



Wisconsin  
Farmers  
Union

# NEWS

UNITED TO GROW FAMILY AGRICULTURE



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# Editor's Note



Around this time of year, many of us may be tempted to craft ambitious resolutions, pledging grand transformations and radical shifts in our lives. However, if you're anything like me, the

allure of New Year's resolutions tends to wane as quickly as the midnight confetti settles.

I've always found more value in the steady cadence of consistency than in the fleeting promises of drastic resolutions. There's something enduring and powerful about the slow and steady pace of progress, akin to the way a farmer tends to their fields season after season. It's this commitment to steadfastness that resonates through Wisconsin Farmers Union and its unwavering dedication to advocacy and educational programming.

Reflecting on the past year, we can take pride in the collective accomplishments that have shaped our community. As we look ahead, the prospect of another year brimming with impactful programming is exciting. Wisconsin Farmers Union has consistently demonstrated its commitment to fostering positive change, whether through initiatives like Wi Women in Conservation, WI Local Food Purchase

Assistance Program, or the Fox-Wolf Climate-Smart Commodities Project.

In the pages of this newsletter, you'll find updates on these important programs, along with insights into the progress of our Market on River building and a retrospective glance at the 93rd annual convention.

As we dive into this new year, I'm eager to think of what will fill these pages in future issues, and the roles you all will play in that.

Wishing you all a year filled with abundance, progress, and the enduring spirit of WFU.

*Tommy Enright*

**WFU Communications Director**





# From the President

As we stand on the cusp of a new year, I'm filled with excitement and optimism, reflecting on the energy and camaraderie that came out of our 93rd annual convention. It was heartening to witness the dedication and passion that our members bring to the table, and I am eager to carry this momentum forward into the coming year.

One upcoming event that demands our attention is Farm & Rural Lobby Day, scheduled for January 17th in Madison. This presents a unique opportunity for us to unite our voices and engage with legislators on crucial issues. Our agenda covers a broad spectrum, including the preservation of small and midsize farms, concentration in agribusiness, healthcare, water quality, dairy, climate change, and the need for fair legislative maps. Join us to ensure our concerns echo loudly in the halls of our decision-makers.

Looking ahead, I'm hopeful that Congress recognizes the urgency of drafting a new Farm Bill. While the short-term extension of the 2018 Farm Bill has provided a temporary lifeline to existing programs, our collective efforts are focused on modernizing the bill to address the evolving challenges faced by our farmers. To achieve this, we need a new five-year Farm Bill, and we'll sure as heck keep pushing for it.

In positive news, our colleagues at the Wisconsin Farm Bureau passed a resolution in support of the Dairy Revitalization Plan at their annual convention in early December. Hopefully this will open the door for more collaboration, as the Dairy Together coalition has been advocating for the inclusion of this plan in the 2023 Farm Bill. To learn more, visit [dairytogether.com](http://dairytogether.com).



At our recent convention, ethanol once again emerged as a prominent topic of discussion. In response, WFU intends to compile educational resources to provide our members with a deeper understanding of this complex issue. Personally, I'm delving into the pages of "Gasolinegate: What's in Our Gasoline is Killing Us," a book shedding light on the oil industry's efforts to safeguard its market. Knowledge is a powerful tool, and we must equip ourselves with the information needed to navigate these intricate topics and issues.

As we step into the new year, let's carry the spirit of unity and purpose that defines our WFU community. Together, we have the strength to keep making positive changes for Wisconsin.

**WFU President**



# From the Executive Director



Why are corporate profits soaring when inflation is stabilizing and supply chains are normalizing? Depending on which economist you listen to, you will get a different answer.

American Enterprise Institute, a right leaning think tank, argues that price gouging has nothing to do with record corporate profits and high inflation. "It's a third-order issue at best," said Michael Strain, their Director of Economic Policy Studies. "We have had a fundamental mismatch between supply and demand, and that's why we've had four-decade-high inflation. It has nothing to do with price gouging."

Others are not so sure. "Companies are maintaining or even expanding [profit] margins because they are not passing these cost cuts onto consumers," said Albert Edwards, a strategist at Société Générale, who called recent moves in [profit] margins "obscene." Edwards was quoted in a New York Times article investigating corporate experiments: manipulation of serving size, package downsizing, maintaining tight inventory to avoid clearance sales, using digital price displays for quick changes, and other tactics to see just if they can keep consumers coming back while maintaining record profits.

When I see such bifurcated analysis like this, I like to do my own research. Are corporations experiencing record profits? Yes siree, they are. According to the Washington Post, corporate profits as a share of the national income are at 15.29%, a higher rate than even the 1950s economic comeback. Last quarter profits were over \$43 trillion. Even accounting for labor rates, we see a strong corporate profit climb even in the midst of inflation and labor challenges.

What about price gouging? During the pandemic, states like Wisconsin attempted to enforce statutes and prevent outright price gouging during a period of abnormal economic disruption. While most of us would agree that price gouging is wrong and we should not let prices get out of hand in the interests of unadulterated profit, in some cases not responding to consumer demand during hard times can hurt farmers. For example, in 2020, some Wisconsin farmers were forced to

dump milk, while consumers couldn't buy it off the shelves fast enough. More than anything, this disturbing example shows how difficult it is for a supply chain to switch from a slow market to a surging one. With more people at home wanting milk by the gallons and demand for small cartons and restaurant products going down, it was impossible for suppliers to adapt their products and packaging to keep up with a rapid new demand. Stores were upset they could not charge more for the stock they had on hand which would have increased retail profit and farmgate prices, but also could have been in violation of price gouging laws.

It takes time to do the research and determine if corporations are intentionally price gouging and taking advantage of consumers and producers. There are some bad actors in the agricultural sector and I think most fair-minded people would say we have to enforce all relevant rules to stop truly unfair price gouging and manipulation. Our friends at Farm Action helped call attention to price fixing by Cal-Maine Foods, a corporation that controls 20 percent of the egg market in the U.S. Cal-Maine Foods is a vertically integrated corporation, with operations conducted mostly on properties they own and a footprint of over 28,000 acres spread over multiple states. While no one doubts that avian flu and other disruptions caused challenges, egg laying flocks owned by this corporation never dipped below 6 percent lower than previous years, yet they gouged consumers and saw profits soaring at 600%.

Farmers can expect to see high input costs next year and lower prices according to most forecasts. When we evaluate price gouging and unfair market control, we must look at inputs: fertilizer, seeds, pesticides, implements.

Currently, 90% of all soybean seeds in the United States are sold by Monsanto, a subsidiary of German conglomerate Bayer. They've also gobbled up several other seed companies and control over 34% of the global seed market.

It's going to be interesting to see how voters view growing corporate power and profit this next election year. Let's keep vigilant and speak truth to power, save and sow the seeds we can, and support our local farmers!

*Julie Keown-Bomar*

**WFU Executive Director**



## 2024 WISCONSIN WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE CONFERENCE

Women at the forefront of Wisconsin's diverse agriculture community should plan to attend the Wisconsin Women in Agriculture Conference this January 12 and 13, 2024 at the Three Bears Resort in Warrens, WI.

The Wisconsin Women in Agriculture Conference will be a one and a half-day event designed to provide research-based and practical educational opportunities for all women interested in any aspect of agriculture.

Register now at <http://go.wisc.edu/654nnb>



## U.S. SEN. BALDWIN RECEIVES SECOND ANNUAL CLIMATE CHANGE-MAKER AWARD

The Climate Action Campaign announced that Senator Tammy Baldwin (WI) is a recipient of the second annual "Climate Change-Maker" award, granted to Members of Congress for their leadership on climate and clean energy over the past year, including championing efforts to advance federal action to cut climate pollution and defending climate progress in the face of persistent opposition in Congress.

"Wisconsin has been dealing with countless impacts from climate change, across the spectrum, including drought as well as heavy rains and unusual flooding in recent years. This has significantly complicated the economics of farming in the Dairy State, but thankfully we have a Climate Change-maker in Senator Baldwin," said Darin von Ruden, President of the Wisconsin Farmers Union. She understands the challenges we face and has supported investments in climate solutions and billions in assistance for federal climate-smart ag programs."



## EPA ROUNDTABLE IN WI

WFU staff visited Huntsinger Farms in Eau Claire for the "Investing in Rural America" round table event with EPA Administrator Michael Regan; Kelliann Blazek, Special Assistant to the President for Agriculture and Rural Policy; and other agriculture representatives. Tara Daun, WFU Watershed Coordinator, took part in the round table representing Wisconsin Farmers Union sustainability and water quality efforts and highlighted a need for funding and technical assistance.

"We need to have the farmers able to connect with each other and build more of that capacity," Daun said.





# WFU recognizes members, rural allies for commitment to family farms

Wisconsin Farmers Union honored several individuals for their dedication to family farmers at the 93rd annual Wisconsin Farmers Union State Convention December 8-10th. The event drew more than 200 farmers to Wisconsin Dells for a weekend of networking, educational workshops and grassroots policymaking.

*Above: WFU chapters received the NFU Leadership Award at the 2023 National Convention, including: Amnicon-Douglas, Dane, Eau Claire, Lake to Bay, Marathon, Polk-Burnett, South Central, and Sterling Crawford Local*

## **Friend of the Family Farmer**

WFU recognized two Friends of the Family Farmer, Inga Witscher and Jess Ryba. First given in 2013, the award recognizes those who have gone above and beyond in efforts on behalf of family farmers and rural communities.

Inga Witscher is a fourth generation dairy farmer milking cows and making cheese on her small farm in Osseo, WI. Inga grew up on her family's grass based dairy in Washington State, then relocated to the East Coast where she learned how to make cheese. In 2006 Inga began her farming career at St. Isidore's Dairy in Osseo where she now milks a small herd of registered jerseys and produces a small batch, raw milk cheddar. Inga co-created along with her dad, a television series highlighting Wisconsin family farms called "Around the Farm Table." The series is in its 10th season on PBS.

"Besides running a family farm, making and selling cheese, and starring in a TV show, Inga is also a true champion for all small farms," said WFU President Darin Von Ruden.

Jessica Ryba, a former Administrative Assistant for the Wisconsin Farmers Union, passionately advocated for family farmers due to her familial connection to farming. Despite health challenges leading to her departure from WFU, Jess redirected her passion by founding the successful Cadott Farmers Market. Her impactful efforts included advocating for the market at the town board, securing EBT card access, writing grants, and generating local excitement on social media. She currently resides in Cadott with her two children.

"Jess's inspiring journey highlights how committed individuals can empower their communities, provide access to local health food in small towns, and leave a lasting legacy," stated Von Ruden.

Jess was unable to accept her award in person, as she was kicking off the first-ever winter market with her Cadott Farmers Market.



**Inga Witscher**  
**Friend of the Family Farmer**



## **Builders Awards**

WFU recognized two members for their Builder's Award, which recognizes commitment to building Farmers Union through county involvement, leadership development & member recruitment.

Dave Mickelson is one of first people you call when you need someone to show up. Dave is always helpful serving on WFU committees, serving on state task forces, participating in lobby day, NFU Fly-in and being a great ambassador and bridge builder in the agricultural community. He is thoughtful in his approach to advocacy and finding solutions, as well as to creating a welcoming space for new members. Dave has been in agricultural research for 33 years with Bayer Crop Science, Pioneer/Corteva and S&W Seed Co. He holds a B.S. in Agronomy/Agricultural Economics from the University of Wisconsin. Dave is currently a member of the Columbia County Chapter of Wisconsin Farmers Union and he lives near DeForest, WI with his wife Barb, where he is still part of the 300 acre family farm he grew up on.

Phil O'Leary has been an active member of WFU Dane Co Chapter for many years. He has works tirelessly on water quality issues in WI, testified on behalf of WFU at our state capital, and frequently shows up to events like Climate Fast Forward, Lobby Day, and water committee meetings. Phil not only participates in our policy process himself but makes a concerted effort to bring in new members and youth into the process. He also works with youth interested in agriculture by volunteer biases and very often points them to WFU, making him a great recruiter to WFU. Phil currently operates his family farm in Rock County WI and is an emeritus University of Wisconsin-Madison engineering professor. He is an agricultural and environmental engineer. For the last several years he has been leading rural political messaging workshops in Wisconsin and across rural America. He has a Ph.D. from the UW in Land Resources. Phil and his wife Carol joined Wisconsin Farmers Union in 2018.

## **Emerging Leader**

This is the fourth year that WFU presented a special Emerging Leader award to an individual who has ignited energy and engagement in WFU. This year's Emerging Leader is Dylan Bruce.

Dylan has continued to show his energy and engagement in WFU over the last couple of years. He has stepped up to vice president, then president of his local and then Chapter unit, and continues to find new ways to strengthen his chapter and bring in new members. He participated in countless WFU programming at the local, regional, state, and federal level. Dylan grew up on an Organic vegetable CSA farm in Crawford County, WI. After working his way through the food system from Chicago to Los Angeles, and completing his undergraduate degree at Occidental College, he returned to Wisconsin to manage vegetable research trials at UW Madison, where he eventually received his MS in Agroecology. Dylan returned to his home farm to start Circadian Organics with his wife, Dr. Anna Skye Bruce, in 2018. They currently grow 4 acres of vegetable and flower seeds, and just launched a retail seed brand, Driftless Seed Supply, in cooperation with other regional seed producers. Dylan has been a member of WFU since 2017, and has served as the Vernon-Crawford County President for 2 years.

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**Dave Mickelson  
Builders Award**



**Phil O'Leary  
Builders Award**



**Dylan Bruce  
Emerging Leader Award**



[Continued from page 7]

### **Bruce Miller Award**

WFU also announced that Danielle Endvick was chosen to receive the 2024 Bruce Miller Award, which will be presented at the National Farmers Union Convention in Scottsdale, AZ in March.

The award is named in honor of the late Bruce Miller, who was an active member WFU and served on the staff of Minnesota Farmers Union. It recognizes individuals within the Farmers Union family who display a true passion for family farming and rural America, while promoting the work of Farmers Union.

Danielle has spent the past 15 years lifting up the stories of rural Wisconsin, first as an award-winning journalist with The Country Today newspaper, then from 2014-2023 as the Communications Director for Wisconsin Farmers Union, and more recently in a new role as Director of Development. She raises beef cattle and a pair of rambunctious boys alongside her husband Jesse on their Runamuck Ranch in Holcombe.

"In her time at Farmers Union, Danielle helped reinvigorate and served in leadership for the Chippewa County Farmers Union chapter," Von Ruden said. "She strived to make Farmers Union a welcoming 'Big Tent' for all and has been a strong advocate for Dairy Together, having seen the effects of the dairy crisis on her family's Chippewa County dairy farm."



**Danielle Endvick**  
**Bruce Miller Award**

## **FIVE COMPLIMENTARY REGISTRATIONS TO RED CEDAR WATERSHED CONFERENCE FOR WFU MEMBERS**

The Red Cedar Watershed Conference Will be held on March 14, 2024, at UW-Stout, Menomonie, WI from 8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Information may be found at [Red Cedar Watershed Conference | University of Wisconsin - Stout \(uwstout.edu\)](https://www.uwstout.edu/redcedarwatershedconference/).

Wisconsin Farmers Union will be sponsoring **5 complimentary registrations** to Wisconsin Farmers Union Members or anyone who would like to become a member of Wisconsin Farmers Union and live in the Red Cedar Watershed counties (Barron, Chippewa, Dunn, Polk, Rusk, Sawyer, St. Croix, Washburn).

For the complimentary registrations, those interested should contact Shelly Longdo at [mlongdo@wisconsinfarmersunion.com](mailto:mlongdo@wisconsinfarmersunion.com) or 715-723-5561 to register.

## **WFU FOUNDATION GRANT RECIPIENTS**

The Wisconsin Farmers Union Foundation awarded grants to the following recipients in the 4th quarter of 2023.

- 77th Alice in Dairyland
- 2024 Brown County Taste of Wisconsin
- Agnes' Table
- 2024 Agriculture Showcase - Envision Greater Fond du Lac
- Feed My People Food Bank
- Food, Faith and Farming Network
- Gerald L. Ignace Indian Health Center, Inc.
- Green Cares Food Pantry, Inc
- Main Street Chippewa Falls
- Red Cedar Watershed Conference
- Second Harvest Foodbank of Southern Wisconsin
- ThedaCare
- UW-Wisconsin Agricultural Outlook Forum
- WAFER Food Pantry
- Wisconsin Holstein Association



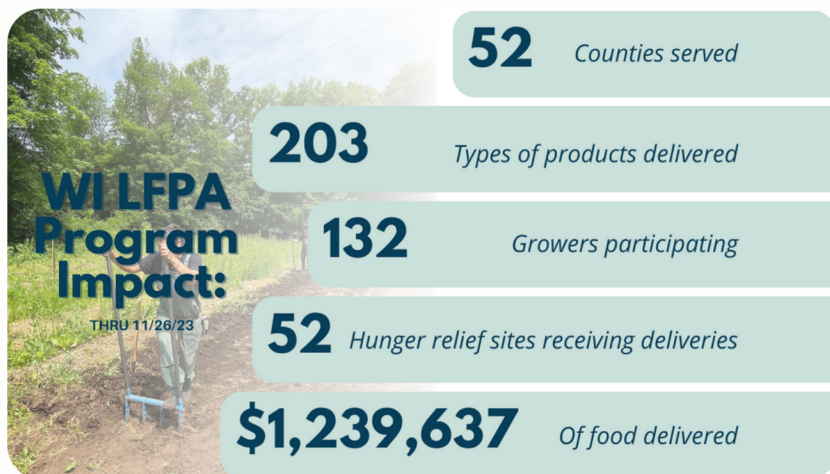


# Connecting Wisconsinites to their food.

The Wisconsin Local Food Purchase Assistance (WI LFPA) Program is about to kick off its second year! The application period for the “Community Partner” grant closed on November 22 and the “Direct to Farmer” grant closed on November 26th, 2023. Grant awardees were announced December 15th, 2023. Congratulations to the 2024 program participants and a heartfelt thank you to everyone involved in the first year of the WI LFPA program!



The WI LFPA program also made a splash at the 93rd Annual Wisconsin Farmers Union State Convention, December 8-10, where a short film highlighting farms, food pantry staff, and community leaders involved in the program was premiered! Head over to [wilocalfood.org](http://wilocalfood.org) to find the video.



Learn more at [wilocalfood.org](http://wilocalfood.org)





# NFU WOMEN'S CONFERENCE: FARMING, LIFE, AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN

Five women from Wisconsin attended National Farmers Union's Women's Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

## WRITTEN BY:

▶ JULIA NUNES, WFU COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST

In November, the National Farmers Union Women's Conference brought together women from across the country in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The two-day event centered around the theme of "preservation," challenged attendees to consider preservation in various aspects of agriculture. From AG business management to leadership development, cooperative education, and more.

WFU was given time to reflect on the preservation of our future headquarters, which is the MOR Building. During this time, Jackie Boos, our Facilities Director, emphasized the importance of not just focusing on the growth of our membership or increasing general awareness, but also on the preservation of our core organizational values and mission.

The conference's keynote speakers and presentations touched on several subjects such as financial management, storytelling, indigenous communities, farmer well-being, the Farm Bill, and working with family. Among the sessions; "How Cooperatives Are Supporting Indigenous Communities" along with "Is Well-Being Even Possible in Agriculture? Farming and Family" stood out to me.

How Cooperatives are Supporting Indigenous Communities session featured women from local indigenous communities who discussed how the cooperative business model supports their communities. I was inspired to learn more about their communities and how they preserve their agricultural history and practices. The session also shed light on the matrilineal matriarchal society of many native tribes. A very heavy

but crucial point of this panel is that we are still on stolen land in order to move forward with our past, land acknowledgment simply isn't enough. Consent needs to happen to move forward together.

The session on well-being in agriculture was led by Constance Wilson in partnership with Rocky Mountain Farmers Union's AgWell. Mental health is seldom discussed in the agriculture community, and this workshop offered a new perspective on well-being and how to regulate emotions in challenging situations. My favorite takeaway from this session was, "Other people can't fix what or how I feel." Hearing echoes in the room that we don't talk about the bad often enough rang true to many in attendance.

The final session of the conference focused on Farming and Family, highlighting how female farmers balance family, work, and farm life. The panel shared their experiences of being women in agriculture, running farms, and involving their children. One takeaway from this session was to replace the term "farmwife" with "woman farmer" to empower women on farms.

The NFU Women's Conference left me feeling energized and excited to be part of the Farmers Union. Spending time with female agriculturalists from across the country was eye-opening, and I connected with women from different states as well as those from my home state of Wisconsin. It was a powerful experience and I would recommend reaching out to our team if you are interested in attending. WFU offers scholarships to offset convention costs.



Wisconsin Women: Julia Nunes, Hannah Alden, Jackie Boos, Hannah Morth and Pam Riesgraf



Bingo! Hannah Morth visited with attendees during the ice-breaker bingo game.



Hannah Alden and Hannah Morth listening in on the Workshop: *Is Well-Being Even Possible in Agriculture?* with Constance Wilson.



Attendees networked during the ice-breaker bingo game.

**"OTHER PEOPLE  
CAN'T FIX WHAT  
OR HOW I FEEL."**





# Preparing Northeast Wisconsin Farmers for a Climate- Smart Market

Wisconsin Farmers Union is excited to announce our involvement in a USDA Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities grant project. The Climate-Smart Commodities project will be led by the Fox-Wolf Watershed Alliance in partnership with Wisconsin Farmers Union, Outagamie County Land Conservation, and Pheasants Forever with a regional focus on the Fox-Wolf Watershed of Northeast Wisconsin.

The project will support the production of climate-smart dairy, beef, grains, vegetables, and specialty crops by providing outreach and education to large, mid-sized, and small farmers, as well as underserved and minority farmers. Project partners will connect farmers with incentives that can help them implement climate-smart agriculture practices, then measure and verify the carbon, greenhouse gas, and water quality benefits associated with those practices. The project will also advance market development of climate-smart products sold direct to consumers and conduct research, through a partnership with Utah State University, to determine if a more nutritious dairy product can be produced through the adoption of soil health practices.

In November, Wisconsin Farmers Union hired Erin Lenninger as Conservation Coordinator to support the Fox-Wolf Climate-Smart Commodities Project. Erin studied management at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa and recently graduated from the University of Minnesota where she earned her Master of Public Health in public health administration and policy. Prior to joining WFU, Erin worked in collegiate marketing and public relations and became a certified health coach. During the 2019-2020 school year, Erin served in the AmeriCorps Farm to School Program as Farm to School Specialist for Juneau County (Wisconsin). This work included 4K-12th grade nutrition education, local procurement of food in school cafeterias, work with school gardens, and leading the Juneau County Farm to School Coalition. Erin grew up in rural northeast Iowa where her family members farm today. Erin currently lives in Neenah, Wisconsin with her three children. WFU is pleased to welcome Erin Lenninger to the team!



Erin Lenninger was recently hired to support the Fox-Wolf Climate-Smart Commodities Project as a coordinator.

Be on the lookout for more information about the project, how to get involved, and upcoming regional events!



# Von Ruden re-elected WFU President

*Westby dairy farmer Darin Von Ruden was re-elected president of the Wisconsin Farmers Union this weekend in Wisconsin Dells, where more than 200 family farmers and rural advocates gathered for the organization's 93rd annual State Convention.*



Von Ruden has served as the organization's District 5 director since 2008, representing Crawford, Grant, Green, Iowa, Lafayette, Richland, Rock, and Vernon counties. He also leads the WFU Foundation Board of Directors, serves on the National Farmers Union Board of Directors as Secretary. Von Ruden and his wife, JoAnn, live in Westby. In the last several years, Von Ruden transitioned the farm to the fourth generation, when son Brett purchased the machinery and 50-cow dairy herd.

Von Ruden has been active with Farmers Union at the local, state and national levels. He is a seven-time recipient of the Silver Star Award, which is National Farmers Union's highest recognition of membership development.

Von Ruden's presidential address focused on a theme of collaboration and progress. "With the current economic situation, it's clear that

we'd be better served by working together rather than fostering continued division."

Spotlighting successes from the past year, Von Ruden noted several of the collaborative initiatives the family farm organization participated in over the last year, such as WI Women in Conservation, the WI Local Food Purchase Assistance Program, Farmer-led Watershed Council, and most recently, the Fox-Wolf Watershed Climate-Smart Commodities project.

"I'm particularly thrilled about a major milestone for our organization – the groundbreaking of our new headquarters. In September, construction began on the Market on River building. It's the beginning of a new chapter for WFU, providing us with a centralized hub to better serve our members and further advance our mission." The mixed-use building will house Wisconsin Farmers Union's headquarters in addition to residential spaces, commercial space, restaurants,

and community gathering areas.

"But let's not forget our most notable accomplishment—the growth in our membership—a testament to the strength of our community," he continued. "The increased engagement and commitment from our members underscore the vital role WFU plays in supporting and advocating for family farmers and communities."

Von Ruden went on to urge members to continue to push for fairness for farmers. "Farmers can get complacent when prices are higher, but it's important that we keep pushing for systemic change so that the lows aren't so low and we can keep more family farmers on the land," he stated.

He concluded by emphasizing the importance of sustained collaboration, mutual support, and collective efforts to strengthen Wisconsin agriculture and enhance the resilience of our communities.





The 2024 Wisconsin Farmers Union Board of Directors includes, from left, (front row) Linda Ceylor, Catawba; Darin Von Ruden, Westby; Tina Hinchley, Cambridge; Ed Gorell, Eleva; (back row) Patty Edelburg, Scandinavia; Jen Schmitz, Cashton; Dave Rosen, Glenwood City; Michael Slattery, Maribel; and Rachel Bouressa, New London.



Paul Adams was elected to represent WFU Region 1 at NFU's Convention.

# Board members & NFU Delegates

Paul Adams of Eleva and Joseph Childs of Boscobel were elected to serve as delegates to the National Farmers Union Convention March 10-12, 2024 in Scottsdale, AZ.

Three district director seats were up for election this year. District 2 Director Dave Rosen, who dairy farms near Emerald, was re-elected in District 2, which comprises Dunn, Pepin, Pierce, and St. Croix counties. Patty Edelburg of Scandinavia was elected to represent Adams, Columbia, Green Lake, Juneau, Marathon, Marquette, Portage, Sauk, Waupaca, Waushara, and Wood counties in District 6. Cambridge dairy farmer Tina Hinchley was re-elected to serve District 7, covering Dane, Jefferson, Kenosha, Racine, and Walworth counties.



Joseph Childs was elected to represent WFU Region 2 at NFU's Convention.



# BUYING FROM BIG AG: HOW GOVERNMENT FOOD PROCUREMENT REINFORCES MONOPOLY POWER (AND WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT!)

WRITTEN, EDITED, AND RESEARCHED BY DEE LANINGA, SARAH CARDEN, ANGELA HUFFMAN, CHRISTIAN LOVELL, AND JOE MAXWELL OF FARM ACTION

## Introduction

Every year, the U.S. government spends billions of dollars on food. In 2022, including everything from food for military bases to school lunch programs, the government spent more than \$9 billion on food procurement.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Department of Defense get the biggest slices of the procurement pie; their authority to spend billions of taxpayer dollars translates into a great deal of power to shape our food system.

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service and its Commodity Procurement Program buy more than \$3 billion dollars' worth of meat, poultry, produce, dairy, and grains every year.

If these contracts went to family farmers and ranchers, the government could jump-start the regrowth of the local and regional food systems that were decimated by decades of industry consolidation.

Instead, the government has been directing taxpayer money into the pockets of the world's largest and most abusive food corporations, reinforcing their domination.

## Who Does the Government Buy Food from?

USDA provides a window into our government's current procurement habits – and how they could be improved. Even a casual scroll through these vendor lists will tell you that the USDA routinely gives contracts in the mega-millions to Cargill, Tyson, and Smithfield.

An analysis of the government's food procurement in 2022 revealed just how much more taxpayer Just 25 vendors received nearly half of all food procurement dollars in 2022. That's just 8% of the total number of vendors.

The greatest share went to Cargill, which raked in 6% of all available contracts and almost 30% of the contracts for grain. Just five vendors claimed 81% of all poultry contracts, and half went to Tyson alone.

Despite notoriously unsafe working conditions, product violations, and bribery convictions on the part of its parent company, JBS snagged more than 60 million dollars in USDA Foods contracts.

## What Happens When the Government Supports Monopolies with Taxpayer Money?

USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack defended the government's apparent preference for buying from global behemoths like JBS: In a January 2023 letter, he said there is so little competition left in our food system that refusing to contract with the world's largest meatpacking company would hurt taxpayers. But giving taxpayer dollars to monopolies only entrenches their dominance and compounds our competition problem. We've seen this situation play out before – and spoiler alert, it didn't work out for the taxpayer then, either.

Back in 2019, the USDA launched a Trade Mitigation Program to help U.S. farmers and ranchers hurt by the U.S. trade disputes with China. JBS got 26% of the allocation for pork purchases: \$78 million in taxpayer dollars.

JBS won this contract, partly because as a multinational corporation it could offer rock-bottom prices, but also because USDA did nothing to let independent producers in on the process. On top of that, USDA failed to factor in the greater harm inflicted on the food system when choosing JBS for the contract.

A year later, JBS secured a deal to sell \$700 million dollars' worth of beef, pork, and poultry to China every year. This means that JBS used taxpayer dollars – meant to help U.S. farmers weather the trade war – to expand into China and take the market for themselves. The worst part of it is that JBS's growth and global conquests do nothing for American eaters or the resilience of our food system.

## What about USDA's Investments to Promote Competition?

President Biden's executive order on competition directed the USDA to improve competition in the food system using a few different tools. So far, the Department has made some progress toward rebuilding the local and regional processing and distribution networks we'd need to keep more



farmers and ranchers in business – but these investments are doomed to fail in the absence of policies that prioritize fair competition. It's already happened, in fact: After receiving more than a million dollars in state and federal grants and loans, a beef packing plant in North Dakota abruptly closed its doors. Doubtless faced with meatpacking and retail industries so consolidated he couldn't get a foot in the market, the owner said, "I couldn't figure out how to move beef more profitably." It is highly likely that the new plants funded by USDA will eventually be bought out by the dominant meatpackers – or mega-retailers like Walmart, which happened in the case of Sustainable Beef – ultimately gifting those giant corporations with even more taxpayer dollars.

The USDA's investments into independent businesses simply aren't enough to get more players into the field, and that's because after decades of consolidation across every sector of our food and farm economy, there are now only a few buyers in each region.

Where once farmers sold their goods to local independent grocery stores, those stores have been gobbled up by large, consolidated chains. Today the U.S. has one-third fewer grocery stores than it did 25 years ago, and 75% of U.S. consumers purchase their groceries from Walmart instead of locally owned grocers.

These buyers only want to work with producers as big as they are – rather than buying from dozens of smaller and independent producers. Even retailers like Wegmans, which has a reputation for offering more locally sourced and high-quality products, has told farmers in our network it was consolidating its local procurement to work with fewer (but larger) farms.

This means that farmers and ranchers have few local or regional options when it comes to selling their products. And without access to markets, family farms cannot survive.

## How Could Changing Government Procurement Practices Improve Our Food System?

Remember those billions of dollars that the government spends on food every year? They could be leveraged to build a better food system for farmers and eaters alike.

By prioritizing independent farmers and ranchers in its food procurement policies, the government could:

- Sustain more independent businesses that grow and raise food for Americans.
- Revitalize rural communities.
- Keep control over the food system in the hands of farmers, local businesses, workers, and eaters.

USDA is already funding state-level programs that put this principle into practice. For example, the Regional Food System Partnership program deployed \$4 million across eight states and in Washington, D.C. to help institutions purchase foods locally and from independent producers, guided by what's called "values-aligned" procurement policy.

This demonstrates that the USDA understands the power of procurement policies that prioritize family farms, local resilience, and fair markets where independent businesses can thrive instead of the cheapest possible prices. Now it needs to walk the walk and implement these changes at the federal level.

There are signs the USDA is beginning to pivot. In November of 2023, USDA updated its domestic origin requirements so that any meat purchased in this category for nutrition assistance programs must be from livestock born, raised, and slaughtered in the U.S. The Department was already prioritizing food products of domestic origin for everything but meat; now, meat will be part of the imperative to buy U.S. products first.

This is a big deal for our cattle producers. In 2022, the U.S. government spent \$1.9 billion on beef. According to the rancher advocacy group R-CALF USA, 2 million head of cattle were imported from Mexico and Canada that year. Under USDA's new directive for the Agricultural Marketing Service to buy that cattle from U.S. ranchers instead represents a huge opportunity and will help ranchers stay in business by increasing demand for U.S. cattle. Applying this standard to the other major government food buyer – the Department of Defense – would direct all \$1.9 billion in federal beef procurement dollars to producers of U.S. cattle.

Still, this is a drop in the bucket compared to the powerful firehose USDA could unleash with its full procurement budget. With congressional action, USDA could expand and invest more in programs like the Patrick Leahy Farm To School Grant Program, which spends about 10 million a year in grants to assist schools to buy local.

The mandatory funding for the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program could also be scaled up. Many of the investments made through GusNIP give local producers a reliable buyer while increasing access to fresh and healthy foods for vulnerable populations.

While GusNIP currently operates with a preference for local and regional procurement, Congress should strengthen the connection between farmers and GusNIP so that the program stimulates local food economies with its annual budget of more than \$50 million.

Along with the Local Food Purchase Assistance Agreement Cooperative Program and the Local Foods for School Cooperative Agreement Program, these programs will open market pathways for producers while we rebuild our food distribution system.

[Continued on page 16]



Congress could also help USDA create “set asides” so that independent businesses have a fighting chance at getting those government contracts, and also overhaul USDA’s bidding system, which is set up to prioritize the lowest-cost bids. USDA actually issued an official report requesting the authority to “allow the use of ‘local’ and other value-based criteria as a specification in federal food procurement.”

### How Could Changing Government Procurement Practices Make Our Country More Secure?

On its journey from seed to grocery shelf, most of our food passes through a very narrow pipeline that is almost entirely controlled by big food monopolies. Big Ag has the power to decide who farms, what they farm, and what we all eat – and they have been more interested in raking in subsidies to churn out feed for their industrially raised livestock than in producing food for people. This has put us all in a precarious position, dependent on imports from other countries to get the nutritious food our citizens need.

But we have the power to change that. By calling for better government food procurement policy, we can use our taxpayer dollars to keep more farmers and ranchers on their land while supporting local and regional businesses. We can change our policies to achieve a strong and resilient food system: one that produces nutritious, accessible, locally and regionally grown food for all Americans.

The cozy Cabin on Lake Wissota at WFU Kamp Kenwood is available to rent mid-October through April. A perfect getaway for the outdoor enthusiast, the cabin offers convenient access to hiking and cross-country trails in Lake Wissota State Park.

- Family Gatherings
- Business Retreats
- Crafting Weekend
- Winter Fun

19161 79th Avenue, Chippewa Falls, WI  
[www.kampkenwood.com](http://www.kampkenwood.com)

**BOOK TODAY!** Contact Brad Henderson, 715-214-7244  
[bhenderson@wisconsinfarmersunion.com](mailto:bhenderson@wisconsinfarmersunion.com)

## Welcome New Members!



New Member	Location	Recruiter	New Member	Location	Recruiter
Big Papa BBQ LLC	Colfax	Jackie Boos	David Baier	Eau Galle	Jerry Thompson Insurance Agency
Dietrich Farm	Twin Lakes		David Johnson	Milwaukee	
Ne-Ne's Taco LLP	Eau Claire		Marie Stolzenburg Family	Madison	Matthew Conte
Organix By Melissa LLC	Elk Mound		Prairie Sundance & Lindsey Kroll Family	Avoca	
Shade Haven	Viroqua	Dylan Bruce	Dave & Gretchen Considine	Baraboo	
Ben Sallmann	Minneapolis	Jane Hansen	David & Susan Clausen	Amery	
Betty Jean Pearson	Chippewa Falls	Julie Keown-Bomar	Elise Couillard	Deerfield	
Clyde Community Center Library	Avoca		Gerald & Cynthia Hall	Marathon	Roger Kreager Insurance Agency .
Ellen Brooks	Gays Mills	Forrest Humphrey	Jim & Sally Renner	Cambria	Nolan Insurance Agency LLC
Erin Thompson & Corey Ziemann	Appleton		Mark and Brenda Steffes	Mineral Point	
Flo Sandok & Jim Bassett	Viroqua		Martin & Kathleen Vanderstappen	Lake Geneva	Mangold Insurance, Inc.
Grace Clardy	Eau Claire		Mary Behm	Fort Atkinson	Anew Insurance Agency
Gretchen and Tom Spicer	Avoca	Leah Spicer	Michael & Beverly Grantner	Van Dyne	Nolan Insurance Agency LLC
Hiemstra Farms	Brandon		Michael & Linda Walgenbach	Brandon	
Jeffrey & Kerri Sarbacker	Black Earth		Michele Williams	DeSoto	Joseph Childs
Kevin & RaeAnn Makos	Argyle		Randall & Lisa Kalish	Janseville	Donna K Nelson
Kim and Cindy Peterson	Blanchardville	Harry Pulliam	Scott & Corine Schieldt Family	Edgerton	Anew Insurance Agency
Kirsten & Ed Holmes Family	Boyd		Michael & Mary Giese	Alma Center	Jackson-Trempealeau Chapter
Charles & Lauren Larsen	Denmark		Laura & Robert Vlaardingbroek	Black River Falls	
Checks - Blufftop Farm	Wauzeka				





# UPDATES

Vendors below will be in our new Market on River  
WFU headquarters building in 2024!

vendor space in MOR is available, reach out to Jackie if interested



**Big Papas BBQ**  
Amy + Herbie Sevier



TemptAsians  
John Tran



Wildflour Bakery  
Alyssa Gilliam



Organix by Melissa  
Melissa Murphy



Ne Ne's Tacos  
Rene + Rhoda Perez

Vendors are required to have a *minimum* of 15% of ingredients purchased from WFU members.

## VENDORS WILL BE LOOKING FOR:

### MEAT

Inside Round Beef,  
Chicken, Shredded  
Beef (Skirt, Flank,  
Chuck Roast), Beef  
Tongue, Pork  
Shoulder, Pork  
Butt, Ground Pork,  
Pork Steak,  
Chicken, Shrimp,  
Cod Fish or Mahi

### PRODUCE

Tomatoes,  
Onions, Cilantro,  
Lettuce, Carrots,  
Potatoes, Green  
Onions, Beans,  
Avocados,  
Jalapeños,  
Limes, Cabbage,  
Corn on the Cob,  
Tomatillos

### DAIRY

Milk, Sour Cream, Shredded  
Cheese, Queso Fresco

### OTHER

Eggs, Baked Beans, Rice,  
Coleslaw, Brown Sugar,  
Ketchup, Mustard, Sugar,  
Apple Juice, Hamburger  
Buns, Tortilla Chips

If you would like to start a conversation with these vendors to create a direct-to-consumer relationship,  
please reach out to our Facilities Director, Jackie Boos at [jboos@wisconsinfarmersunion.com](mailto:jboos@wisconsinfarmersunion.com).





By Matthew Conte  
WFU Rural Organizer

Farmers and consumers are experiencing rising costs at the end of production and at the grocery store. Farmers are spending more to improve their facilities and practices, while consumers are paying higher prices for the same products. To make matters worse, corporate consolidation and anti-competitive practices have resulted in stagnant wages for workers while corporations have gained more control over the market. To address this issue, the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) have introduced new antitrust rulings and filed lawsuits against companies that engage in anti-competitive practices.

Farmers who grow broiler chickens have been particularly affected by these practices over the last decade. The system of processors owning chickens and contracting them out to growers has been in place since the 1950s. However, this system has become a captive practice for growers, leaving them vulnerable to the conditions imposed upon them by the processors. Processors have complete control over the breed of chicken, the breeding stock from which the chicks come, the feed, and the terms that the contract growers are subject to.

This includes requirements for the facilities and types of equipment used while leaving the buying of equipment and facility upkeep and renewal to the growers themselves. In an unstable market, growers are left increasingly precarious by the processors they depend on.

Ed Gorrell, who was a grower for 37 years (18 of which he grew broiler chickens) alongside his wife Kristi, explains his perspective on being a contract grower: "I think growers should be seen more as employees than anything else. I thought of myself as a mechanic, owning all his tools and working on the car." Contract growers are incentivized to cut costs to attain bonuses, which drives them to take shortcuts. The existing tournament system compensates contract growers according to their base pay outlined in the contract, along with a bonus determined by factors such as quantity, flock health, and reduced costs. Growers in the top 50% of the group receive substantial bonuses, often amounting to thousands of dollars, while those in the next 25% receive smaller bonuses. This system is also implemented on processors by their larger corporate owners, such as Tyson



or Purdue, driving down costs even further for the corporate conglomerates. These anti-competitive practices have caused the number of growers to decrease significantly, resulting in not just the amount of farms dropping but the number of birds per farm skyrocketing through many now having five or six mega-coops holding 50,000 to 80,000 birds each.

Corporations supply chicks, feed, and medication, while farmers manage the facilities and labor to raise the birds until they are ready for processing. Farmers are compensated based on their efficiency in meat production relative to other contracted farmers with similar contracts. However, many farmers have complained over the past decade about excessive corporate leverage and inadequate accountability within these arrangements. This has led to lower-than-expected profits and mounting debts from constructing or upgrading facilities. As a result, the number of poultry farms has dwindled. Ed Gorrell has seen many of his fellow growers either sell off or have to buy more coops to stay in the business. These systems also led to retaliation against farmers to push them out by providing lower quality bred chickens, which would lower the chances of obtaining bonuses and reduce take-home pay for the grower.

### **New Regulations**

The US poultry sector is about to face new disclosure mandates from the US Department of Agriculture, intended to provide more precise insights into the potential profits of chicken growers who work with major corporations to rear chickens for meat. Large live poultry dealers will now have to inform farmers of their earnings, provide explanations on handling flock losses, and ensure minimum flock placements per year. Smaller dealers are exempt from these regulations.

The new rules are expected to take effect by late January. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack has highlighted that these regulations are being implemented under the Packers and Stockyards Act of 1921, which aims to “assure fair competition and fair trade



practices, to safeguard farmers and ranchers... to protect consumers... and to protect members of the livestock, meat, and poultry industries from unfair, deceptive, unjustly discriminatory and monopolistic practices.”

The meatpacking industry's consolidation came under renewed scrutiny during the COVID-19 pandemic when major processing facilities temporarily closed, leaving some producers with no outlets to sell their livestock. Federal officials have since urged the industry to take necessary measures to ensure that such issues do not arise again in the future.

Wisconsin Farmers Union supports efforts that strengthen the Packers and Stockyards Act to safeguard the rights and interests of family farmers and growers. One such effort is the prohibition of unfair tournament or ranking systems for compensating contract growers. Another is providing protection to livestock and poultry farmers from any form of retaliation. These steps taken by the USDA are just the beginning of creating fair conditions for competition and improving the grower's conditions within markets that are currently dominated by corporate interests. We encourage further action to continue the regulation of corporate control and influence over our food system and to give farmers a chance to participate in a fair system that does not exclude them from the decisions that affect their livelihood.



**GENEROSITY OF  
CONVENTION-GOERS  
PROVIDES YOUTH ...**

# A CHANCE AT CAMP



Over \$17,000 raised at WFU Convention to help youth from families facing economic hardship attend Farmers Union Camp

By Danielle Endvick  
Director of Development

In late August, when I left Wisconsin Farmers Union after nine years as Communications Director to pursue what I dubbed “a quieter chapter,” I noted that I’d probably be back again someday. Little did I know just how soon it would be! As I quipped on social media on my first day back in late November, “Ope, turns out that walking away from a mission and community you love is harder than I thought ...”

A whirlwind two weeks later I was standing behind a microphone emceeding the camp fundraiser for Wisconsin Farmers Union’s 93rd Annual Convention and being reminded that the boomerang landed me right back where I’m meant to be -- in an organization rooted in shared values and community. All weekend long, I was in awe of the generosity of our beautiful bunch.

In a heartwarming show of support throughout the weekend, members raised a whopping \$17,000 for Farmers Union Camp scholarships for families facing economic hardship. That’s enough to provide 100+ scholarships for campers throughout the next few years.

**Registration is Open for  
Farmers Union Camp!**

[www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com/youth-camp](http://www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com/youth-camp)



**46 Bidders**

**84 Donations & Baskets**

**✓ \$17,000+ Raised for  
Camp Scholarships!**



Farmers Union campers shared favorite things about camp during the fundraiser. Pictured are, from left, Director of Development Danielle Endvick with campers Logan Endvick, Charlie Breitenmoser, Blake Endvick, and Olivia Roth.





Auctioneer Phil Garthwaite's humor helped drive donations upwards of \$11,000 during the live auction at convention.



A bidding war between WFU President Darin Von Ruden, left, and Farmers Union Industries CEO Dale Bednarek raised a whopping \$5,000, with Bednarek matching Von Ruden's winning \$2,500 bid.



WFU board member Rachel Bouressa takes the "mystery prize" bike for a spin around the convention hall.

On Friday night, as auctioneer Phil Garthwaite rallied the crowd, an impressive \$11,119 was raised through the sale of 10 items and additional donations. Special thanks to all of bidders, but especially to WFU President Darin Von Ruden and our friends at Farmers Union Enterprises and Minnesota Farmers Union for their generous contributions.

A nod is also due to St. Croix County dairy farmer and WFU District 2 Director Dave Rosen, who donated the grand finale live auction item, a "traveling" bicycle won last month at the Minnesota Farmers Union Convention fundraiser. The bike has made the rounds at several Farmers Union fundraisers, earning thousands of dollars for good causes. The value of the bike this particular weekend was undoubtedly increased by At-Large Director Rachel Bouressa's entertaining ride through the crowded convention hall. In fact, \$650 was donated solely for her performance by WFU President Darin Von Ruden, in addition to a \$900 bid by Farmers Union Industries board member Aaron Chervestad for the bike.

Saturday's silent auction raised an additional \$6,000 for the cause. See the list of donors and buyers at right. If you get the chance, be sure to thank those businesses and individuals for their support of Farmers Union Camp! Special thanks to those chapters who donated baskets!

You can bet we're already scheming some fun new items to add to the live auction next year -- including even more chapter baskets, a revival of Dorothea Von Ruden's famous lefse, and a singing performance by a for-now anonymous dairy farmer who definitely is not -- in this very moment, while reading this line -- regretting telling me about his talents. Be sure to save the date for Dec. 12-15, 2024 at Chula Vista Resort in Wisconsin Dells for a not-to-be-missed event!

Part of the pull of this organization for me is the legacy it is carrying forward. Did those farmers who put their sweat and funds into building the lodge at Kamp Kenwood know we'd still be celebrating this special place and using it to teach youth about cooperatives and Wisconsin agriculture a near-century later? I'm excited to lift up the camp, our new Market on River Project, and all of WFU's programs and special initiatives through my new role -- and grateful to have such a generous membership along for the ride.

That said, making a difference in this organization doesn't require opening up your wallet. (Although we appreciate it when you do!) We know that chapter leaders and volunteers throughout the state are making differences in big and small ways all year-round. Thank you to all who make this organization the kind of place that calls you home.

*Special thanks to the WFU Convention Fundraising Team: Jackie Boos, Grace Clardy, Karen Goulet, Brad Henderson, Lavane Hessler, Shelly Longdo, and Kirsten Slaughter. These individuals poured their love and support into making the fundraiser a success!*

## WANT TO SUPPORT FARMERS UNION CAMP?

Donate to support WFU's work or the camp at [www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com/foundation](http://www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com/foundation)

# THANK YOU for your support!

### Silent & Live Auction Winning Bidders

JoAnn Adams  
Jill Berke  
Shawn Bartholomew  
Dale Bednarek  
Becky Breda  
Hans Breitenmoser Jr.  
Dylan Bruce  
Aaron Chervestad  
Matthew Conte  
Jerry Croes  
Tara Daun  
Craig Dunning  
Patty Edelburg  
Danielle Endvick  
Karen Goulet  
Laurie Gruber  
Lavane Hessler  
Tina Hinchley  
Chris Holman  
Dan Kaatz  
Julie Keown-Bomar  
Bob Kuylen  
Daniel Kvalheim  
Krist Kvalheim  
Lori Kvalheim  
Claudia Lenz  
Mike Lenz  
Sally Leong  
Shelly Longdo  
Craig Myhre  
Sue Neeley  
Diane Posner  
Dave Rosen  
Dennis Rosen  
W. Michael Slattery  
Mary Segerstrom  
John Skoug  
Wayne Soren  
Mike Stranz  
Jim Streveler  
James Timm  
Cindy VanDerPol  
Josh VanDerPol  
Darin Von Ruden  
Gary Wertish  
Jeanne Wertish

### Auction Item Donations

American Income Life  
Amnicon-Douglas FU  
Ashland-Bayfield FU  
Barron County FU  
Brad Henderson  
Burnett Dairy Co-op  
Chaseburg FU  
Chippewa River Distillery  
Chuck and Julie Bomar  
Chula Vista Resort  
Circle M Market Farm  
Columbia County FU  
Dancing Dragonfly Winery  
Dave and Catie Rosen  
Door Peninsula Winery  
Huey's Hideaway Museum  
Dane County FU  
Dave Rosen  
Discovery Center  
Drumlin Ridge Winery  
Eau Claire Children  
Museum  
Eau Galle Cheese Factory  
Economy Furniture  
Eau Claire FU  
Farm Wisconsin  
Farmers Union Industries  
Gator Garb  
Green Bay Packers  
Henry Rifles  
Just Coffee Co-op  
Kirsten Slaughter  
Leinenkugel's Brewery  
Menomonie Market  
Metropolis Resort  
Minnesota Farmers Union  
New Glarus Brewing  
O'Neil Creek Winery  
Porter's Patch  
Premier Co-op - Westby  
River Bend Winery  
River Country Co-op  
Road America/Elkhart Lake  
Shelly Longdo  
Silver Springs  
Siren Shrub  
Spring Street Sports  
St. Croix FU  
St. Isidore's Dairy  
Tara Daun  
Taylor-Price FU  
The Local Store  
Tractor Central  
Travel Leaders  
Vernon Communications  
Vernon Electric Co-op  
von Stiehl Winery  
Joann Vandyk-Adams  
Vernon-Crawford FU  
Wenzel's Farm  
Wheatstone Farm  
Widmer's Cheese Cellar  
Willy Street Co-op  
Wisconsin Beef Council  
Wood-Portage-Waupaca FU

### Cash Donations

ECO Group  
Edward Jones  
Holly Bowe Realtor  
Huff Insurance  
John Gehrke  
Jim Hare  
Susan Millar  
MSK Realtors  
Prevail Bank  
Sally Leong  
Sarah Lloyd  
Jody Lenz  
Melissa/Mike Mahon Stein  
Kriss Marion  
David Mickelson  
Diane Posner  
John Skoug  
Madonna Timm  
TDS Telecom  
WESTconsin Credit Union





# Countdown to Camp!

Registration is now open for the 2024 Camp Season

by *Grace Clardy*  
*WFU Education Director*



We have some exciting news for young adventurers and cooperative enthusiasts in Wisconsin! We are thrilled to announce the opening of registration for the 2024 summer camp season. This year brings an added level of convenience and efficiency with the introduction of UltraCamp as the new registration system. UltraCamp promises a user-friendly experience, streamlining the registration process, and ensuring a hassle-free journey for parents and guardians.

As families gear up for a memorable summer, Wisconsin Farmers Union Camp offers a unique blend of outdoor activities, educational experiences, and community building. From exploring nature trails to engaging in hands-on agricultural learning, campers are in for an enriching adventure that fosters a love for the environment and sustainable living.

In a fun twist, each overnight camper will receive a special keepsake – a vibrant tie-dye shirt that they will make during arts & crafts time! This colorful memento not only adds a touch of individuality to the camp experience but also serves as a tangible reminder of the friendships and memories made during their time at Wisconsin Farmers Union Camp.

With the convenience of UltraCamp and the promise of tie-dye treasures, now is the perfect time to secure a spot for your campers at our serene and fun-filled summer camp. Don't miss out on the chance to provide your youth with a summer to remember, complete with outdoor adventures, new friendships, and the joy of learning in the heart of Wisconsin's natural beauty. Register today and set the stage for a summer of growth, exploration, and lasting memories!







# YOUTH CAMPS ON LAKE WISSOTA NEAR CHIPPEWA FALLS

KAMP KENWOOD | CHIPPEWA FALLS, WI



**THE BEST SUMMERS HAPPEN HERE!**

Register today!  
[KAMPKENWOOD.COM](http://KAMPKENWOOD.COM)



CAMPS FOR  
AGES  
**8-18**



# JOIN US FOR FARM & RURAL LOBBY DAY

Wednesday, January 17, 2024







# ROOTED FOR GROWTH

Endvick Returns to WFU as  
Director of Development

# We'll Be There.

Since  
**H M**  
1885  
**Hastings Mutual**  
INSURANCE COMPANY  
www.hastingsmutual.com

Danielle Endvick has returned to the Wisconsin Farmers Union team in a new capacity, as the Director of Development. This new role is aimed at strengthening the organization and setting the membership on a strong path forward to ensure the work we do will help family farmers for generations to follow.

“Danielle was an integral part of our team before and we are delighted to welcome her back in her new capacity,” notes WFU Executive Director Julie Keown-Bomar. “This position has been in the works for some time, but the stars aligned rather opportunistically and we were able to keep hold of a person with expertise, talent, and passion for the mission of WFU in a new impactful role.”

The Development of Director position will be focused on revenue generation, grant writing, external relations, cooperative initiatives, and stewardship strategies.

“I’m elated to be returning to this stellar team, to members who have become like family, and to a role in which I can have a meaningful impact on furthering our mission to keep family farmers on the land,” Endvick said. “In many ways it feels like coming home, but I look forward to pivoting into a new lane, finding creative funding and collaborative opportunities, and building strategic partnerships to help further our work on behalf of our members.”

Endvick began her new role November 27th.  
She can be reached at 715-382-6814 or  
[dendvick@wisconsinfarmersunion.com](mailto:dendvick@wisconsinfarmersunion.com)

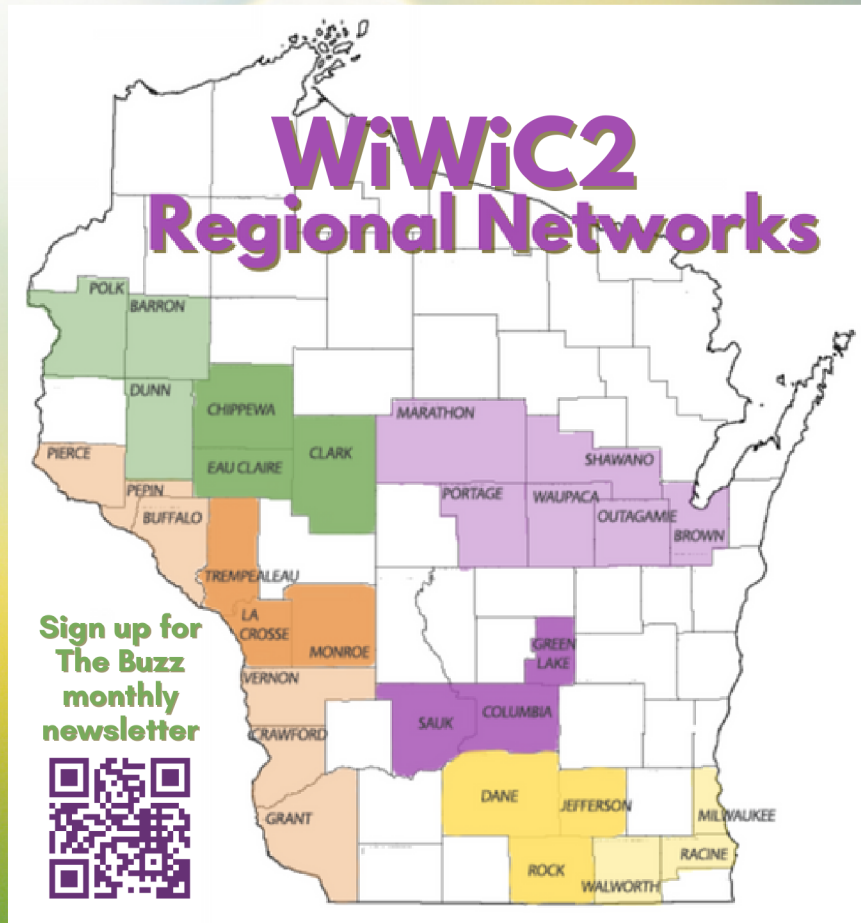




# WISCONSIN WOMEN in CONSERVATION

nurturing land. and ourselves.

## Bringing You More in 2024



### WiWiC2 Regional Networks

Sign up for  
The Buzz  
monthly  
newsletter



- 4** new regions
- coaches in **27** total counties
- 12** new podcast episodes
- conservation bus tours in **4** locations
- 30** potlucks
- 1** full-time conservation plan writer
- 24** learning circles **12** on-farm field days

After three years of programming in 18 counties that reached over 2900 women farmers, farmworkers, landowners and conservationists, the Wisconsin Women in Conservation project is expanding! Having won an additional two-year grant from the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service, WiWiC2 adds an additional 12 counties. WiWiC is a partnership between Wisconsin Farmers Union, Michael Fields Agricultural Institute, Renewing the Countryside and Marbleseed with the goal of reaching Wisconsin's growing population of women land stewards with conservation education, support and funding. 2024 events start in January! Sign up for the newsletter at [WiWiC.org](http://WiWiC.org).



# Snapshots



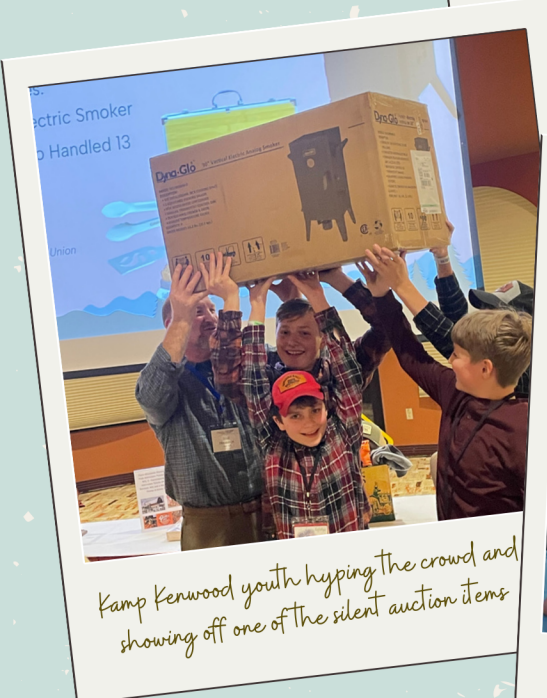
Deb Rosen with David and Lorelei Swanepoel



WFU Members Tom Kriegl and Kriss Marion having a laugh on the policy floor



Farm Action's Senior Policy Advocate Sarah Carden presented on the Farm Bill



Kamp Kenwood youth hyping the crowd and showing off one of the silent auction items



Groundwater Education Specialist Dr. Kevin Masarik doing a groundwater simulation



Delegates from the South Central chapter digging into policy



Thank you to all the members, delegates, speakers, presenters, panel members, volunteers, and staff who helped make this event a huge success! Wisconsin Farmers Union Convention serves as a meeting place for our agricultural community and gives members a chance to voice their opinions and decide where WFU efforts should be focused for the upcoming year. Thank you again to all who made the trip to the Wisconsin Dells! We look forward to seeing you again next year.



Zephyr Teachout gave a rousing keynote address about monopoly power



WFU Members Becky Brathal and Hannah Alden with WFU Facilities Director Jackie Boos



WFU is for the children



Hiru Smith, Executive Director for the Department of Agriculture with the Ho-Chunk Nation (center) gave a powerful address Sunday morning



Members enjoying some time to catch up during meal times



The man, the myth, the legend...  
Dave Velde



Tay Fatke of Marbleseed with Ashland-Bayfield Chapter Pres. Josh Pearson





# SOMETHING TO CELEBRATE

By Kirsten Slaughter  
WFU Membership Director



As we look back over 2023 I think there is a lot we can be proud of about the organization, including our membership. The last couple of years have been hard nationally on membership organizations with numbers trending down, but Wisconsin Farmers Union is not part of that trend. In the last two years we have actually seen an increase in our membership. With new members joining from across the state, and a growth of over 170 members in 2023.

The growth of WFU is the collective work of all our members and staff, and something that should be celebrated and shared by everyone. It is the result of chapters holding activities that engage with their community, of our attendance with the WFU booth at conferences and events across the state, outreach to new members, our involvement in the LFPA project and the new directory, advocating for issues in the legislature, communicating WFU activity through the media and our newsletter, education on top WFU issues, and so much more. It has been a goal of our membership team, and everyone on staff, to focus on membership growth and we are very proud of that accomplishment.

As Wisconsin Farmers Union grows it means our collective voices are louder and bringing in new voices only adds to the organization. We know that when someone is personally asked to attend something, they are more likely to show up. By taking the time to ask someone to join WFU or attend a chapter meeting you are making a big impact in the organization. As we make new goals for growth in the New Year, take time to invite and welcome new folks into the WFU.

In a time where the political divisions and global conflict can feel overwhelming, I see Farmers Union continuing to be a place to find community. The structure of WFU is based around ideas of members coming together over the shared ideas, and to “reason together” to find solutions and stand up for one another. Earlier this year we went on a membership tour, visiting members all the way from the northern and southern tips of Wisconsin, and I am often reminded of the themes of collaboration and community that we heard from everyone. As we finish 2023 I am excited to work together to bring new people into the organization. Thank you to the members of Wisconsin Farmers Union, and we look forward to connecting with you all in 2024.







# CHAPTER CHATTER

## **SOUTH CENTRAL CHAPTER CRAFTING MISSION STATEMENT, HOLDS COSTUME CONTEST AT ANNUAL MEETING**

South Central WFU has been working on a chapter mission statement that will guide their events and communications in the coming year. They began the work of identifying what that statement might be by having a visioning session at their annual meeting in October, then created a survey for those who were unable to attend. The goal is to have this statement crafted and then voted on by their members in January 2024. Their annual meeting also included a Halloween costume contest with some fun entries!



**WHAT DREW YOU TO WFU?  
WE WANT TO KNOW!**



## **POLK-BURNETT CHAPTER MAKING THE MOST OF LOCAL INITIATIVE GRANT**

Since the 2022 launch of the Polk-Burnett Chapter project, the St Croix Food Alliance, engagement in a local food marketing alliance is unmistakable. In 2023, the SCVFA repeated a series of four winter farmers markets in partnership with Abrahamson's Nursery in St. Croix Falls, WI. Thanks to a Local Initiative Grant awarded to Polk/Burnett in 2023, they were able to establish EBT/SNAP benefits at these markets fulfilling their mission to strengthen and promote a thriving, resilient, and equitable local food economy in the St. Croix River Valley.



These winter markets not only bring more business to an established local business, the SCVFA team organized upwards of 18 vendors to fill pantries, dinner tables and holiday gift giving. Local artists, live music and farm to table prepared food and a reindeer added to the festive, community feel.

In addition to the winter market, the SCVFA partnered with Cafe Wren in Luck, WI for 2 weekends to set up a table featuring products from farmer members and makers. The SCVFA table was the 4th highest in sales, providing a new economic opportunity for members around the holidays and further spreading the word about supporting local farms.





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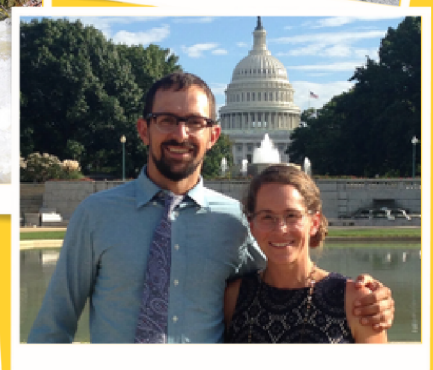
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# THE MORE THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE THINGS CHANGE



Alan Guebert

The old maxim “The more things change, the more things stay the same” might ring true for some facets of our lives, but it’s not true for climate change. In fact, when it comes to our now fast-changing climate; the more

things change, the more everything changes.

That’s especially true in agriculture, as almost every farmer and rancher—as well as every taxpayer and food buyer—knows. Moreover, we see it daily in global food and commodity markets.

But we haven’t seen the worst of it yet, according to two reports on the ag impacts of climate change. The first, by the Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), examines what U.S. farmers will experience in the coming generation. The second, by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, offers a global analysis.

Both studies are eye-opening and heart-stopping.

For example, the CSIS report opens with this jolt: “In 2021, agriculture and food-related industries contributed 5.4 percent of U.S. GDP and provided 10.5 percent of U.S. employment. Worldwide, almost 45 percent of the population lives in households where agricultural activities represent the primary source of employment.”

So, yes, “If agriculture can make global prosperity, it can also break it.” That’s especially so with the U.S. because it “is the largest exporter of agricultural commodities in the world: foreign markets absorb about one-fifth of U.S. agricultural production.”

What makes the CSIS report so revealing is its detailed look at how climate change will impact individual state crops. For example, it notes that all Iowa counties’ corn yields will likely drop “five percent” by 2030 and “over half of the (state’s per county) yields will experience burdens of more than 10 percent.”

The good news, it goes on to report, is that Iowa’s “wheat yields are projected to see an increase of 17 percent in this time period as (wheat’s) growing range is expanded due to higher temperatures.”

Well, it’s good news if you have the machinery,

skill, and local markets to bring wheat back into your generations-long crop rotation that’s included little more than corn and soybeans since Grandpa plowed with the old Johnny popper.

The CSIS report takes similar looks at dairy, wheat, soybeans, and corn and then examines how climate change will affect today’s conservation policies and Farm Bill legislation. That data reinforces the plain fact that almost no one on either the political or production side of American agriculture is preparing for the immense change farmers and eaters face with climate change.

A big share of that responsibility lies with Congress where “the current debate around the farm bill seems to be focused on redirecting climate-related funding”—ag’s portion of the green-as-spinach Inflation Reduction Act—“rather than enhancing it.”

There will be a future price to pay for that present short sightedness. In fact, we’re already witnessing that growing cost, according to the FAO’s deep dive into the impact of weather disasters on global agriculture and “food security.”

The “increasing severity and frequency (of weather disasters), from 100 per year in the 1970s to around 400 events per year in the past 20 years, affect agrifood systems across multiple dimensions, compromising food security and undermining the sustainability of the agriculture sector.”

That impact, “an average loss of USD (\$)123 billion per year,” estimates the FAO, hits everyone in the global food chain but its “highest relative losses (are) on lower- and lower-middle-income countries.”

War and crises “such as the COVID-19 pandemic” hammer both sides of the food equation—food growers “as well as input and output markets” that “result in negative effects on the wider agrifood system...” to bring more instability to an already wobbling international food market.

Both reports all but beg for immediate international action to reduce climate risk while developing “more scalable farm-level” solutions to address the looming food crisis.

What neither analyzes, however, is if anyone is listening.





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# 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](mailto:tenright@wisconsinfarmersunion.com)

**ON THE COVER:**

Our cover photo this month was captured by Brigid Ferkett of Gravel Road Farm in Waupaca, WI.

