

**2025**

# ANNUAL REPORT

**WISCONSIN FARMERS UNION**





# OUR MISSION

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Wisconsin Farmers Union is a member driven organization that is committed to enhancing the quality of life for family farmers, rural communities, and all people through education, cooperation, and civic engagement.



## FROM THE PRESIDENT

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This year once again demonstrated the strength of Wisconsin Farmers Union. Across the state, members stepped forward to share their stories and experiences, and that collective voice brought more media attention to WFU than ever before.



Reporters, policymakers, and community leaders took notice because farmers and rural residents were willing to speak honestly about the challenges they face and the solutions they believe in.

Whether the focus was local food systems, funding freezes, or consolidation in agriculture, WFU's presence grew through consistent advocacy and clear, grounded testimony. Grassroots leadership continued to shine at chapter events, youth programs, farm tours, policy discussions, and national meetings. The opening of our new headquarters at Market on River added another space for community connection and visibility.

WFU's strength has always come from the willingness of members to engage, learn, and lead. That commitment shaped a successful and impactful 2025, and it positions the organization well for the work ahead.

*Darin Von Ruden*  
*Wisconsin Farmers Union President*

## STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

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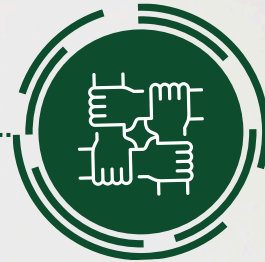
**Empower Family Farmers  
and Advance Rural Communities**



**Engage and Grow  
WFU Membership**



**Strengthen the  
WFU Organization**





# 2025 Quarterly Highlights



## January-March

- Farm & Rural Lobby Day
- Next Crop Leadership Retreat
- Hosted federal funding freeze town hall
- NFU Convention in Oklahoma



## April-June

- Membership tour across six counties
- For Farmers' Sake D.C. Fly-In & La Crosse press event
- Day camps held around the state
- WFU hosted National Farmers Union's State-to State Forum



## July-September

- Summer Conference
- Family-Scale Agriculture as a Climate Change Solution Webinar
- Hosted Farmers Union Enterprises Leadership Program
- National Farmers Union Fly-In
- Overnight Summer Youth Camps



## October-December

- Annual meetings and policy discussions
- County presidents meeting and grassroots policy development
- Camp 2026 launch party
- 95<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention





# Membership in Action



This past year showcased the strength, creativity, and commitment of Wisconsin Farmers Union members across the state. From farm tours to youth camps, leadership retreats, and monthly social hours, our chapters continued to build community, deepen relationships, and welcome new people into the work. WFU's impact is rooted in the energy and engagement of our members—people who believe in a fairer, more connected, and more resilient Wisconsin.



## 2009

WFU member households in 2025



## 35+

events attended with WFU booth



## 127+

chapter meetings and events



## 950+

earned media mentions



## Next Crop & Leadership Development

- Highly successful Next Crop Leadership Retreat with 30 emerging leaders
- Updated and expanded Leader Manual and leadership-growth resources
- Member highlight articles featured throughout the year in the WFU Newsletter
- Hosted the multi-state Farmers Union Enterprises Leadership Program in Door County in July



## Youth & Community Education

- Multiple day camps and youth programming coordinated with the Education Department
- Chapters partnering directly with staff to deliver hands-on, community-based educational opportunities
- Successful statewide Membership Tour with 13 stops across Wisconsin





## Growing Community

The first year for WFU's new headquarters project, Market on River, was a resounding success. At this vibrant hub for farmers, makers, neighbors, and small businesses, WFU hosted dozens of events, hundreds of vendors, and growing opportunities. MOR has quickly become a cornerstone of community life along the Chippewa River.

- Hosted **70+ events** in its inaugural year, activating the space for artisans, families, and community gatherings
- Welcomed more than **266 vendors** across Monthly Markets, Sundays at MOR, and pop-up events
- **10 residents** now call Market on River home
- **9 small businesses** operate out of Market on River

## Supporting Local

- Market on River businesses actively supported WFU farmer members by purchasing ingredients directly from local farms
- Hosted large-scale pop-up events (such as the November "Holiday Market" with **40 local pop-up vendors**) that spotlighted regional makers, drove foot traffic, and expanded market opportunities for small businesses and WFU-member farms

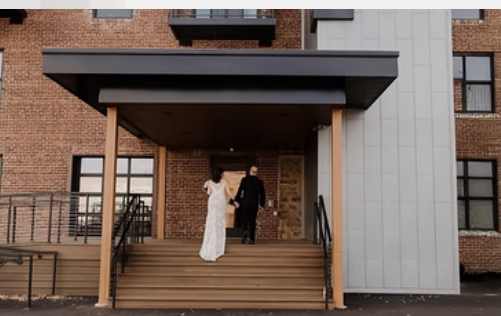
## RIVER STREET KITCHEN

AT MARKET ON RIVER

New culinary opportunities are emerging at River Street Kitchen, WFU's shared-use commercial kitchen, including chef collaborations, farm-to-table pop-ups, cooking classes, and community meals



The Mercantile is WFU's store within Market on River. The 'Merc' features local products from our farmer members and WFU merchandise







# POLICY & ADVOCACY

## New Resources

- Launched The Policy Note, a new monthly digest of WFU's advocacy work at the State Capitol (Be sure to subscribe!)
- Updated and published all 16 Policy Briefs on the WFU website
- Revamped Government Relations hub on the WFU website, featuring:
  - Policy & Key Issues
  - Special Orders of Business
  - Member Committees
  - Take Action portal

### Farm & Rural Lobby Day

61 Attendees | 42 Meetings



## Policy Engagement



### Testified on 9 bills, including:

- Transition to Grazing (SB 113/AB 118)
- Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SB 284/AB 222)
- PFAS Regulation (SB 127/128)
- Nutrient Loss Reduction Program (AB 310)
- Farm Link Program (AB 411)
- Hemp Definition Update (AB 503)



### Taken a position on 38 legislative issues



**Led a statewide coalition** to continue the advancement of common sense Cottage Foods legislation (Apr–Dec 2025)



**Led meetings with lawmakers** during NFU Week of Action in DC and La Crosse

### National Farmers Union Legislative Fly-in

19 WFU Attendees  
21 Meetings





## State Budget Wins

- \$150 million expansion of the Agricultural Roads Improvement Program (20% for small local bridges)
- Cover Crop Rebate Program: \$800,000/year
- Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Program: \$1 million/year
- Meat Processor Grants: \$700,000/year
- Dairy Processor Grants: \$600,000/year
- Buy Local Buy Wisconsin: \$200,000/year
- Tribal Elder Food Box Program: \$1.5 million/year
- Strengthened funding for UW System, farmer mental health programs, and Wisconsin Farm Center

## Member Action & Campaigns

- WI LFPA Campaign: 1,281 letters sent • 21,313 social media impressions
- SNAP Advocacy: 348 letters sent • 2,644 social media impressions
- Other campaigns:
  - 287(g) Immigration Enforcement
  - DATCP Livestock Fees
  - OBBB Vote
  - ACA Tax Credit Expiration
  - Right to Repair



## Special Orders of Business

WFO members and staff brought our grassroots policy to life throughout the year, advancing action on the Special Orders of Business adopted at the 2024 Convention. From testimony and coalition work to local outreach and media engagement, WFO championed these member-driven priorities:



### Quality Health Insurance in Wisconsin

Elevated farmers' voices on the cost of coverage and supported expanded access to affordable, comprehensive care.



### Local Food Purchase Assistance Program

Mobilized members to send more than 1,200 letters and calls urging continued state funding to strengthen farm-to-table connections.



### Fair Legislative Maps

Called for independent nonpartisan redistricting commission to ensure rural representation and a fair democracy.



### Concentration in the Agriculture Industry

Advocated for fair markets, antitrust enforcement, and stronger support for small and mid-sized farms.



### Combatting Climate Change

Promoted farmer-led conservation programs and sustainable energy investments through testimony, education, and policy partnerships.





# Youth Program Highlights

In addition to another year of successful camp programming, WFU Education Department's annual accomplishments include:

- Networking and learning at events with our senior campers, such as the Youth as Partners in Civic Leadership Conference
- Guest farmer speakers at summer camps
- Celebrating WI youth Ruby Sheaffer being elected to NFU National Youth Advisory Council
- Partnering with libraries to bring agriculture into rural storytimes
- Hosting a camp launch party to kick off 2026 registration

**210**

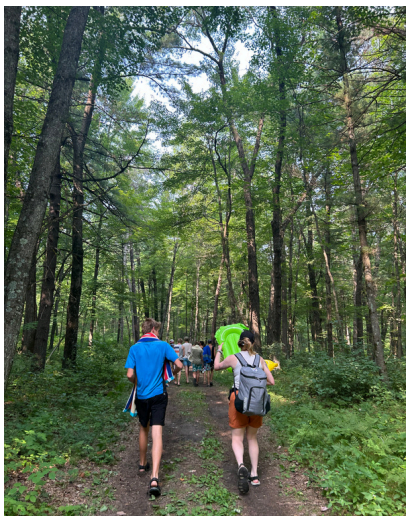
**CAMPERS**  
including those  
at Kamp  
Kenwood's 4  
overnight camps  
and 7 day camps  
across the state

**50%**

**OF CAMP FOOD**  
sourced by local  
producers



**Join us in 2026!**  
sign up at [kampkenwood.com](http://kampkenwood.com)





# Conservation & Stewardship

Conservation ethic continues to be braided into WFU's ethos and policy book. As we continue to build expertise in conservation on farms, we're connecting our conservation work throughout WFU's greater mission.

- Our Conservation Team has provided input to several proposed policies through the Governmental Relations Department.
- We're presenting on the connection between consolidation and concentration in agriculture and climate change.
- Staff are promoting local foods as one of the solutions to watershed protection and climate mitigation.
- Members have been working with staff through our conservation-focused committees to expand the conversation and build opportunities across chapters to improve our policies to conserve resources in Wisconsin.



*Wisconsin Farmers Union members and staff participated in a renewable energy tour in Fond du Lac and Dodge Counties.*



*Leaders from the South Kinnickinnic Farmer-Led Watershed Council examining a Kernza crop before harvest at a Kernza educational event in Pierce County.*

## Small Farm Sustainability Stipend

# \$24,400

**AWARDED to 13 farms**

The goal of the stipend program is to support sustainability practices that improve the farms and the ecosystems they're in. Funds went toward projects such as tree establishment, cover crops, rotational grazing and renewable energy farm tech upgrades.

“I want to thank Wisconsin Farmers Union very much for the grant you provided to help my farm. I was able to purchase electric fencing to better rotational graze my sheep around the farm especially along my river pasture where I worry about my young lambs falling in. - Louis Medina, KnL Organics Farm”

## Soil Health & Watershed Protection

# 21

**EDUCATIONAL EVENTS focused on water quality.**

Conservation staff directly reached **over 650 attendees** through 1:1 conversations, presentations and field days.

Our watershed coordinator continued to support 5 farmer-led watershed councils in northwest Wisconsin, helping them provide **\$69,400 toward watershed protection practices** like cover crops, nutrient management, and rotational grazing.

## Renewable Energy

# 10

**EVENTS with over 250 attendees.**

We're focused on getting people out to solar fields in order to understand the potential concerns and opportunities of solar farming, agrivoltaics, and land protection.

We're also looking for ways to expand distributed energy generation potential through things like our rooftop solar webinar and promoting small-scale and community solar where possible.



# MEET THE TEAM

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# GROW WITH US

## *In 2026*

The Wisconsin Farmers Union membership is made up of people from all walks of agriculture and life. From conventional to organic, rural to urban, our members find shared values in an organization that empowers them to have a voice in the issues that matter to our farms and communities.

Wisconsin Farmers Union isn't just for farmers. We also welcome ag professionals, rural residents, and consumers who want to advocate for family farms.

*Like what you see? Get involved!*

- Sign up as a member today! A one-year membership is only \$30 for the whole family.
- Already a member? Chances are, you know someone whose values align with WFU. Invite them to join!
- Connect with a local chapter to plug into the community of Farmers Union. Find a chapter map at [wisconsinfarmersunion.com/chapters](http://wisconsinfarmersunion.com/chapters)
- Donate to our work to improve the quality of life for family farmers, rural communities, and all people.

[www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com](http://www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com)



## Connect with us!

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