing in Wisconsin and around the US. In packing plants alone, the vast majority of 240 laborers who died and the 45,000 who contracted COVID-19 were documented and undocumented immigrants. Undocumented

workers are the backbone of vegetable and fruit farms in California and the Pacific Northwest.

The Biden Administration's \$3.5 trillion "Build Back Better Act" includes a key component which addresses and entails a legal solution for regularization of most undocumented immigrants with a path to citizenship, inclusive of the youth brought here as minors who are presently in limbo under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program.

The Senate parliamentarian, an unelected bureaucrat who opines on which items may be addressed under legislative procedures for passing bills through the reconciliation process (requiring only a 51 percent approval for bills, related to the budget) amongst other regular procedures, has ruled that immigration issues may not be addressed in the proposed Act, despite the fact that the effect would accrue more than \$100 billion to the US economy and increase tax and FICA revenue.



Legal and Congressional scholars have contested that the parliamentarian's opinion is merely an opinion and that the Senate need not follow the parliamentarian's guidelines. While this may lead to lawsuits that will probably and ultimately be adjudicated before the Supreme Court, the federal government and this country need to address a problem that has festered our country and been left unresolved for decades.

Neither the proposed Farm Workforce Modernization Act, which would facilitate and increase the number of immigrants permitted with H-2A visas but allow a path to citizenship only for immigrants who have worked here for 10 years, nor the present DACA program address the larger problem of regularizing the status of 11 million undocumented persons, most of whom are here as either economic or political refugees. It is thought that many, if not most, of our farm and agriculture workers are essential in our society and would not meet the 10-year requirement.

In response to addressing the issue of regularizing undocumented residents, marches, rallies, protests etc. sprang up around the country in the fall of 2021. In line with WFU policy positions, members joined a march of thousands in Milwaukee on Indigenous Peoples' Day. WFU board member and dairy farmer Tina Hinchley addressed the marchers to demand that politicians live up to campaign promises and that Congress include a solution to this neglected immigration issue, presently included in the Build Back Better Act.

We WFU members need to step forward in support of this issue, contact our federal senators and congresspersons to advocate that they resolve the problem of undocumented immigrants – who are our neighbors and essential to our society – and include this in the Act.

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Wisconsin
Farmers
Union

A Link In the Chain

Farmers work to unite food pantries with local options



Photo by Danielle Endvick
Patty Wright, shown working on her family's Spring Hill Community Farm, is among Farmers Union members who are working to connect their communities to locally sourced food.

Bayard Godsavage
Rural Voices Correspondent

Over the course of the last eighteen months, as the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged communities, many systematic and structural inadequacies, from healthcare systems to basic infrastructure issues to unequal access to housing were laid bare. Similarly, over the last 18 months the issue of food insecurity has become visible, quite literally, according to Polk-Burnett Farmers Union members Margaret Pennings and Dan Guenthner, who own Common Harvest Farm in Osceola. For several years they have been working closely with food shelves in the Twin Cities.

"When you couldn't distribute indoors, because of health concerns, suddenly those long lines were moved outside, and it became more difficult for people to ignore what's going on," Pennings said.

Historically, the food distributed to people in need has often been "a lot of stuff that other people don't want," according to Julie Keown-Bomar, executive director of the Wisconsin Farmers Union (WFU), who serves on the board of Feed My People, a food bank serving counties in Northwestern Wisconsin. Often donations came in the form of highly processed, commodity items.

Indeed, Pennings and Guenthner recall, when they first began volunteering 15 years ago, there was no fresh produce whatsoever on big distribution days. But now, local producers like themselves, and organizations like Feed My People and Hunger Taskforce, as well as community food pantries and food shelves, are working to change that.

According to Keown-Bomar, local producers and Farmers Union members have really stepped up over the course of the pandemic. She cited, for example, a pork donation from WFU members totaling around 30,000 pounds. That's good because, she notes, the need is there.

"[Feed My People] saw numbers go up at the beginning

of the pandemic," she said, "then that started to recede, but in the last couple of months it has ticked upward again."

Perhaps the most significant benefit of food banks and food shelves working with local producers is that it gives people who are struggling with food insecurity the option to make healthy food choices, and there's a certain dignity to that. It also shortens the supply chain which is, according to Keown-Bomar, better for the environment. If a squash doesn't have to leave the county, for example, opposed to riding around on trucks from the farm to distribution center to grocery store shelf and back to the distribution center, finally landing at a food pantry.

Also, importantly, creating lasting relationships between local growers and food banks creates "predictability on both ends." When a food pantry knows what's coming from producers, they can better allocate limited resources to respond to the needs of those they serve.

But developing those relationships is tricky, in part because of economic systems that have been built up around food production and agriculture, systems which monetize waste, and in some senses rely on food banks for profit.

"The giant food company model is so omnipresent that it almost appears that there's no other way," said Keown-Bomar, who has a PhD in Cultural Anthropology from the University of Minnesota. "But I know that not to be true. As an anthropologist, I know that to absolutely not be true."

As part of the federal government's COVID relief legislation, the USDA implemented the Farmers to Families Food Box program. The program collected and packaged food for distribution in local food pantries and was a lifeline during a time when, because of health concerns, pantries could not allow volunteers on the premises beyond limited capacities. The program also offered stability and reliability, knowing that boxes would arrive regularly.

However, the program was not without controversy,

and its implementation has since come under scrutiny. The name, “Farmers to Families,” and much of the official descriptions of the program lead you to think of a CSA box, filled with fresh, locally produced food. The reality, often, looked nothing like that. Decisions about the contents of boxes did not seem to be based on needs of communities, or on what was locally available, but instead tended to favor large producers who were key officials.

According to Sherrie Tussler, executive director of Hunger Task Force, even when there was fresh produce or dairy, it tended to come from far away. “When there was dairy,” she said of the boxes being distributed in Wisconsin, “it was from Illinois. Are you telling me you can’t find cheese in Wisconsin?” In time it became clear that the program was becoming a means for restaurants and their suppliers to empty their inventories to offset losses during the lockdown.

The contents of the boxes varied widely, depending on who was awarded packaging and distribution contracts (also a highly politicized process), and she cited specifically Gourmet Gorilla, out of Illinois, for their good work. “They always had beautiful boxes,” Tussler said. But, all in all, she described the philosophy of the program as, “They want you to drive through, take this box of shit, and be happy.”

Throughout the pandemic, Hunger Taskforce has worked to allocate resources to best serve communities and increase access to food from local growers. In that effort, the Evers and Biden administrations have proven more helpful. Hunger Taskforce, along with Feeding Wisconsin, secured more than \$10 million in funding through Evers supported programs to procure food from small and medium producers. The idea, Tussler told me, was not only to get good, local food to people who need it, but also to help Wisconsin farmers who were struggling after the pandemic complicated access to the market. Hunger Taskforce worked with Wisconsin’s Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) to identify “pain points.”

“Pork producers were hurting, so we bought pork,” she said. “Pheasant farms were going bankrupt, so we bought pheasant. We bought elk and bison for Indigenous tribes. When we heard dairy farmers were having to dump milk, we bought a lot of cheese.”



Photo by Danielle Endvick

The Farmers Union Enterprises truck unloads 30,000 pounds of pork at the Feed My People Food Bank in May 2020.

As restrictions lifted and Tussler was able to visit some of the farms that Hunger Taskforce had purchased from, and as many of those farmers began volunteering, several told her privately what a lifeline the program had been.

Recently, Feeding Wisconsin, an association of food banks in the state that includes Feed My People, partnered with the Intertribal Agriculture and the Oneida, Menominee, and Red Cliff Ojibwe nations to develop the Tribal Elder Food Box Program. A pilot program, it distributed 900 boxes of locally sourced meat and produce from native and non-native producers biweekly in June to December 2021.

Shawn Bartholomew, who now works as a regional membership coordinator for WFU, did a lot of legwork for the program in his time at DATCP, coordinating pick ups with producers. The Tribal Elder Food Box Program gave growers, and those receiving the boxes, certainty, which meant producers could produce more food to meet the need.

“The more growers grow,” Bartholomew said, “the more they give back. Small growers in Wisconsin can produce enough to meet our needs, and when they do better, everyone does better.”

Going forward, he said, it’s essential to secure grant funding to build capacity, so small farmers can help meet the needs of their communities. This is the problem that small producers often run into. In the United States, supply chains, processing, and transportation are built to serve a system of excess, leaving smaller producers excluded, often by design. In the Tribal Elder Food Box Program, groups like the Wisconsin Food Hub Cooperative gave assistance in the form of transportation and distribution.

Bartholomew cautions that bigger isn’t always better – that thinking, after all, got us where we are. “I think programs are best, and can best meet the needs of the communities they serve, when they’re kept local.”

Faith and giving have been guiding principles for Penning and Guenther’s Common Harvest Farm. When they started in 1989 they were living in Minneapolis and farming on a leased piece of land outside the city. Their first CSA members were neighbors who shared their values. Central to that community, Guenther said, was the bookstore and restaurant St. Martin’s Table. “From the beginning,” Penning added, “We were living and working in the community we served.”

After a while Guenther and Penning acquired land near Osceola, but kept many of the same members and maintained ties to the Cities, specifically to the Ministry of the Community of St. Martin’s, where for several years they provided food for a weekly single mothers group. In the 90s they delivered food as part of the Minnesota AIDS Project. For the last 15 years they have supplied fresh produce for



distribution to the Brian Coyle Neighborhood Center in the Cedar Riverside neighborhood of Minneapolis. Pennings and Guenther's assessment of the food bank system in this country echoes others I heard. "We have a food system built on waste and we need to change that," Guenther said. "There's good food out there. A lot of small farms, at the end of the day, have extra. It's a matter of the labor it takes to get it to the people who need it."

Since Guenther and Pennings began working with the Brian Coyle Neighborhood Center, they have delivered an impressive amount of produce. But there's a labor cost to it.

"As much as we were able to give," Guenther said, "it was always the leftovers, and we thought we could do more." So, five years ago, after discussions with members, they began Sharing the Harvest, which allows sponsorship of shares that go directly to the food shelf. "We want to do it right," Pennings said. "We try to grow the food that the community [many of whom are Somali] wants." This last year, because of drought, was a lean year, so "only" 17,000 pounds went to the cause. Most years it's more like 25,000 pounds, a quarter of what they grow, with members contributing \$13,000 annually to help fund the program.

A little further east, in Dunn County, Wisconsin, a similar program, Farmers Feed Dunn County, seeks to get food from local growers distributed through Stepping Stones of Dunn County in Menomonie. The program was conceived in early 2021, when Barron County Farmers Union members Patty Wright and Mike Racette, who grow produce in Prairie Farm, began working part-time in the warehouse. Stepping Stones Executive Director Padraig Gallagher said that they'd been looking for a way to connect with local growers for some time.

"The farmers in this county grow some spectacular food,"



Submitted photo
Dan Guenther and Margaret Pennings of Common Harvest Farm know farming is about community. They are pictured here with their children, Annie, Grace and William.

“
We have a food system built on waste and we need to change that. There's good food out there. A lot of small farms, at the end of the day, have extra. It's a matter of the labor it takes to get it to the people who need it.”
 — Dan Guenther, farmer and Polk-Burnett Farmers Union member
 ”



Photo by Danielle Endvick
Mike Racette and Patty Wright are connecting fellow farmers with local distribution options through Stepping Stones of Dunn County.

he said. Once he met Mike and Patty, they were able to connect with other area farmers. Since then, he said, "the fresh produce we were able to offer has doubled in 2021."

The program allows Stepping Stones to be intentional about what goes into boxes that get distributed each week. As Patty said, "We want to be conscious of what goes out."

Often, boxes will contain recipes for what is in season. Most of the food provided to Stepping Stones through Farmers Feed Dunn County comes in the form of donations, extras that farmers have after harvest, and at this point it is mostly produce, though Gallagher hopes to expand to things, like local beef and eggs. There is some funding to make targeted purchases, to round out the boxes – like fresh tomatoes, if there are beans in the boxes, to help make chili. "With food pantries," he said, "you've got dimes and you have to make dollars worth of purchases."

For Racette and Wright, it's a beginning. Like Guenther and Pennings, they have always seen farming as a community endeavor. In fact, they have thought about a model similar to the one at Common Harvest, where members help fund labor costs. "It takes resources," Racette said, "to make the kind of food we produce available. And sometimes it feels like we're swimming upstream."

But one gets the sense from talking to them that the work is worth it if it means offering better food choices to those facing food insecurity.

As Guenther said to me, "Just because something is hard, doesn't mean you shouldn't do it."

And who knows, as the pandemic continues to expose structural inequities and systematic shortcomings, and as more people begin to question why we continue to support economic models that only seem to work for a very select few people, maybe we will see more support for smaller, local models.

As for the affect of the Farmers Feed Dunn County program, still in its infancy, Gallagher says it's been enormous. "It's been humbling," he said. "Seeing the commitment these growers have to healing their neighbors, it's sincere and it's deep."

Farmers' Voices Critical in Upcoming Climate Conservations



Vivienne Kerley-de la Cruz
WFU Policy Coordinator

As the legislature considers climate change bills in the coming sessions, it is critical that they have actual farmers at the table in the policymaking process. It is clear to farmers around the country that the climate is changing. Rising average temperatures, shifting precipitation patterns, changing growing seasons, and increasingly frequent and severe weather events are making it more difficult to grow food, feed, fuel, and fiber. Studies continue to show these difficulties will only intensify over time.

Many farmers and ranchers have implemented conservation practices that build soil health, which makes the land more resilient to extreme weather and help to sequester carbon. They are also adopting climate-smart practices that reduce consumption of fossil fuels and inputs. Farmers and rural communities are uniquely positioned to meet the goals set forth in any future climate change legislation, and legislators should be sure they are apprised of forthcoming legislation and consulted on changes.

Below is a summary of some of the recent legislation brought forward by Representative Neubauer:

Biodigester Grants:

A bill which requires the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) to provide planning grants for establishing regional biodigesters. Biodigesters are used to break down organic material into gas, liquids, and solids.

Wisconsin Farmers Union (WFU) supports anaerobic digesters in our policy. These digesters break down organic material in an environment absent of oxygen, producing biogas and digestate as byproducts. We support continued research and funding for anaerobic digesters.

Carbon Sequestration/Sustainable Ag Programs:

Allows DATCP to create a sustainable agriculture grant program to award farmers who implement on-site fossil fuel input efficiency measures or plant vegetation such as hedgerows, windrows, or riparian buffers, or implement approaches to increase the carbon stored in the soil, or develop a conservation management plan for carbon reduction or sequestration. The grants selection process will prioritize grant projects which maximize total reduction in atmospheric carbon dioxide equivalents and/or projects that improve air or water quality and

provide agronomic benefits. The bill allows grant recipients to use the grant funds to make down payments on equipment or other types of loans related to the purpose of the grant.

WFU encourages both increased research and continued market incentives, like grants, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and enhanced income for producers who protect the environment through carbon sequestration.

UW Extension Climate Science Positions:

A bill which specifies that the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System must provide funding for two agriculture and climate change positions at UW-Madison. The positions must be filled using existing, currently vacant positions but must also reflect an increase in the total number of research positions at UW-Madison. Wisconsin Farmers Union consistently supports continued investment in climate change and agriculture research, particularly that investment and research through the University of Wisconsin system.

County Conservation Staff for Climate Resilience:

Under current law, as part of the Soil and Water Resource Management program, DATCP provides funding to counties for county conservation staffing. This bill provides that the program may be used to fund county conservation staff who can focus on climate change and resiliency. The bill provides \$1.8 million annually in general purpose revenue funding for this purpose. Each land conservation committee shall annually prepare a grant request to address needs and activities to be undertaken by this position under the county's chapter.

WFU supports robust state and county funding for conservation staffing. We also continue to support local control over issues of local concern, which in this case would be county control over local water quality and quantity.

Food Waste Reduction Pilot:

This bill provides grants for food waste reduction pilot projects that have an objective of: preventing food waste, redirecting surplus food to hunger relief organizations, and composting food waste. Preference will be given to grant proposals that serve areas where the median household income is below statewide median household income and in which no grocery store is located.

WFU has always been supportive of measures to reduce and/or recover food waste, as well as encouraging and promoting composting. WFU also recognizes the particular burden and vulnerability of low income and food desert communities.



What's Next In Wisconsin Wolf Management?



Photo credit: iStock | Holly Kuchera

Laurie Groskopf
DNR Wolf Management Plan Committee & WFU Member

A series of meetings were held in late summer and fall 2021 to provide input into the new Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Wolf Management Plan, scheduled to be released in February. There will be a short period to allow public comment on the plan, likely in March. Wisconsin Farmers Union and its members need to be prepared to comment on what will be a very long plan to review in a short period of time.

During the period from 2010-2017, when other attempts by DNR to revise the wolf management plan were taking place, half of the county boards in Wisconsin enacted advisory resolutions to control the wolf population to 350 (7), 350 or less (26), 100 (1), 80 (1), or 50 (1). The 36 county board chairs and clerks were recently reminded by mail of these resolutions, and your members may wish to contact their county board chair to ask what process will be used to provide this information to the DNR during the public comment period. If you need help or your county did not pass a wolf control resolution, reach out to me at 715-453-6301 to learn more.

The number of wolves in Wisconsin is a contentious issue. What can your members do to improve the knowledge of wolf numbers in Wisconsin? There is a large carnivore reporting form that can be used on the DNR web site, under "wolf". Be sure to fill out as much information as possible if you have a sighting. Reports are more likely to be used if there is a clear picture attached to the report.

DNR still uses volunteer trackers to help determine the presence of wolves and establish their estimate. There are multiple opportunities to become a volunteer tracker this winter season. The tracker classes are now available on-line, and passing a test is mandatory before being able to join the tracker group. The DNR will offer Zoom

training in tracking on January 5 at 6 pm. Also, in-person training is scheduled during January and February at three locations in Wisconsin. The Timber Wolf Information Network is providing this training. Consult the DNR wolf monitoring web page for training details.

It appears there will be no wolf season this winter. The DNR is not making attempts to appeal the latest judge's ruling that cancelled the season; it is also not entering into the national legal battle to relist wolves.

There are 102 entries on the wolf depredation/harassment/public threat list, similar to last year. This is unexpected as the USDA Wildlife Service and lethal landowner permits have dispatched 70 wolves, and previous experience shows that level of removal leads to less conflicts. There are fewer hunting dog conflicts on this year's list - the lowest in many years. But farmers and pet owners are still carrying the burden of wolf conflicts in higher numbers. You can assist in efforts to diminish conflicts by reporting any suspected conflict to USDA Wildlife Services. The number in the north is 1-800-228-1368 and in the south 1-800-433-0663. Report as soon as possible, preserve the evidence if it does not put your livestock at increased risk, and remove any vulnerable animals from areas that might pose a risk. Wildlife Service staff are required to respond within 48 hours, but they often respond more quickly.

You can learn more about wolf management in Wisconsin and view advisory committee meeting minutes at <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/WildlifeHabitat/wolf/>.

If you have any questions or need advice or information, please contact me at 715-453-6301. I have been working to promote responsible wolf management since 1995, and I represent WFU in my seat on the Wolf Management Plan Committee. I know many of you continue to be concerned about the status of wolves in Wisconsin.



Storm Strikes Kamp Kenwood

When Wisconsin Farmers Union's historic Kamp Kenwood was struck by the wind storms that swept through Wisconsin on December 15th, a call went out for volunteers for a clean-up effort later that week.

As odd as it is to see this kind of a storm in December, we're grateful the damage didn't happen during the height of summer camp season when we had youth on-site or during our peak time for fall wedding rentals.

Though a number of trees fell, the camp buildings thankfully suffered no structural damage.

WFU would like to extend our sincere gratitude to all who came out to help clean up the camp on December 18th. We appreciate the heavy lifting and the laughter that made a sad chore more bearable. Thank you!

– Executive Director Julie Keown-Bomar & the WFU team



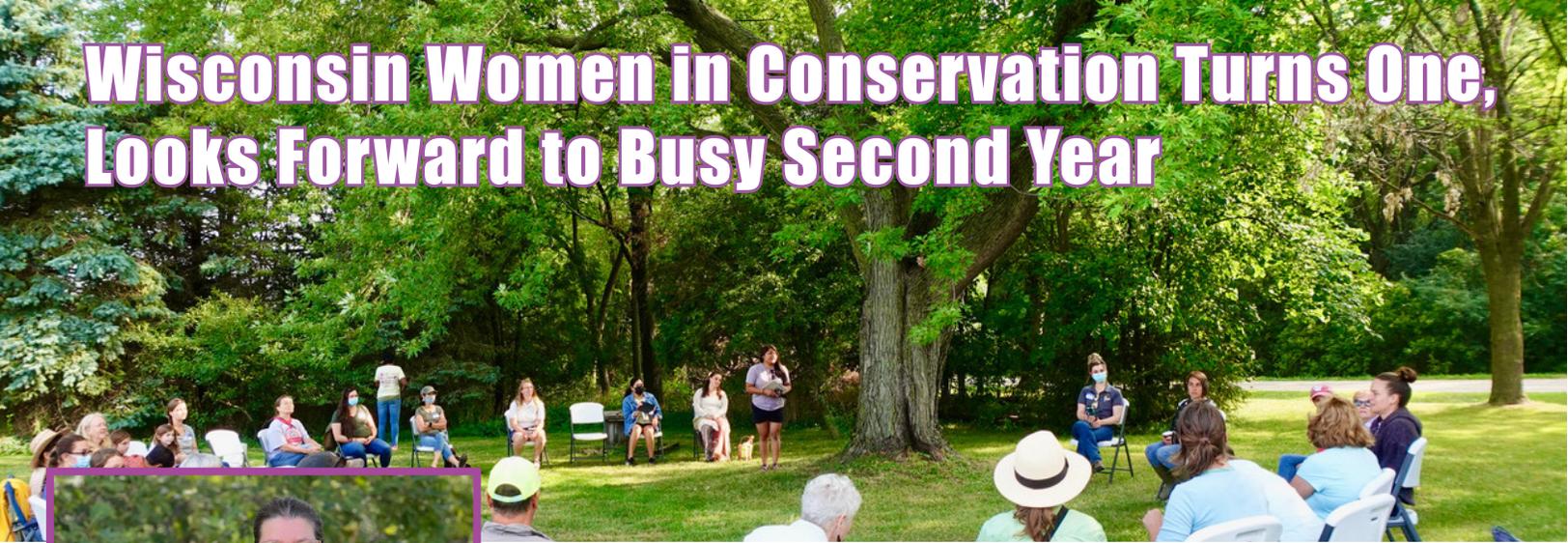
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We'll Be There.

Wisconsin Women in Conservation Turns One, Looks Forward to Busy Second Year



From top: WiWiC uses a learning circle to facilitate peer-to-peer education; WFU Member Sarah George is a WiWiC Regional Coordinator who planned a Pepin Prairie Walk; women view the flock at Full Circle Community Farm in Seymour; WFU staffers Alicia Razvi and Kirsten Slaughter at a summer field day.

Kriss Marion

Wisconsin Women in Conservation Communications Specialist

Wisconsin Women in Conservation (WiWiC) – a Wisconsin Farmers Union special project in partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Michael Fields Agriculture Institute, Renewing the Countryside, and Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES) – recently completed its first year of outreach and education to women farmers and landowners. The program engaged 1,337 participants with 17 Zoom Events and 5 Field Days, as well as 2,300 on social media through Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest.

“We never intended to be a mostly-virtual project, but we had to pivot because of COVID,” says WiWiC Communications Specialist Kriss Marion. “It was tough for our team to quickly learn how to facilitate community in Zoom, but I think that challenge became a huge opportunity for us. We were able to reach wider than our networks and connect more women with conservation resources because of it. I’m excited to build on that foundation as we move into more on-farm events in 2022.”

For 2022, WiWiC is planning 12 in-person learning circles, 6 field days, and another 7 virtual events, beginning with a peer-to-peer Mental Health training series with FarmWell Wisconsin, which kicks off in January (see page 31).

WiWiC is a three-year project providing women landowners and farmers peer-to-peer opportunities to connect and learn about land stewardship. Programs facilitate access to expert content, professional services and resources. Thirty-five percent of Wisconsin's primary operators are women, per the 2017 Census, an increase of 16 percent since 2012. WiWiC prioritizes and funds conservation plans to guide this important but historically underserved demographic.

Through the efforts of WiWiC staff, Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers declared the second week of July as the first “Wisconsin Women in Conservation Week.” WiWiC hosted a July 14 “Happy Hour” networking event for educators, and over 40 attended, including press. Then WiWiC launched a Wisconsin Women in Education Educators Network in October with a virtual event attended by over 80 conservation professionals. The WiWiC Educator Network will continue to meet bi-annually, with the next event on March 8, from 10-11am on Zoom.

Whether you are a woman conservation educator, a farmer, or landowner, sign up for “The Buzz” monthly newsletter at WiWiC.org to stay informed about 2022 events!

Trainings Help Women Learn Mental Health Response Skills

Women farmers and landowners wear multiple hats and juggle various responsibilities, often providing emotional support to family and community. We all live in a stressful space at one time or another – and for one reason or another. Wisconsin Women in Conservation is pleased to partner with FarmWell Wisconsin to provide two-hour virtual trainings this winter to help women learn to identify someone in need, and respond intentionally, but not burn out.

“Mental health is a topic that impacts everyone. For better or worse, women often take on the role of providing emotional support for their families and extended networks – acting as counselors, confidants, and mediators,” says Chris Frakes, of FarmWell Wisconsin. “It is vital to learn the skills needed to carry out those roles more effectively and to learn how to set boundaries that protect your own wellbeing.”

Participants will explore the “COMET” method, which stands for Changing Our Mental and Emotion-

al Trajectory. This program aims to change the trajectory of someone in a vulnerable space, and headed towards crisis, back towards a place of wellness.

The workshops, led by FarmWell and WiWiC facilitators, will be in a “Learning Circle” format, encouraging peer-to-peer interaction among participants. They will practice being that person who says or does something to offer support, care, or a referral and causes a positive change.

Farm Well Wisconsin works in Southwestern Wisconsin to develop and offer resources that support the health and wellbeing of farmers, farmworkers, and their families. The group believes that farming well depends on taking care of our bodies, minds, emotions, and relationships.

“Neighbors helping neighbors is a deep-seated rural value. We do not hesitate to assist our neighbors when they are impacted by a house fire, but when we notice that a neighbor is struggling with stress or depression, sometimes we are unsure,” says Frakes. “COMET believes in the

power of everyday interactions. By learning a simple, effective strategy for engaging with people who are stressed, we can make a difference.”

Rural communities lack enough mental health professionals to meet the need, especially during times like the pandemic and tough economic downturns. “Ordinary people can help fill the gap,” says Frakes.

COMET attendees will come away from the workshop with a concrete, actionable set of skills that will increase their confidence in reaching out to friends, family members, and acquaintances who are in a vulnerable space. Through robust discussion, and one-on-one roleplay, attendees learn how to hold space for someone who is struggling, and to set aside their concern that they must know all the answers or how to “fix” the other person’s problem.

The trainings are organized by region to facilitate community, but welcome to all women farmers and landowners. Space is limited to 30 people per event. Registration is FREE but necessary to obtain the Zoom link. RSVP at WiWiC.org.

Some upcoming trainings include:

- **Northeast COMET Training**
January 20, 10am-noon
Marathon, Portage, Shawano, Waupaca, Outagamie & Brown Counties
- **West Central COMET Training**
February 3, 10am-noon
Pierce, Pepin and Buffalo Counties
- **Northwest COMET Training**
February 17, 10am-noon
Polk, Barron, and Dunn Counties
- **Southwest COMET Training**
March 3, 10am-noon
Vernon, Crawford & Grant Counties
- **Southeast COMET Training**
March 17, 10am-noon
Walworth, Racine and Milwaukee Counties

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REGIONAL LEARNING CIRCLES JAN-MAR 2022

Community Kitchen Co-op Connects Farmers, Consumers



Jim Massey
Rural Voices Correspondent

MONTICELLO - When people began clamoring for local food as the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic lingered on in 2020, a group of south-central Wisconsin farmers and cooperative-minded people decided to come up with a way to market food directly to consumers. The farmers formed the Community Kitchen Cooperative, a Green County-based organization that aggregates food from local farmers and offers meal shares to area consumers. The meal shares are picked up weekly at locations in Monticello, Monroe and Madison, with each meal share feeding two people with a ready-to-eat or ready-to-heat lunch and dinner.

Co-op members include farmers who provide food for the program and workers who prepare and distribute the meals.

When the pandemic brought restaurant sales to a virtual halt in mid-2020, Lori Stern, owner of Cow & Quince Restaurant in New Glarus, offered her restaurant kitchen as a location to run a pilot food-share program. The six-week trial in November 2020 provided 48 food shares.

Co-op members leveraged their pilot experience into a full-fledged program in a former upscale restaurant in Monticello that began in October of 2021. The customer list includes 60 shares and 120 meals.

"We have definitely seen progress from last year," says Dela Ends, Community Kitchen Co-op board president and a farmer and worker member. "Covid is our friend with this. We deliver when people don't necessarily want to go out to eat as much as they did."

One of the co-op's goals is to purchase virtually all of a farmer-member's produce, so the farmer can concentrate on growing his or her crops and not worry about attending labor-intensive farmers' markets or finding other sales avenues.

Most of the food in the meal shares comes from the co-op's six farmer members, but produce occasionally has to be purchased from non-member farms to balance out a particular meal, Ends says.

As the co-op grows, Ends says she hopes farmer-members can concentrate on specified crops so the co-op can access the variety it needs. Farmer A will provide carrots and potatoes, Farmer B tomatoes and lettuce, etc.

The co-op model is helping build a local food system whereby farmers become price makers instead of price takers, says Lauren Langworthy, special projects coordinator for the Wisconsin Farmers Union. The Farmers Union Foundation provided two Local Initiative Grants to the co-op in 2021 totaling \$8,500.

"It's important that everyday people work together to take back control of a localized food system that prioritizes the wellbeing of the communities who produce, provide labor and eat," she says. "In working together, we can ensure that food dollars are being spent where they're most needed - on our hard-working neighbors who will cycle those dollars through our local economics again and again."

Most of the co-op's members are also Farmers Union members, Langworthy says, so the WFU Foundation "is a champion any time our members want to start a cooperative that addresses local needs."

FL Morris, a co-op member and farmer from Monroe,

provided a variety of crops to the effort in 2021 but would like to specialize in tomatoes, kale and onions in the future.

"That's part of why this model is farmer friendly," she says. "Is it necessary to grow 45 different crops? Is that efficient? Sometimes it's good to have eggs in many baskets, but at some point you're not efficient. It can be more efficient to focus on a few crops and grow larger quantities."

Morris, 37, was active in the creation of the South Central Wisconsin Hemp Cooperative, a venture started in 2019 that focused on growing and marketing certified organic hemp. While hemp products such as CBD oil haven't overflowed the bank accounts of co-op members, Morris says she learned a great deal about cooperatives from the experience that she has put to use as Community Kitchen board treasurer.

"This is important work to me," she says. "We're trying to make the marketing our job so we can let the farmers grow the food and give them a fair wage for what they grow. We want to do something about the inequities of our local food system in Green County."

Morris is also attending Madison College, where she is in the construction and remodeling program. She put her newfound skills to use when the Community Kitchen needed to transform the downtown Monticello building from a restaurant to its work space.

"We hired an electrician, a plumber and did a bunch

of work ourselves," Ends says of the remodeling project. Morris served as the unofficial general contractor while Arlo Paust, the Community Kitchen's board secretary and a worker member, laid most of the new flooring.

Paust says a long-term co-op goal is to use some of the building's space for a storefront where people can pick up shares and buy extra coffee, cheese, bakery goods and other food.

He says he thinks the co-op has a sustainable future because of the unique nature of its membership.

"We're particularly unique because we're worker owned and farmer owned," he says. "Usually it's one or the other."

Admittedly, it has been easier to find farmers than workers in recent months, Ends says.

"We've had some long days," she says. "We definitely could use more workers." The co-op currently has about 10 employees.

The meals vary weekly and seasonally, depending on what local ingredients are available. Payment for shares, at about \$41 per week, is made in advance of each four-week cycle. The \$41 translates to a lunch for two at \$15 and a dinner for two at \$26.

A recent meal share included shepherd's pie, baked sweet potato, coleslaw and potato leek kale soup, while another week's meal featured butternut squash lasagna and fall leafy salad with apples and honey mustard vinaigrette. Customers can add bakery goods, dessert, cheese, eggs or coffee to their weekly shares at an additional cost. Co-op organizers are hoping to see farmer membership grow as the number of food-share customers increases.

"We hope we can serve as a pilot project that other communities can replicate," Ends says. "There's nothing like it in Wisconsin. It's the idea of a local food shed to keep the food local."

Langworthy says there are efforts around the state to develop food hub models but putting them together takes a lot of energy and intention.

"It's easy to inadvertently lean on the passion of members, especially in the early stages, and not necessarily make it work in the long term," she says. "I applaud the Community Kitchen where they've taken the time to do a pilot project and put together a really good structure. It's those efforts up front that give this a much better chance of surviving."



Submitted photos

Above: Community Kitchen Co-op workers Dela Ends and Arlo Paust put food items in bags to be picked up or delivered to share members. Right: A commercial kitchen at the co-op's Monticello headquarters is kept busy. In the photo are kitchen workers Dela Ends, left, and Erica Roth.



Tyson Foods: Meatpacking Isn't For Chickens



Alan Guebert
Correspondent

People have strange hobbies. For example, a Great Plains friend of mine once trained a chicken to play dead. Remarkably, on command, his chicken would take a whole-body flop that could have taught Steve Martin a thing or two about physical comedy.

Another friend, a retired professor, is (unsurprisingly, really) even more iconoclastic: he reads Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) corporate filings for fun. Honestly.

Why? Well, first because he's a nerd's nerd and second, because every now and then the professor stumbles across a brain-seizing gem like the one contained in the Oct. 2021 SEC filing by Tyson Foods.

"Many of our customers," reads Tyson's 10-K, a legally-mandated report, "such as supermarkets, warehouse clubs and food distributors have consolidated in recent years, and consolidation is expected to continue throughout the United States and in other major markets."

But "These consolidations," it continues, "have produced large, sophisticated customers with increased buying power who are more capable of operating with reduced inventories, opposing price increases, and demanding lower pricing, increased promotional programs and specifically tailored products."

Wait an Arkansas minute, is Tyson Foods, the proverbial Big Chicken of Big Big Meat, warning shareholders of a possible market flop to newly "sophisticated consolidators" like "warehouse clubs" such as Walmart's Sam's Club and Costco?

Maybe, because worrisomely, "These customers also may use shelf space currently used for our products for their own private label products."

There's no "may" about it; many are already doing exactly that.

Indeed, in 2019, Costco began pushing the construction of a captive poultry supply chain—from contract chicken growers through its in-store chicken rotisseries—in eastern Nebraska for all retail stores west of the Mississippi River, including Hawaii.

At the same time and a day's drive east, Walmart (as noted in this space in March 2019) already had "Walmart-contracted truckers hauling Walmart-con-

tracted milk to a Walmart bottling plant that Walmart will then process and haul to Walmart stores on Walmart trucks to sell directly to Walmart customers."

Tyson's public recognition that its market power is being bled away by some of its biggest customers rather than some of its fiercest competitors came just weeks before several poultry company executives went on trial in Denver federal court for alleged price fixing in U.S. poultry markets.

Could these two events be simple serendipity or is there a connection between the meatpackers' eroding pricing power and the systemic price-fixing the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) alleges occurred for several years between poultry slaughterers?

The DOJ doesn't say but, according to an Oct. 25 report by Forbes, the department is more than emphatic in its investigation of "price-fixing on a mass scale... across the [poultry] industry's top 18 companies, which are responsible for some 99% of commercial chicken sold."

Some of Big Chicken's biggest customers, however, suspected something was wrong in the poultry market and they were angrier than a flock of wet hens. The angriest, it appears, was KFC, the global chicken fast food chain.

According to early November testimony at the Denver trial, one prosecution witness "told of an alleged interaction between (one) KFC" official who told a poultry company's "executives that 'he was going to beat us down with a hammer and baseball bat' as payback for three years of high chicken prices."

Hammers and bats aside, end users like KFC, Costco, and Walmart—unlike hog farmers, ranchers, and poultry growers—increasingly have alternatives to giant meatpackers: they are establishing captive supply chains to provide their own customers with their own products.

And, sure, farmers and ranchers will still be part of those new chains but they'll still be "chained" to the same, now decades-old flow of market power—upward toward the retailer, not backwards toward the farmer and rancher.

But it may take time for Tyson, historically a chicken company, to get used to the ages-old farm idea that what's good for the goose is good for the gander.

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A Tie-Stall Barn at Night

Editor's Note: Often during the holidays, my friend Kate Ziehm, the brilliant mind behind the Morning Ag Clips, shares this column. I inevitably find myself transported back in time to the dairy barn of my youth. Whether you're currently farming, hold memories of it, or have never been, I hope you enjoy the journey Kate takes readers on. Find more at www.justmekate.com.

A few weeks ago, the kids and I were driving home when we passed by an old abandoned dairy barn that was clearly a showstopper back in the day. You know the type I am talking about. Red barn, small square, white trimmed windows, and a milk house attached on the front with a neatly painted white door.

I sighed and said something to them about how I missed the days of milking in a tie-stall barn. Of course, they asked why, and I replied, "because it's just so cozy at night."

And there was silence, as all three of them stared at me, perplexed.

So I went back...

The steam spilled out into the snow as I opened the milk house door with my foot clad in its black Tingley rubber boot. Once inside I set down the stack of black calf buckets that I had carried in my arms and was greeted by a moist warmth that enveloped me upon entry into the barn.

The moan of the milk pump marched on, bouncing off the walls inside the small cement floored room. I picked up the white-handled scrub brush and reached for the hose next to the stainless steel sink.

I stuck my well-washed, pruned hand into the detergent bag and pulled out a measuring cup of white granules, and sprinkled them carelessly over my pails as I began washing and stacking them one by one on the drying rack.

Stainless steel pipes and the old, deep double-sided wash sink sat in the far corner and the sparkling bulk tank reached deeply into the middle of the small room.

The familiar smell of dampness filled my nose. I looked down at the pool of water, sitting where cement had been worn away from years of hose pressure that had washed over soiled boots, bucket milkers, and calving chains.

I pushed my way through the swinging door and was greeted by the familiar faces of the cows, foraging through their hay as they sought out one more pellet of grain.

A hint of fresh wood smell filled my nose, coming from the newly spread sawdust and the clunk of the grate sounded as I walked over the gutter cleaner.

The steady rhythm of pulsation filled the barn and a milker was suddenly kicked off by a fresh heifer over in the corner. She still had that wild look in her eyes, as she was adjusting to her new life in the milking string on both ends of the day.

I ducked over, under the fan, and rested my hand on her rump, helping the farmer steady her as he stuck the kicked-off teat cups back on her udder.

The cats scurried from stall to stall in search of the leaking udders where they could find milk pooled underneath to lick up every drop before the sawdust soaked it up.

Hanging on the old whitewashed post, a blue iodine cup dangled on a nail, and the country music station played "Silent Night", in the background.

Heifer milked, the end is near and supper is in sight. I head back out into the barnyard to the calf hutches where I have a few more pails to gather and wash up.

I trudged back to the milk house, toward the warmth of the light, streaming out through the square windows, and hear the moan of the milk pump; it's sound being familiar, regular, and the same...

With my empty 5 gallon buckets in hand, I looked up as the sound of the pump suddenly stopped. Milking was over. My eyes lifted toward the vast, cold, star-filled sky above and I breathed in, fulfilled. Another day has passed, another to begin tomorrow... and I knew, that this wouldn't last forever.

My children will know milking parlors and heated shops, fancy calf barns, and big truck trailers that sit outside the milk house and get picked up daily. Years from now they will look back and remember too.

They won't have my memories, but they will have their own that conjure up that warm, nostalgic feeling that way back when, there was comfort, simplicity, and heart.

Oh, how I love a tie-stall barn at night...





State Office: 117 W. Spring St.
Chippewa Falls, WI 54729

Legislative Office: 30 W. Mifflin St., Ste. 905
Madison, WI 53703

(715) 723-5561

www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com

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