

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2026



Wisconsin
Farmers
Union

NEWS

UNITED TO GROW FAMILY AGRICULTURE



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By Tommy Enright
Communications Director

September always seems to arrive before we are quite finished with August. The garden is still producing, harvest is getting underway and the calendar has somehow filled itself through the end of the year. This issue of the *WFU News* captures that familiar mix of looking back on a busy summer while getting ready for what comes next.

Inside, you'll find stories from Farmers Union members doing good work across Wisconsin, a recap of another memorable summer at Kamp Kenwood and a closer look at the difficult choices farm families face when affordable health insurance is out of reach. We're also introducing Lunch on the Hill, highlighting new Wisconsin Futures fact sheets and sharing updates from WFU's policy, conservation and membership work.

You'll also get your first full look at the 96th WFU State Convention, coming to Appleton December 11–13. Registration is open, deadlines are approaching and there are plenty of ways to take part, from award nominations and policy resolutions to board elections and workshops. Consider this issue your friendly reminder that convention season has a way of sneaking up almost as quickly as September.

Tommy Enright

WFU Communications Director

Now seeking stories for

Wisconsin FUTURES

The Wisconsin Farmers Union Foundation has launched a new public education initiative, Wisconsin Futures, pairing a statewide billboard campaign with a new website, **wisconsinfutures.com**, aimed at connecting everyday economic pressures to policy decisions impacting rural communities and working families.

One of the goals of this project is to highlight real-life experiences and help people see how policy decisions are tied to what's happening in our communities, which is why we're inviting WFU members and all Wisconsinites to share their own stories and experiences, with submissions open now at **wisconsinfutures.com**.



From the President's Desk: The Truth Still Matters

As election season picks up, we're going to hear plenty of speeches, promises and accusations. Some will be grounded in fact. Others will stretch the truth, leave out important context or simply make things up. Once a claim gets repeated enough, especially on social media, it can start to sound true whether it is or not.

We saw a small example this summer. While organizing one of our candidate forums, WFU exchanged emails with a candidate's staff and was told the candidate would not attend. Later, when someone asked on social media why the candidate hadn't participated, the response was that they had never heard about the event or been invited.

I'm keeping the details vague because the point isn't to single out one person or one campaign. The point is that we should expect better from anyone asking for the public's trust.

Politics has always involved some spin. Candidates naturally want to present their records and ideas in the best possible light. But there's a difference between making your case and rewriting what happened. We can't have meaningful conversations about the future of our farms, rural communities or state if we aren't honest about the present.

There are some good resources available to help us do that. The Wisconsin Futures website now features fact sheets that bring together reliable information on agriculture, health care, housing, rural communities, immigration, energy and other issues affecting our state. You can also visit the policy pages on the WFU website to learn more about where our organization stands on the issues. Our positions aren't handed down by a political party or decided behind closed doors. They come from our grassroots, member-driven policy process and reflect the priorities WFU members have debated and adopted together.



Farmers know there's little value in pretending a problem doesn't exist. If the crop is struggling, the milk check isn't covering the bills or the barn roof is leaking, saying otherwise won't fix it. You have to look honestly at what's happening before deciding what to do next. Our politics could use more of that common sense.

I'm proud of the WFU members who have stepped forward this year to speak their truth. You've shared what rising costs, market consolidation, health care challenges and policy decisions mean for your families and communities. Those stories cut through statistics and campaign talking points. They're especially important as voters prepare to choose the people who will make decisions on our behalf.

Finally, a big thank you to everyone who helped celebrate the 75th anniversary of Kamp Kenwood and participated in our Summer Conference. Both gatherings were great reminders of the history and shared purpose that hold this organization together, and hopefully we can carry that energy into our state convention in December.

Darin Von Raden

WFU President

A FARM AND FOOD SYSTEM WORTH REIMAGINING

Danielle Endrick

WFU Executive Director



There are signs of a strained food system all around us, and lately, they've been hard to miss.

Nearly 2,000 people have been sickened in an outbreak tied to lettuce from Taylor Farms — not a family farm, despite the pastoral name, but a major produce corporation supplying greens under numerous labels nationwide. Meanwhile, 30,000 pounds of beef imported from Argentina were recalled after reaching and Florida without receiving required federal import reinspection. Think about that: imported beef recalled in Texas, the heart of American cattle country. All this as federal staffing cuts have also raised concerns about food-safety capacity at a time when basic safeguards are being missed.

At the same time, some of the nation's biggest meatpackers are closing plants, citing America's cattle supply being at its lowest level in 75 years — while some cattle producers (this one included) question whether the closures are also a form of market manipulation, further constraining processing capacity and packer competition. That means fewer processing options in an industry where farmers already have precious few buyers. Families continue to feel the pinch at the grocery store, while farmers receive precious little of those markups.

These aren't all symptoms of the same problem. But taken together, they're the rattling of an unstable system. We are increasingly disconnected from where our food comes from, and we're living through the ripple effects. Too many policymakers have little understanding of agriculture or rural America, even as their decisions determine who gets to farm and whether rural communities thrive. Washington can't even seem to accomplish something as fundamental as passing a new five-year farm bill.

Recently, I was in a room in Chicago with some of the strongest advocates for agriculture, plotting how we can advocate for reach change, when I was asked what I thought the solution was to this perfect storm.

My answer? *Probably nothing like the solutions we've been turning to for the last few decades.*

For too long, we've been told that bigger, fewer and more consolidated is the inevitable path toward a modern, efficient food system. But if modernization means fewer farmers, fewer buyers and fewer local processing options, we ought to question that definition of progress.

Maybe it's time to be more imaginative. What if the goal of agricultural policy was to put more farmers on the land, not fewer? What if we invested in farms that put real food into their communities and built a system that creates healthy people, thriving

rural economies and opportunities for the next generation?

Those might sound like big, impossible ideas. But big ideas are nothing new for Farmers Union. This organization was born because farmers looked at the system around them and saw it wasn't working for them. Throughout the last century, Farmers Union members organized, challenged powerful interests, and won changes for family farmers and rural communities.

Maybe we're being called to do it again.

I'll admit there are days when the challenges facing agriculture feel heavy. I recently stood talking with my Uncle Bob, a lifelong farmer worn out after a challenging day of combining wheat. As we talked about agriculture, he made a wry comment about his age and how he likely wouldn't be around long enough to see how today's chaos plays out. I understood the weariness. But it also made me think about who will be here.

This summer, my son ran for the Senior Youth Advisory Council at Farmers Union Camp. Seeing him and other young Farmers Union members step forward reminded me that another generation is learning how to leave things better than they found them.

In July, we celebrated Kamp Kenwood's 75th anniversary, a reminder of how many lives this organization has shaped. Watch for more in the next issue of the WFU News and at WFU's 96th State Convention in Appleton this December.

That legacy of showing up and shaping what comes next is why annual meeting season matters. Members gather on farms, around kitchen tables and in meeting halls to debate ideas and propose policies that shape what Farmers Union fights for.

I hope you bring some imagination with you.

Bring the frustration, too. Bring the ideas that seem too ambitious. Question what we've been told is inevitable. Ask what agriculture could look like if our goal wasn't simply to manage the decline of family farming, but to reverse it.

There are still family farms worth fighting for. There are young people deciding whether agriculture has a future for them. And there are communities hungry for something better.

Let's imagine something better and then get to work building it. Farmers Union's founders didn't accept the system they inherited as inevitable. Neither should we.

WFU Launches Lunch on the Hill

Wisconsin Farmers Union has launched Lunch on the Hill, a new short-form podcast in partnership with Midwest Farm Report that provides farmers a quick look at the policy and political issues shaping agriculture in Wisconsin.

Each Wednesday, Lunch on the Hill brings WFU voices into the conversation to break down what is happening in Madison and Washington and what it could mean for family farmers. The short episodes tackle timely issues affecting agriculture and rural communities, offering context on the policy debates, decisions and developments WFU is following.



With episodes designed to fit into a lunch break, tractor ride or drive between chores, the series offers another way for WFU members and farmers across the state to stay connected to the decisions affecting agriculture.

New episodes are released every Wednesday. Watch or listen to Lunch on the Hill and catch up on previous episodes at wisconsinfarmersunion.com.

New Fact Sheets Released, Seeking Your Rural Stories

Wisconsin Futures, a project of the Wisconsin Farmers Union Foundation, has a new resource to help people better understand the issues affecting our state. The new Fact Sheets section brings together key facts, data and background on topics like agriculture, healthcare, housing, rural communities, immigration, energy and more. They're designed to be easy to read, download and share, whether you're looking to learn more, prepare for a conversation with a neighbor or an elected official.

Wisconsin FUTURES

Facts and figures are important, but they only tell part of the story. Wisconsin Futures also gives people a place to share their own experiences with the issues affecting their families, farms, businesses and communities. Your story doesn't have to be long. Even a few sentences can help put a human face on the numbers and show how policy decisions are playing out across Wisconsin. **Visit WisconsinFutures.com** to explore and share the fact sheets, and add your voice to the conversation.

NRCS ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS FOR CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

While NRCS accepts applications year-round, interested agricultural producers in Wisconsin should apply by September 18, 2026 to be considered for fiscal year 2027 funding. Programs include:

- **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP):** The Agricultural Land Easement component of ACEP enables producers to protect their agricultural land from development by enrolling it in a permanent Agricultural Land Easement. The Wetland Reserve Easement component of ACEP helps landowners protect, restore and enhance wetlands which have been previously degraded due to agricultural uses.
- **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP):** CSP helps producers build on existing conservation efforts while strengthening their operation.
- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP):** EQIP provides producers with the technical and financial resources they need to address resources concerns on their land including improved water and air quality, increased soil health, reduced soil erosion, improved natural vitality and more.
- **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP):** RCPP promotes coordination between NRCS and partners to deliver conservation assistance to producers and landowners. NRCS provides assistance through producer contracts or easement agreements.
- **Regenerative Pilot Program (RPP):** which enables producers to implement whole-farm regenerative practices through a single application for EQIP and CSP.

WISCONSIN FOOD HUB COOPERATIVE OPENS NEW COLD STORAGE FACILITY



The Wisconsin Food Hub Cooperative celebrated the opening of a new cold storage facility on August 10th with a ribbon-cutting ceremony at its facility on State Highway 54 in Waupaca.

“Cold storage is a critical link in a statewide system that helps Wisconsin farmers reach dependable markets while ensuring that schools, pantries and community organizations can access fresh, nutritious food more efficiently,” said Tara Roberts-Turner, general manager of the Food Hub. “We are deeply grateful to the USDA and our philanthropic partners for investing in the infrastructure needed to make this possible.”

WFU MEMBER WINS WI LAND + WATER AWARD

WFU member Brian Gunderson was recently the recipient of the WI Land + Water Conservation Farm Family of the Year award. The award promotes farm conservation accomplishments by recognizing farmers performing outstanding work, including community involvement and conservation education.

WFU CHAPTERS HOST CANDIDATE town halls

2026 is an election year, making it a critical time to stay informed on the issues that family farmers and rural Wisconsinites are facing. Heading into the August primary and November general elections, the Wisconsin Farmers Union Government Relations team has been collaborating with WFU chapters to plan candidate town hall events, focused on key races throughout the state. As a non-partisan organization, WFU invites all candidates and maintains impartiality at all times.

St. Croix County Farmers Union



In June, the St. Croix County chapter hosted a successful forum with Congressional District 7 candidates in Star Prairie. Candidates from both sides took questions from the chapter and the audience related to farmland preservation, healthcare, and land access. 60 chapter and community members attended, leaving the forum as more informed voters.

Marathon County Farmers Union

Marathon County hosted a candidate town hall in mid-July in Athens, also focused on Congressional District 7. Candidates from both parties fielded questions concerning anti-trust legislation, market consolidation, and immigration. A recording of this town hall is available on WFU's YouTube channel.



Eau Claire County Farmers Union



In late July, Eau Claire County hosted a candidate town hall for Congressional District 3 in Eau Claire. The event had over 50 people in attendance and included questions for the candidates focused on a variety of rural and agricultural issues such as immigration, healthcare, conservation, and dairy. The event was also livestreamed on Eau Claire County's Facebook page.

Looking ahead, a number of chapters will be hosting town halls for federal, state, and local races in advance of the general election. **Subscribe to the Policy Note** at wisconsinfarmersunion.com/government-relations to see updates about upcoming town halls in Waupaca County, the northwest region, the Driftless area, and southeastern Wisconsin.

96 Years Strong



96TH ANNUAL STATE *Convention*

December 11–13, 2026
Hilton Appleton Paper Valley
Appleton, Wisconsin

Groundswell - Farm Transitions

Friday, December 11 | Noon–4:30 p.m.

This year's Groundswell Pre-Convention Workshop will focus on farm succession and transition. Participants will explore different pathways and financial models, learn how to begin important conversations and connect with professionals who support farmland access and transition.

Convention Workshops

➤ Rural Community Power

Explore how communities can organize, identify leverage points and protect local interests as data centers and large corporate developments seek rural land, water and resources.

➤ Paths to Family-Scale Dairy Viability

Hear how advocacy, legislation, regulatory reform and new markets could help create a more stable future for Wisconsin's family dairy farms.

➤ Cooperative Resilience

Learn the basics of cooperative models and hear how two Wisconsin veterinary clinics became Cooperative Veterinary Care, the nation's first worker-owned veterinary hospital.

➤ Urban Agriculture in Action

Hear from urban growers navigating land access, soil health, regulations and food insecurity while building more resilient local food systems.

KEYNOTE

Wendy Johnson

Wendy is a Northeast Iowa farmer, entrepreneur, writer and policy advocate. She and her husband operate Jóia Food Farm, raising pasture-based livestock and integrating grazing, agroforestry and direct marketing alongside their organic grain farm. Wendy also co-manages her family's 1,100-acre corn and soybean farm, where she has introduced no-till, cover crops, diversified rotations and reduced inputs, and founded Jóia Sleep, a regenerative wool bedding company. She serves on several agricultural boards and committees and is the lead farmer advisor for Climate Land Leaders.



Fundraiser & Silent Auction

Music & Social Time Saturday Night



REGISTRATION NOW OPEN!

More info, registration link, and hotel room block information can be found at wisconsinfarmersunion.com/convention



Take Part in the Biggest WFU Event of the Year!



Nominate a WFU Leader

Wisconsin. Members may submit nominations in three categories. Award nominations are due October 15.

- **Friend of the Family Farmer:** Recognizes individuals who have gone above and beyond in efforts on behalf of family farmers and rural communities.
- **Builders Award:** Given for outstanding commitment to building Farmers Union through county involvement, leadership development and member recruitment.
- **Emerging Leader Award:** Given to a new members who is igniting energy and engagement in WFU.

WFU Board Elections

Members elect directors to three-year terms in three districts:

District 2 (Dunn, Pepin, Pierce and St. Croix)

District 6 (Adams, Columbia, Green Lake, Juneau, Marathon, Marquette, Portage, Sauk, Waupaca, Waushara and Wood)

District 7 (Dane, Jefferson, Kenosha, Racine and Walworth)

Candidate bios due October 10 for inclusion in the Nov/Dec *WFU News* or November 22 for communications to delegates.

Represent WFU at NFU Convention

WFU will elect two member delegates to attend the 2027 National Farmers Union Convention March 7-9 in San Antonio. Any current paid member may self-nominate or be nominated before convention (on the convention webpage) or be nominated during the convention caucus. Candidate information is due October 10 for the *WFU News* or November 22 for communications to delegates.

Register for Convention

Early bird deadline: November 15

Voting delegate deadline: November 30

Final attendee deadline: December 5

New to convention? **Join the Convention 101 webinar on Oct 8th** to learn what to expect, how the delegate process works, and how members help shape WFU policy.

Dates to Remember

October 1

Policy and bylaw resolutions due

October 10

Deadline for board and NFU delegate candidate bios for inclusion in the Nov/Dec *WFU News*

October 15

Award nominations due

November 15

Early bird registration deadline

November 19

Hilton Appleton Paper Valley room-block deadline

November 22

Final deadline for board and NFU delegate candidate information to be shared with delegates

November 30

Voting delegate registration deadline

December 5

Non-delegate registration deadline

Register, find forms and learn more:



wisconsinfarmersunion.com/convention



Celebrating Sustainable Growth at Shadow Ridge Ranch

WFU FARMERS REFLECT ON RIGHT-SIZING THEIR FARM AND CONTRIBUTING TO COMMUNITY

By Michelle Thiede, Kitchen Steward, and Becky Brathal, Conservation Coordinator

Elizabeth Mittag, a Stillwater, MN native, believes that it is never too late to make your dreams into reality. On a recent day spent sitting at the kitchen table with Elizabeth and her husband, Randy, sipping lemonade as their horses grazed on the hillside outside, it was easy to see that philosophy in action.

The horses are purebred Norwegian Fjords and Percherons that have become the heart of the Mittags' Shadow Ridge Ranch. The couple started out with riding horses but Liz had always wanted to drive a team. The ranch's name traces back to a previous farm, where she would bring the cows up from a pasture below the hill each night to

protect them from predators. As they reached the ridge, their shadows stretched across the moonlit ground. The magic of those moments later inspired the name of the couple's 72-acre farm.

The Mittags have two teams that pull a variety of sleighs and carriages. They often meet up with friends for carriage rides and have even taken the horses camping. Sharing the experience is part of the joy: the couple has welcomed community members, including local DNR staff, to explore the trails by carriage.

The purebred horses grace this landscape alongside a herd of about 28 cattle and a flock of chickens. Liz got her start in dairy farming before meeting Randy and quickly discovered that while she loved the cows, she didn't love milking them. That realization led her to beef cattle, specifically Herefords, which she chose for their docile temperament, mothering capabilities, and small horns. Over time, the Mittags expanded the herd using genetics from high-quality sires.

Liz and Randy bought their current property near River Falls in 2016. This allowed them to grow the herd and establish rotational grazing on a larger scale, with space for the pasture to rejuvenate between grazings. It also provides a natural habitat for the birds and the bees. The Mittags are very happy with the outcome and love to share with others who are interested in learning about their journey. We were able to watch a young calf that had been born the day before – all the Herefords characteristics shined through as the calf's momma watched us with caution when we got near the pen. And warned us with some vocalization!

Keeping the farm growing sustainably, Liz and Randy decided to keep a herd size scaled to the land and forage supply, rather than taking out large debt. By working with River Country RC&D, they received guidance on paddock sizing, rotation frequency, and waterline planning, saving significantly on hay and improving pasture utilization. Liz explained that their herd size is around 28 head and they plan on keeping it around there after recently downsizing. The land has not seen conventional fertilizers or pesticides since before COVID. Although they are not certified organic, they are hoping to make the grade soon. They do offer organic eggs, selling 20-30 dozen eggs per week. They also offer organic honey, with the help of Liz's son.

Liz and Randy donated a Hereford heifer for the Minnesota Beef Youth Experience. As part of that donation process, they mentored a youth and continue to give back to the community in many ways. They host educational pasture walks and engage in many agricultural outreach programs such as hosting farm tours for River Falls High School and Montessori. They have been recognized for their focus on regenerative agriculture, winning the local Wisconsin Farmers Union "Soil Your Undies" challenge in 2025 for promoting biological activity in their pastures.

"Don't be afraid to do your own thing and trust instincts. You know what you are talking about, so don't be afraid to act like it."

During our visit earlier this summer, we planted another pair of underwear and Randy returned their mini undie trophy and bragging rights in anticipation for this year's winner.

Looking back, Liz has been a trailblazer in the farming community. When she started out 30 years ago, there were not a lot of women starting their own farms. She no doubt helped pave the way for future women farmers by working hard and earning respect in a male-dominated industry.

Her advice for other women out there? "Don't be afraid to do your own thing and trust instincts. You know what you are talking about, so don't be afraid to act like it."



Liz and Randy Mittag pose for a photo in one of their many horse-drawn carriages.



HIGHLIGHTING HEALTHCARE IN RURAL WISCONSIN

Wisconsin Farmers Union has partnered with A Better Wisconsin Together to create a series of videos that feature member voices on the pressing healthcare issues that rural Wisconsin is facing. The first two videos in the series are available now for viewing on the WFU YouTube channel: [YouTube.com/@WiFarmersUnion](https://www.youtube.com/@WiFarmersUnion)



Pam Guthman is a Chippewa County Farmers Union member who has a rich family history of farming. We visited her and her father in Holcombe, WI. In a conversation with Pam, she shared her perspectives on rural health disparities and the prohibitive cost of health insurance.



Kari Esbensen and Russell Butkiewicz are Wood-Portage-Waupaca Farmers Union members in Ogdensburg, WI. During their interview, Kari and Russell pulled on their expertise in healthcare to share how the closure of a Waupaca County birthing unit will have ripple effects for years to come.

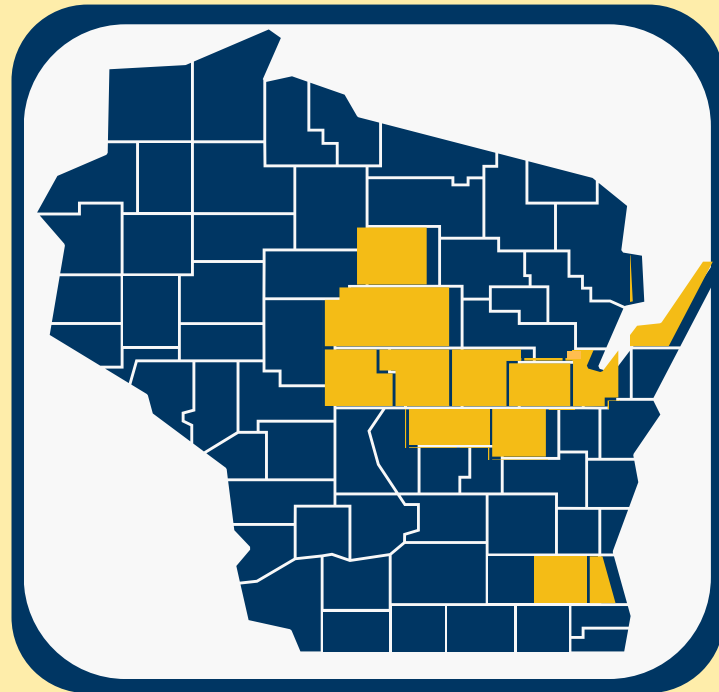
Additional videos on healthcare and other topics are set to release later this year, including a conversation with Sauk County Farmers Union member Tom Kriegl.

ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT ROOFTOP SOLAR?



Grow Solar is a regional **group buy program** that helps homeowners and farmers install solar at a *lower cost*. Through the power of bulk-buying, the more participants who join, the better the pricing becomes.

- **Reach out to MREA to see the discount available in your area!**
- **Regions: Central Wisconsin, GB/Fox Valley, Door County and Milwaukee Waukesha areas.**
- **Deadline to sign up is Sept. 30!**



To learn more about how these group buys work please visit www.growsolar.org or contact Corey Ziemann at MREA, corey@midwestrenew.org

**DEADLINE TO GUARANTEE GROUP BUY PRICING:
SEPTEMBER 30, 2026**



If you'd like to learn more about rooftop solar and WFU's policy and programming in this space, please reach out to Erin at 715-382-0341 or elenninger@wisconsinfarmersunion.com



Growing along the Kinni:

Four generations on Peterson Farms



By Becky Brathal, Conservation Coordinator, and Michelle Thiede, Kitchen Steward

When we met Roger Peterson on a June morning, he was doing what he has done for most of his life: working the land. We caught up with him as he sprayed a neighbor's field near Spring Valley and listened as he reflected on more than five decades of farming, family, and change along the Kinnickinnic River.

Roger's father purchased the family's original River Falls property in 1971, shortly after getting married. Now 99, he still lives on the home farm. Over the years, the operation has grown to about 2,000 acres and 300 milking cows.

Three of Roger's five children now help operate the dairy, with an emphasis on sustainable practices such as cover crops, sand separation from bedding and careful soil-health management. His other children live nearby, keeping the family closely connected to the farm. Roger also has 14 grandchildren, ranging in age from 11 to less than a year old. Many spend their days on the farm, where a recent highlight was watching chicks hatch from an incubator.

The landscape surrounding the farm has changed dramatically since Roger's childhood. Fifty-five years ago, the Kinnickinnic River corridor was barren and badly eroded, with little vegetation and lots of trash and muck. Old tires and debris lined the river – no trout back then.



Roger Peterson started working on his family's farm at age 17. His children and grandchildren are now on the farm with him.

Records from the 1960s show that the city once dumped garbage into nearby ravines, while car dealerships discarded parts in the river. Manure was also dumped into the ravines, further degrading the Kinni. Eroded sand and rock dominated the river corridor, trees were scarce and flooding frequent.

Over the years, many organizations worked together to clean up the area, and changing farm practices have helped the area thrive.

Today the Kinni is clean and the area lining the 25-mile-long river that originates from springs in St. Croix County and flows into the St. Croix River at Kinnickinnic State Park is green, lush, and full of trees. When we arrived at the family dairy later that day, we were able to go down by the river and look at the amazing landscape. A small cabin on the property remains a gathering place for the family.

Roger started working on the farm at age 17. Since then, the operation has grown substantially. About eight years ago, the farm switched to no-till practices. This change reduced fuel costs, improved runoff control by keeping soil in place, and made harvesting easier because the ground became firmer. As a result, they were able to reach areas that

had previously been difficult to access. This also helps with flooding in the area.

The farm employs about 10 workers. Since Covid, the workforce has changed. Before the pandemic, the farm often hired students – Roger still occasionally sees some who worked on the farm over the years and enjoys reminiscing. Now, the farm mainly employs Hispanic workers. Two workers were detained by ICE during recent operations. They had become part of the community, a working part of everyday life on the farm. Immigration has become a major concern because these workers were dependable and hardworking. Roger explained that they are very reliable employees, and he felt helpless when they were sent back to Ecuador.

The farm has changed and grown over the years. When asked about retirement there was a long pause before a small chuckle and Roger's response was, if he feels good, he will continue to do it. Do what brings you joy.

A farm highlight he shared was a recent tour from the local elementary school. They got to see a new calf and named it but were still more excited about the baby goats! He is happy working with his children and what they bring to the table; he doesn't micromanage them.

"They grew up doing it, just like I did," Roger said.

Abigail, one of the grandchildren, met us when we arrived at the dairy and exclaimed, "We are going to bury underwear today!" (For context, one of Becky's conservation projects in the summer is burying cotton underwear on farms to show how the soil microbes break down the material in just over 60 days.) Abigail told us multiple times that she "loves getting dirty." Growing up on the farm gives you many life lessons, you learn to think for yourself, and what the consequences of your actions are.

It is clear that the Peterson family loves what they do. It shines through when Roger talks about the farm, its rich history, and the family and farm workers that now help nurture it every day.



Planting underwear at Peterson Farms for the "Soil Your Undies" competition!



A Summer of Learning, Growing & Connecting

AT KAMP KENWOOD



By Elizabeth Yost, WFU Education Director

What a summer it has been at Kamp Kenwood! This year, 260 campers joined us for a season full of sunshine, cooperation, big questions, new friendships, and plenty of good food.

Throughout the summer, campers learned that agriculture and food systems are about so much more than what ends up on our plates. They explored soil health, conservation, cooperative businesses, local food systems, and civic engagement through hands-on activities, conversations, games, and projects.

And speaking of food—we were proud to put our values on the table! Camp meals featured lots of locally grown food purchased from Wisconsin farmers, we estimate about 80 percent of our spending going to regional producers, giving campers a chance to enjoy fresh, seasonal ingredients while learning about the people and farms behind their meals.

Senior campers elected their Senior Youth Advisory Council for the 2026-27 season. Congratulations to Gracie Boos (Chippewa County), Blake Endvick (Chippewa County), Lila Neely (Rock County), and Shepard Boerson (Green Lake County). Together, our SYAC will determine the 2027 camp season theme and volunteer at our annual convention.

From digging underwear out of the soil to building their own cooperative store, campers spent the summer deepening their appreciation for the natural world and the humans who inhabit it. We are grateful to every camper, counselor, farmer, educator, and supporter who made this season so joyful. We can't wait to see what grows next!





Now Open!

CONVENTION SPONSORSHIPS

DECEMBER 11-13, 2026

Hilton Appleton Paper Valley

333 W College Avenue,
Appleton, WI 54911



View our sponsorship packet and register online today!

Wisconsin Farmers Union Community Platform

The Community Platform is a member-only online site designed for sharing resources, networking around common goals, and connecting via direct messaging or video calls. You won't get pie here, but you will get community.

How to Join the Conversation

Members with an email address on file should have already received an invite with setup instructions. If you didn't receive an email or need to update your contact information to participate, simply provide us with your current email address and we will get you set up.

We look forward to seeing you online and continuing the great work we do together!

Need assistance?

For help getting up and running, please contact:

- Kirsten Slaughter:
kslaughter@wisconsinfarmersunion.com
- Karen Goulet: kgoulet@wisconsinfarmersunion.com

We need your feedback!

We need your input on how you want to participate in WFU! We are gathering thoughts from members to better understand why people join WFU and how we can improve the value of membership. The information collected from this survey will be used internally by WFU staff to help guide future programs, communications, and member support. **Your honest feedback is extremely valued in helping us improve the member experience.**

Find the survey here!





WFO Celebrates 75 Years of Kamp Kenwood, Looks Ahead at Annual Summer Conference

Wisconsin Farmers Union welcomed strong crowds to Kamp Kenwood for two days of celebration, connection, and advocacy in July. More than 100 members and supporters gathered July 16 to mark the camp's 75th anniversary, followed by another robust turnout for the organization's annual Summer Conference on July 17, where members explored key issues facing agriculture and prepared to advocate for family farmers during a pivotal year for rural Wisconsin.

The Summer Conference featured educational workshops on communications, water quality, membership development, and

hosting local candidate town halls ahead of the 2026 elections. Attendees also heard a keynote address from Land Rich, Cash Poor author Brian Reisinger, whose work explores the challenges facing family farms and rural America. The day concluded with WFO's annual pie contest, a longtime Summer Conference tradition that showcased members' baking talents and capped off the conference with a little friendly competition.

Throughout the conference, WFO leaders reflected on the issues shaping agriculture today, including trade policy, dairy policy reform, immigration, conservation,

healthcare, and strengthening rural communities.

"At times like these, it's easy to focus on everything that's going wrong," said Wisconsin Farmers Union President Darin Von Ruden. "But when I look around our organization, I see people who continue showing up, helping their neighbors, and believing family farming is worth fighting for. That's what Wisconsin Farmers Union has always been about—building something better together."

Read the full article at wisconsinfarmersunion.com/blog



From left: Mike Miles and Sarah Lloyd lead members in song; WFO President Darin Von Ruden provides the State of the Farmers Union; WFO Conservation Coordinator Becky Brathal showcases a pie for the pie contest; and keynote Brian Reisinger shares a heartfelt keynote address on rural mental health.

JOIN US TO CELEBRATE



INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE
WOMAN FARMER
2026

WOMEN FARMERS DAY

Featuring speakers

DATE AND TIME: October 17th Time TBD
LOCATION: Fond du Lac

Join us to celebrate the 2026 International Year of the Woman Farmer and 2026 International Day of Rural Women. This will be a chance to connect with other rural and urban women farmers, hear stories from women doing innovative and meaningful work in agriculture, and learn practical tools you can bring back to your farm and community.



Lucia Leon
Co-Owner, Homan Grown
Farmer, Lightly Farmed



Kriss Marion
Board Member, WFU
Farmer, Circle M Farm



Danielle Endvick
Executive Director, WFU
Farmer, Runamuck Ranch

REGISTER AT: [WISCONSINFARMERSUNION.COM/EVENTS](https://www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com/events)



Nourishing Wisconsin A Farm to Institution Conference

Registration is Open!

Wednesday, November 11th 2026

Market on River, Chippewa Falls, WI

An event tailored towards institutional buyers, farmers, and those interested in increasing the presence of local food in Wisconsin institutions.



REAP FOOD GROUP



FAIRSHARE
CSA COALITION

Small Farm Sustainability Stipend Spotlight: Harmon Community Farm



Ozaukee County recipients utilize funding for solar powered irrigation

By WFU Intern Ian Wojtak

In June, I attended programming led by new Wisconsin Farmers Union members at Harmon Community Farm and learn a bit more about the wonderful work they have done to create their own solar-powered irrigation system with a Small Farm Sustainability Stipend from WFU.

Floyd Harmon, a University of Wisconsin-Madison alum with a background in mechanical engineering, showcased his fully off-grid irrigation system used to power hoses around the farm. Though seemingly complex, Floyd assured us, “It’s not rocket science; anyone could set something like this up for themselves.” He encouraged folks interested in replicating the project to look to free online resources for help.

Jada Harmon led a community discussion on environmental justice culminating in a tour of the farm. The soil, once crumbly and over-tilled, was restored by Jada and her family through revitalizing crop rotations. She is fiercely proud of her garlic plot, the “crown jewel” that kicked off the soil restoration process. Jada preaches a grounded approach to farming, and advocates “listening to and understanding the soil and its history to inform what actually can be done, and what can actually be grown.”

Harmon Community Farm is located in Mequon, where Jada and Floyd are growing heirloom crops – from Palestinian okra to Caribbean bush beans – and of course, their ever-resilient garlic.

Small Farm Sustainability Stipend

Let the good work continue...
More funding now available!

**Apply for up to \$2,000 to help
improve your farm’s sustainability!**

**Funds are flexible and can help
with equipment & seeds, labor
costs, project advisors, and more.**

Application Deadlines:
November 1, February 1, May 1, August 1

Any small farm may apply!

Are you seeking to increase your *positive impact* on the
**environment, your community, or your local food
system** through your farm? Reach out today!

For more information or application
assistance, contact Erin at 715-382.0341
elenninger@wisconsinfarmersunion.com



WFU Member Engagement Survey:

Continuing the Tradition of Member-Driven Programming

By Allison Crook, Regional Membership Coordinator

What do you value most about your Wisconsin Farmers Union membership? What kinds of programming are you most interested in participating in at the local and statewide level? We want WFU to continue providing opportunities for engagement that are both inspiring and meaningful. To do this well, though, we need to hear from you! That is why the Membership Department created the “WFU Member Engagement Survey.” Will you please take the survey today?

For me, the thing I value most about WFU is our grassroots, democratic process for shared decision-making around our priorities. The first WFU event I ever attended was the 88th Convention. Witnessing the policy process was the moment I knew I would join the organization. I came away from it so inspired—never before in my life had I witnessed democracy so alive and in action. The members did not agree on everything, but we came together around the issues that mattered to us and demonstrated respect for one another as we came to “reason together” for our shared values. I left my first WFU event feeling connected, inspired, and ready to act. I want all of our members to experience that sensation.

We know that members join WFU for many different reasons – a sense of community, a collective voice in the Capitol, leadership programming, and cooperative education, to name a few. We also know that members might be looking for different ways to engage at the local versus statewide level. To continue putting on impactful programming, we must also stay grounded in the organization’s roots: membership participation is the foundation for all the work we do!



Please take a few moments to fill out the survey today!

The Membership team wants to know what your expectations of engagement with WFU were when you joined, how these expectations have or have not been met, and what you are currently looking for from your member experience. We also want to know how you prefer to receive communication, what kinds of events appeal to you, and what barriers make it difficult to participate. We will use the survey results to inform statewide programming and share this (anonymized) information with chapter leaders across the state, so that they have more information on the kinds of programming you are looking for in your local area.

In the spirit of our grassroots, democratic process that has so inspired me, please take a couple of minutes to fill out our Membership Survey. We look forward to working collaboratively to ensure our programming continues to meet the needs and interests of our members at this moment.

By Ian Wojtak,
WFU Summer
Intern



Photo by Erin Thompson,
Policy Analyst

BALANCING HEALTH & HAPPINESS

Why Health Insurance Options Fall Short for Wisconsin Family Farms

Robyn Calvey and Noah Ryan both came into farming with a love for the land, a family connection, and a desire to grow local food. With a combined total of more than 25 years of farming experience, Robyn and Noah know what it takes to succeed as small-scale farmers. They're also all too familiar with the financial and health tradeoffs that many farmers face in doing what they love. At Park Ridge Organics, and on farms around the state, farmers and farmworkers must balance fair wages with healthcare access, profitability with size, and the desire to follow one's passions with the realities of meeting basic needs.

ABOUT PARK RIDGE ORGANICS

Park Ridge Organics is a diversified vegetable farm located in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. The farm primarily grows for wholesale customers and supplies a farm store on the property that's seasonally open to the public and online.

Robyn's parents originally bought the farm in the 1980s and by 2003 had expanded into direct-to-consumer and wholesale production. Robyn returned to the farm after a career in environmental advocacy in 2005 and took over the business in 2013.

Each year, Robyn has a number of employees that assist with production, farm store management, deliveries, and more. This spring, Robyn welcomed her brother-in-law Noah back to the farm as a full-time employee. Noah first began working for Robyn when he was 18. He left the farm to pursue a degree in Environmental Studies at UW Oshkosh, which eventually landed him an office job as a county health inspector. In August 2025, Noah was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma, an event Noah felt was a catalyst that pushed him back to the farm for the sake of his quality of life, even if it meant compromising the health insurance benefits that came with his public sector job.

THE TENSION OF SCALE

Operating a small-scale farm requires intentional choices. At its largest, Robyn had grown Park Ridge Organics to 7 acres of vegetable production. She reached a tipping point where she had to decide whether to expand her processing and cooling infrastructure or scale down the farm. Ultimately to Robyn, the control over production and cost that come with a smaller farm outweighed the potential gains of expansion. The farm now grows 40 types of produce on about 3 acres of land.

This tension of scale also comes up for farmers on the issue of healthcare.

“For many small farms, there is this desire to stay under a threshold of earning so they can still qualify for Badgercare, which may mean they are doing less potential investment for their own future,” Robyn said.

This dilemma is not unique to Park Ridge Organics; 14% of Wisconsin farm families have no health insurance at all, and another 17% have catastrophic coverage solely for severe, work related accidents¹. The uninsured rate soars in dairy farmers. Nationally, 41% of dairy farmers lack health insurance coverage². Keeping a small farm afloat amidst rising insurance prices and agricultural concentration becomes a balancing act of costs.

A similar balance must be struck when it comes to farm wages.



“As a small farm, I cannot offer the same benefits as other places, healthcare is one of them,” Robyn said. “If I pay a good wage and they get another well paying, off-farm job in the winter, they might be making too much money to qualify, so they pay quite a bit for health insurance even on the marketplace.”

The result of this trade off is uninsured farmers being pushed into the healthcare marketplace. Prior to the passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), farmers were often excluded from private health insurance due to the health and safety risks characteristic of farming. Because of this, farmers are four times as likely to participate in the health insurance marketplace compared to the general workforce³.

HEAVY WITH UNCERTAINTY

The tension between farm life and healthcare has been an immediate one for Noah since his cancer diagnosis and return to Park Ridge Organics. “It was one of the best decisions of my life to come back here,” Noah said.

But when that cubicle comes with employer-subsidized government health insurance, the decision is heavy with uncertainty.

“Working for the county, that's peak benefits, health insurance, everything,” Noah said. “It's what you go to college for, what society tells you to pursue, get the money, get the wage. I did that, and I was deeply dissatisfied. I had to ignore my heart and the desires of my soul, tune them out so I could get a college education, and start a family some day, and not worry about insurance. As Americans we have to deny part of ourselves and go to jobs that aren't truly aligned with who we are so we can just live life.”

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FARMERS NEED HEALTHCARE, TOO.

As healthcare premiums spike and public options thin, these access barriers continue to rise, particularly amongst young, aspiring farmers like Noah. In a time when many Americans struggle with healthcare costs, an expectation for government intervention emerges. For many, and for Noah and Robyn, this effort feels absent.

"I don't think the politicians are going to do it," Noah said. "They have the time, I have to carve out time to understand who's even representing me, what they're into, what they're voting for, and what their interests are. They have the time to come to my town hall, and they don't."

Both Robyn and Noah agree a degree of public awareness and action are needed.

"I don't know if the public understands the farmer's perspective," Robyn said. "We need a campaign that helps the eaters understand the challenges of small-scale farmers. Support your farmer – they need healthcare, too."

As a 2026 Special Order of Business, quality health insurance is a topline issue this year for Wisconsin Farmers Union. Robyn and Noah's story is all too common in rural Wisconsin. Farmers and their families deserve access to quality, comprehensive, and affordable healthcare. As the November general election approaches, it is important to consider these issues stepping into the ballot box.

In the meantime, as Robyn said, support your farmer. Doing so ensures generational farms like Park Ridge Organics, and young, aspiring farmers like Noah, are afforded the opportunity to participate in and shape the future of our state's rich agricultural tradition.

"Support your farmer - they need healthcare, too."



¹ USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service

² American Hospital Association

³ Kaiser Family Foundation

Welcome New Members!

New Member

Dylan Anderson
Jennifer Wirt Family
Nicole Muschinske
Stephen Petro & Dana Smith Family
Kaitao Lin
Kerri Kiernan & Andrew Werthmann
Morgan Sisson
Kelli & Shane Jewison Family
Sarah Rasmussen
Brittney & Kyle Boone Family
Thorsten & Mary Landwehr
Christine & Jeff Evans
Nichole & Blaine Halverson Family
Claire & Lee Zelasko
Pete Subkoviak & Juan Castano Marquez
Richard Pulcher
Noah Ryan

Location

Plymouth
Wausau
Rice Lake
Milwaukee
Lake Hallie
Eau Claire
Burlington
South Range
Madison
Rock Springs
Chippewa Falls
Chippewa Falls
Menomonie
New Auburn
Chicago
Lublin
Fond du Lac

New Member

Brad Bornheimer & Valerie Kammeyer Family
Derrick Koehn & Cheyenne Okey
Randall Greenfield
Rachel & Mark Parker Family
Alaisa Knowlton Family
Kimberly Huggins Family
KEEP - Wisconsin's K-12 Energy Education Program
Hannah & Tanner Macias
Grant Cutting Family
David Lallensack
Anne-Iris Dittmer
Kelly Rychter & Reid Webster
Sarah & Mike Young
Michelle & Keith Bachand
Laurie & Chuck Nikolai-Svetlik
Jessica Wolf & Austen Fuchs
Mahal Ina
Wisconsin Manufactured Home Owners Alliance

Location

Medford
Almena
Waupun
Viola
Superior
Westby
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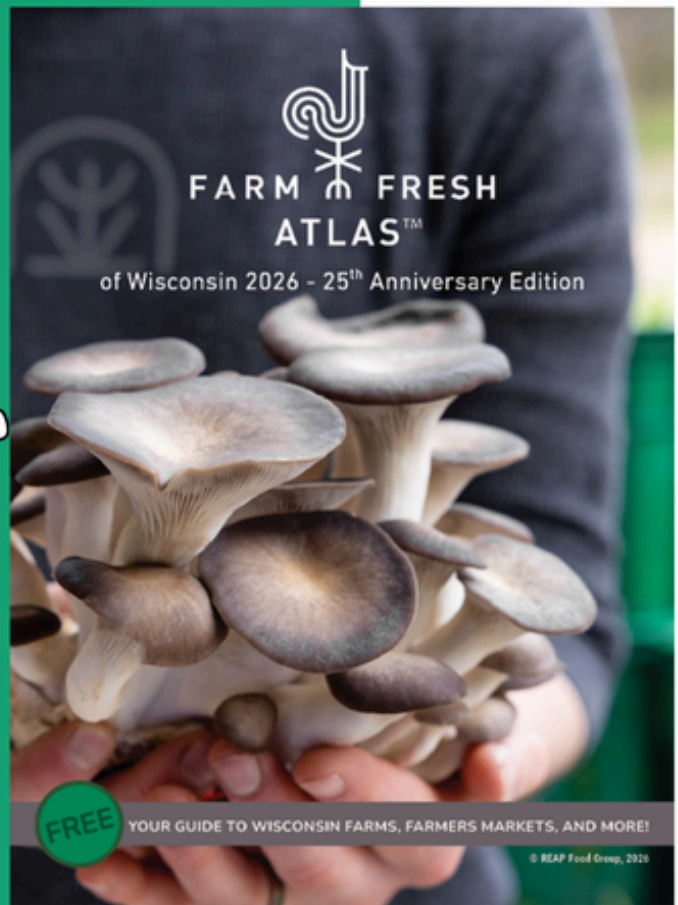
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By Wisconsin Farmers Union

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SUBMIT YOUR BEST RURAL LIFE PHOTOS!

WISCONSIN FARMERS UNION NEWS

PHOTO CONTEST

The winning photo earns a Farmers Union hat! High-resolution vertical photos preferred. Send your photo entries and a brief description to Tommy at tenright@wisconsinfarmersunion.com

ON THE COVER:

Our cover photo this month was submitted by Danielle Endvick.

