

MAY/JUNE 2023



NEWS

UNITED TO GROW FAMILY AGRICULTURE

WFU LAUNCHES LOCAL FOOD DIRECTORY

**SPEAK UP
ON THE
FARM BILL**

MICHAEL PERRY
SLATED TO SPEAK AT
SUMMER CONFERENCE

Don't Mind the Mud



Danielle Endvick

Communications Director

We're in the throes of Mother Nature's spring tantrums as I write this. One minute, I'm stepping out onto the porch steps, my morning cup of coffee in-hand, enjoying the sunrise and the chorus of songbirds commingled with the sandhill cranes that have returned to the farm. The next, we're steeped in another foot of snow that slowly melts into rivers of slop in the pasture.

The swinging pendulum of spring can wreak havoc on even the most optimistic soul, despite knowing the mucky mayhem is a spring rite of passage.

While tuning into a recent podcast by Mel Robbins, former lawyer turned motivational speaker, author, and podcast sensation, I was inspired by how she views particularly challenging segments – and seasons – of life as "bridges." When the going gets tough, she notes that you're likely on a bridge; it might feel a bit rickety or wobbly like an old swinging rope bridge, but it is helping you get to where you need to go next, and the only way to go is forward.

We know sunny days are ahead. Likewise, as we take on the big issues of the day, we know that Farmers Union is helping to build a bridge through the muck – building community, speaking up, and forging a better future for the generations that follow.

Throughout this issue, you'll see evidence of the work WFU is doing to lessen the mire and inspire change.

One of our most anticipated upcoming projects is the Wisconsin Local Food Directory, which members will be able to opt into for marketing to consumers and institutional buyers. Learn more on page 6.

WFU's recent investment in a property in downtown Chippewa Falls, which will house our headquarters, an exciting food hall and more, will also create opportunities to spotlight local products and create added value for the membership. See page 10 for an update on that project, including some fun new design concepts. Please also join us in welcoming Jackie Boos, who will help secure vendors and partners for this project. Connect with her if you're interested in being involved!

We're also extremely excited to announce that Michael Perry will join us at Summer Conference in July. Learn about his latest book and find event details on page 8.

The following pages also include a host of inspiring leaders who are stepping up – through the WFU Emerging Leaders Program, Farmers Union Enterprises Leadership (FUEL) cohort, Beginning Farmers Institute, and more. It's invigorating to know we're not plodding along the bridge alone.

So roll up your sleeves, pull on those mud boots, and join us in shaking off the muck. A little dirt never bothered this crew, and there is a role for all of us in speaking up for rural issues, improving the outlook for family farmers, and building community. Farmers Union is up to the task.

Endvick raises beef cattle, chickens, and a pair of rambunctious boys on her Runamuck Ranch near Holcombe. She can be reached at 715-471-0398 or at dendvick@wisconsinfarmersunion.com.



THE RIG IS UP

Time to say goodbye to gerrymandering



Julie Keown-Bomar
Executive Director

As I watched the Joint Finance Committee (JFC) hearing in Eau Claire April 6th, I was on the horns of a dilemma. The room was packed with hundreds of people all wanting to have their voices heard on budget priorities that mattered greatly to them. People shared stories of dire child care struggles, infrastructure concerns, and the need for clean water for all. I was moved as I always am by democracy in action. Be that as it may, I was let down by some JFC leaders sitting on the dais. I knew by looking at stoic, disengaged faces that for a few leaders with strongly predetermined agendas and secure political seats, they were just going through the motions.

Because of gerrymandering, majority leaders sitting in safe seats that their party designed know they don't have to listen to the needs of Wisconsin citizens, even though they have a \$7 billion dollar surplus this next budget and the opportunity to do a lot of good throughout the state. Those in the minority party are controlled and limited by the lines drawn around their basically blue districts and they don't have to listen to us "out state" folks either. The fates are predetermined, and it's bad for democracy.

Wisconsinites took time off jobs and made sacrifices to spend an

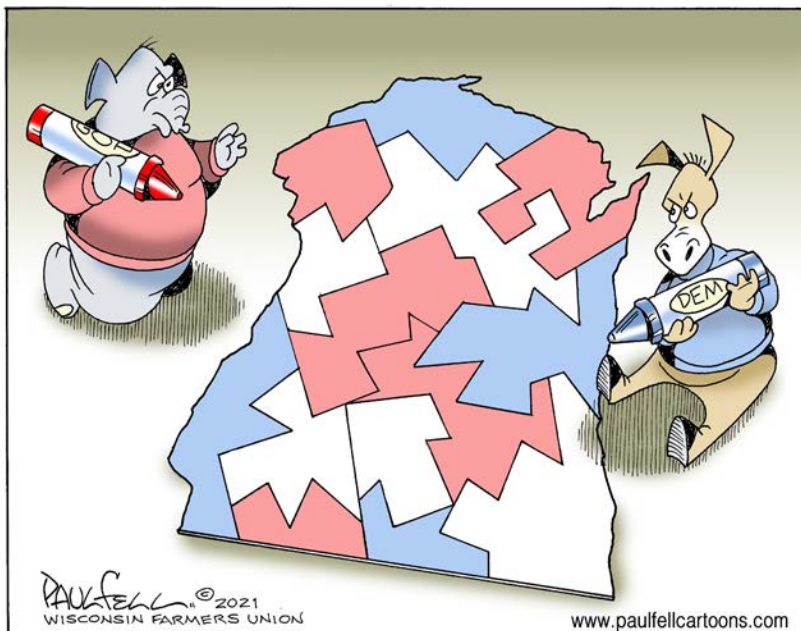
entire day to have their voices heard for two minutes in front of the committee. WFU members like Tom Kriegel, Jen Schmitz, and Tina Hinchley, to name a few, waited hours to have the opportunity to speak for two minutes on priority issues. The Farmers Union staff worked hard to analyze policies, develop a budget toolkit, and organize with partner organizations to advocate on shared issues. Rural organizers phoned members to encourage and assist them in testifying effectively. We keep trying despite how gerrymandering stifles our voices.

Wisconsin is nearly evenly divided between Democrats and Republicans. Governor Evers won 51 to 48 percent in the fall election, but Republicans disproportionately control nearly two-thirds of the legislative seats – largely due to gerrymandering to strategically pool voters into easily winnable districts.

Although Wisconsin Farmers Union sometimes gets labeled as "progressive" it's a lot more mainstream and old school populist than the two dominant parties. WFU members are willing to stand up to either party if they

are not standing up for the needs of the majority of voters. Regardless of political affiliation, most members agree that gerrymandering strangles democratic participation, and we've had policy pushing back against the practice for years. We don't believe elected officials should receive a built-in advantage and not have to listen or compromise because their seats

See page 5 ► RIGGED



Three Wisconsin farmers chosen for Beginning Farmer Institute

Three Wisconsin farmers are among the eleven chosen to participate in the 2023-2024 cohort of the National Farmers Union's Beginning Farmer Institute. The program aims to support the next generation in American agriculture. Over the course of nine months, attendees will participate in four sessions focused on technical training, mentorship, and leadership development.

Hannah Alden of Dorchester, Mallaidh Mleziva of Whitelaw, and Melissa Mahon Stein of Soldiers Grove will represent Wisconsin in the program.

Established in 2011, BFI was created to help address concerns about the rapidly aging farm population. According to the most recent Census of Agriculture, farmers older than 65 outnumber those younger than 35 by more than six to one, raising serious questions about who will be operating America's farms in the coming decades.

"The Beginning Farmer Institute is building the next generation of leaders for Farmers Union and their communities" said NFU President Rob Larew. "It's no secret that as farmers, we need to set the next generation of farmers up for success. I am immensely proud of our team for putting words into action and building out this program."

This scarcity of young and beginning farmers is not due to a lack of interest - rather, it is due to immense barriers to entry, including the difficulty of land acquisition, high upfront costs, and a shortage of educational opportunities.

During the program's hands-on training sessions, participants will gain practical skills to overcome any hurdles they may face, including business planning, accounting, insurance, and labor management. The program will employ the Farm and Ranch Business Health Assessment, a tool used to help farmers set goals for strengthening their business.

The future of agriculture benefits from strong, vibrant, and diverse farmers and ranchers. It's our mission to make that future possible. BFI will help us get there.

Other farmers selected to participate include Tammy Copenhaver (MT); British Griffis (IL); Lexi Linsenman (MO); Anjelica Lusco (KY); April Marquart (ND); Slade Sizemore (PA); Laurel Smith (CO); and Romondo Woods II (MI).

The NFU Foundation has continued to grow BFI through the generous support of CHS Foundation, Farm Credit, and Farmers Union Industries Foundation. Learn more about BFI at nfu.org/beginning-farmer-institute/.



MEMBER BENEFITS

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

wisconsinfarmersunion.com/benefits
nfu.org/benefits




































WFU hiring for women in conservation role

Wisconsin Farmers Union is hiring a part-time Regional Coordinator for Wisconsin Women Championing Conservation. The role will work with a team of agricultural and natural resources advocates to promote and develop outreach for a new project that is designed to provide women with the knowledge and resources needed to transform their lives through the incorporation of conservation practices.

This position is based in Northeast Wisconsin. Learn more at wisconsinfarmersunion.com/employment

Apply for Next Generation Advisory Council

National Farmers Union (NFU) is searching for a Next Generation Advisory Representative (NGAR) to assist with the organization's outreach and engagement with young and beginning farmers.

The person in this role participates in NFU Board of

Directors meetings as a non-voting member and brings an informative, innovative perspective. The NGAR provides input on industry trends and develops strategies designed to engage the next generation of farmers.

The term of office is 3-years, with responsibilities including attending quarterly NFU board meetings (usually 3-4 days each, including travel). Associated costs (including travel, meals, and incidental expenses) will be paid or reimbursed by National Farmers Union.

Applicants should submit the following documents by May 13th to be considered for this role: 1) Resume, 2) personalized introduction letter describing connection to Farmers Union and interest in the position, 3) letter(s) of recommendation, and 4) a description of your farm operation or experience.

Applications can be submitted to Senior Director of Engagement Emma McCormick at emccormick@nfudc.org. Applications will be reviewed by NFU and notified of their status by August 1.

From page 3 ► RIGGED are drawn by increasingly well funded political and corporate interests, not the voters.

Many people who would be great public servants are discouraged from running for office because of gerrymandering. It's like the dilemma many face with farm succession—if you are going to lose, why go into it? It's not true that young people don't want to participate in politics or farming, they just don't want to fight a system that is rigged against them and appears corrupt.

WFU's grassroots membership still believes that government and the economy should work for ordinary people and if that gets labeled as extreme or too progressive, well then I call on you to take a closer look at the definition of democracy. Equality, freedom, and order – values that this country was founded on – are always going to cause debate and even clash. However, aren't they worth compromising on so we can keep living this unique experiment with democracy? Let's demand a system for debating common values and compromising instead of destroying the systems that can serve all people well when functioning properly.

Sparks of hope

What gives me hope is that for the first time in over a decade, with the recent State Supreme Court election, we have a chance to end gerrymandering in the state. This is great news for a functioning state democracy.

It also appears that some are willing to listen and if we can end gerrymandering, many more will be too. Senator Joan Ballweg (R-Markesan) chair of the Agriculture committee and majority caucus vice-chair, indi-

cated on a recent Wisconsin Public Radio segment that she understands how the lack of childcare is affecting the workforce, she supports well testing, and more support for producer-led watershed grant programs – all issues that WFU has been elevating this budget cycle. She held listening sessions and genuinely listened. So did others on both sides of the aisle. WFU members who went to Farm & Rural Lobby Day in January met with elected officials and noted that this year that they listened more than in years past. That is a bit more like it, elected folks!

Our belief in non-partisan reasoning is the challenge and the strength of WFU. We hold up a Big Tent with many different farmers and political ideologies represented under it. That is a rarity nowadays. However, we do believe in a common set of values. We are non-partisan, we believe in civic engagement and cooperation, and we don't want politicians choosing their voters. They work for us, and we believe voters should have a fair shot in choosing their elected officials.

I long for the day when I attend a JFC listening session and all of the folks on the dais really pay attention because they believe in the power of the constituents and not only the power of their party.

Thanks to those of you who participated in the listening sessions and all of you who participated in our grassroots movement. It's all worth fighting for and your engagement matters.

Keown-Bomar can be reached at jbomar@wisconsinfarmersunion.com.



Farmers Union set to launch Wisconsin Local Food Directory

CONNECTING INSTITUTIONAL
AND DIRECT MARKET
BUYERS TO LOCAL FOOD!



By Forrest Humphrey

Local Foods Organizer

Wisconsin Farmers Union has teamed up with the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection, Marbleseed, and the Wisconsin Food Hub Cooperative on a grant-funded project called the Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) program. The aim of this program is to strengthen local food systems across the state by getting local food into the hands of hunger relief organizations. While other states have similar programs, LFPA is special in that we are providing funding directly to farmers in the form of contracts for the growing season.

A few weeks ago I had a chance to speak with Michael and Angie Lungren, WI-LFPA participants and new members of Farmers Union. Michael and Angie operate Rocky Run Farm near Tomah. They expressed their excitement at being able to provide vegetables to the LFPA program:

"We have a tremendous passion to grow healthy vegetables to provide to others using organic practices. This program will be a huge asset in helping us do that."

- Michael and Angie Lungren, Rocky Run Farm

In addition to participating in the WI-LFPA program, The Lungrens sell produce throughout the growing season at the Sparta and Camp Douglas Farmers Markets and also deliver produce to the greater La Crosse area.

For many WI-LFPA farmers like Michael and Angie, farmers markets are a central part of their livelihood. The relationships built with consumers through continual presence at farmers markets is critical. Wisconsin Farmers Union is in a great position to help producers foster these relationships.

Through the WI-LFPA grant, our WFU team has been tasked with creating a database of small producers across the state. This database, called the Local Food Directory, will allow farmers to create a profile for their farm and list the types of products they have available. In turn, institutions, wholesale purchasers, food security programs, and consumers can search for producers in their region. This directory is available to all WFU members regardless of participation in the WI-LFPA program.

The hope is that this directory will allow small and mid-sized farms to connect with their communities in new ways that ultimately make local food systems stronger and more resilient.

In May, WFU members have the opportunity to opt into the directory and create a farm profile. I hope that people take advantage of this opportunity – the strength of the directory depends on strong social networks.

If you have questions about the WI-LFPA program or the Local Food Directory, please contact Forrest Humphrey at 715-450-9179 or fhumphrey@wisconsinfarmersunion.com.



*Wisconsin Farmers Union
Local Food Directory
Webinar*

**MAY 2ND
6-7PM VIA ZOOM**

Learn how to access the Local Food Directory and start making connections with new consumers!

Visit 'Events' page at wilocalfood.org for link



CALLING ALL FARMERS UNION MEMBERS!

Help us help you.

Wisconsin Farmers Union is updating our records through a member questionnaire. Your answers will help us better serve our members and ensure that you're getting the most relevant information from our organization.

Please be sure to fill out the email questionnaire WFU sends May 1st.



We look forward to serving you in 2023!

Coming soon!

THE WISCONSIN LOCAL FOOD DIRECTORY

Farmers who complete the WFU member questionnaire will have the first opportunity to join the new WI Local Food Directory.

This directory will be a great way to connect to Wisconsin's local food network and increase visibility for your farm.

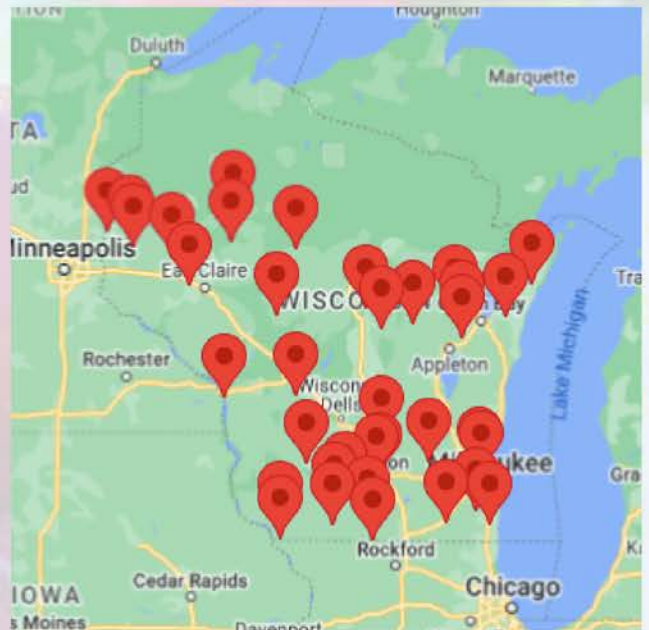
Please fill out the questionnaire regardless of whether you want to participate in the directory so we can update your membership information.

The directory allows you to share:

- Farm name and/or logo
- Farm Description
- Keywords for easy search access
- Product and/or farm images
- Contact information

Buyers will be able to search by keywords, city, or in categories like agritourism, dairy, eggs, flowers/herbs, vegetables, fruits, meat, value-added products & non-edible products

LEARN MORE AT WILOCALFOOD.ORG



TACKLING THE TOUGH STUFF

Known for his homespun humor, Michael Perry shifts gears with latest work on rural mental health.

Julian Emerson

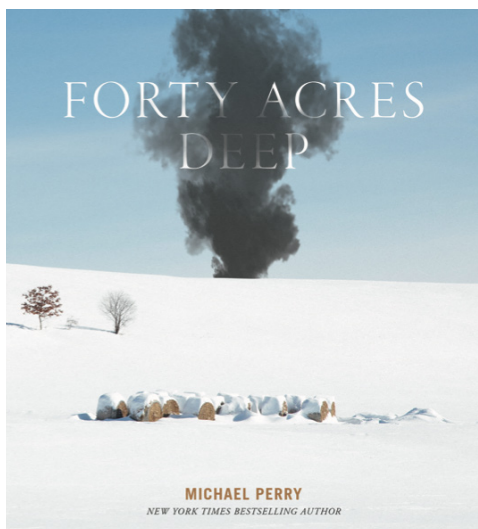
Rural Voices Correspondent

When national best-selling author and former farm kid Michael Perry wrote his latest book, "Forty Acres Deep," about a farmer's struggles with mental health, he worried the heavy topic might surprise and deter some of his readers, who are used to the homespun humor of his previous works.

"I knew this would be different than a lot of my work," Perry told me during an interview shortly after the release of his book. "I knew it was a more difficult topic. It's definitely not an easy book to read, from an emotional standpoint. There aren't a lot of bright, uplifting moments in there."

There certainly aren't. The book's fictional main character, Harold, faces mental health challenges even deeper than the seemingly never-ending snow that continues to fall throughout the story. The snow is not only a literal hazard to Harold's livelihood but a symbolic piling on of one difficulty after another that threatens to melt him.

Perry was right to write about farmers' mental health in a stark, hardscrabble way, as evidenced by the book's brisk sales. In fact, based on my conversations and interviews with farmers in recent years, Perry's dark depiction



of Harold and his mental health challenges are spot on.

I've spoken with farmers – seemingly relatively happy individuals – who have acknowledged pointing a loaded gun at their head, contemplating their seemingly bleak futures, and doubting whether it is worth sticking around for.

Others have described the soul-searing sense of failure they feel when they lose money year after year, placing their family's finances in jeopardy. How do you reconcile working ever harder only to lose ever more money?

Others tearfully talk about how the never-ending pressures of farming and losing the only way of life they have

ever known has led their husband or wife or grandfather or son to kill themselves, leaving an unhappy trail of grief, what-ifs and heartbreak in their wake.

"No matter what I tried, I couldn't convince him that it would be okay, that we would make it through. Losing the farm just broke him, and he couldn't live with that," one wife of a farmer who took his life told me.

'Didn't see any way out'

I was at Paul Adams' farm near Eleva on the March day in 2020 when he sold his beloved dairy herd because his once-profitable operation had gone bankrupt. Adams had done everything farmers are supposed to do to remain in business in an increasingly competitive industry. He purchased more cows to find operational efficiencies. He had transformed his farm into an organic one, and found a profitable market for his milk. For a time he prospered, and he grew some more.

Then the USDA relaxed the rules that organic dairy farms must abide by. Suddenly Adams' 800-cow herd was competing against farms of 5,000 or more cows. His only way to stay solvent was to borrow more money. But banks wouldn't let him take on more debt. Suddenly, the way of life he had known for all of his 68 years, on this same farm

WELLNESS RESOURCES

24/7 Wisconsin Farmer Wellness Helpline

1-888-901-2558

*Around the clock support for farmers
struggling with suicidal thoughts,
depression, or anxiety*

Tele-Counseling

1-888-901-2558

Free, confidential counseling

Counseling Vouchers

1-888-942-2474

Assists with \$ for in-person counseling



Photo by Danielle Endvick
Paul Adams on the day his dairy herd
sold in 2020. He has since become
a rural mental health advocate and
champion for other dairy farmers.

that had been in his family since the late 1800s, was finished.

Without farming, Adams didn't know what to do with himself. His feelings of helplessness and depression grew worse. As his struggles continued, Adams seriously contemplated killing himself in two different ways and became more determined to do so.

"I had just gotten to a point where I didn't have any hope, and I didn't see any way out of it," Adams told me.

Brittany Olson, a farmer and Wisconsin Farmers Union member, previewed Perry's book to offer feedback about its depiction of farmers' mental health. She described Perry's work as "a beau-

tifully grim and accurate depiction of terminal depression."

"I know a lot of farmers like the protagonist in the book, those strong and stoic and silent types, and it's that character mold that has contributed to some of the stigma surrounding mental health in agriculture," Olson said. "It's a brutal and good reminder to check on each other once in a while."

Suicides on the rise

Unfortunately, Adams is far from alone. According to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS), suicides climbed substantially in recent years. From 2010 to 2020, more than 800 people died from suicide annually.

That figure has risen 32% since 2020.

DHS doesn't track suicides by occupation, but health experts say suicide rates in rural regions have increased markedly and are of concern. Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) Secretary Randy Romanski acknowledged those concerns and said his department, along with DHS and others, are working to connect farmers with mental health services.

"Farmers face so many challenges and so much that is beyond their control, and we are trying to reach out to them and get the help that they need," Romanski said, noting the expansion of farmer mental health initiatives, such as a voucher program linking farmers to mental health care services.

Thankfully, some farmers are getting the help they need. Adams is among them. As a Farmers Union member, he has become a strong advocate for changes to the current agriculture structure that makes it difficult for family farmers to compete. He traveled to Washington, DC twice last year to share his story on fly-ins, in an effort to spur change and help other farmers.

"I feel so fortunate to be in the place I am today," Adams said. "I know what it's like to be in a dark place. And there are more farmers out there facing that than I think we realize."

Perry agrees. He has watched farmers he knows fight the good fight before going out of business. And in whatever ways it can, he hopes his book prompts farmers and others to ponder mental health needs and seek help if they need it. The last page of his book lists multiple mental health resources.

"There are people all over fighting lonely battles," Perry said. "If in some way this book can help people reach out, that would be a good outcome."

Perry will be the featured speaker at WFU's Summer Conference July 14th at Kamp Kenwood in Chippewa Falls. Dive into his humor-filled early works and the tough topics tackled in "Forty Acres Deep." The day will also lift up good things in the countryside, including WFU chapters and youth. Seating is limited. RSVP at 715-723-5561 or wisconsinfarmersunion.com/events


INVITES YOU TO
SUMMER CONFERENCE
FRIDAY, JULY 14TH 2023
9AM-2PM, KAMP KENWOOD, CHIPPEWA FALLS, WI
Seating is limited. RSVP today!
wisconsinfarmersunion.com/events or 715-723-5561

Bring your best pie for the pie contest!
*Kamp Kenwood is a nut-free facility

FEATURING SPECIAL GUEST
MICHAEL PERRY
Our keynote speaker will be Michael Perry, accidental *New York Times* bestselling author, humorist, singer/songwriter, amateur snow plow driver, and playwright from New Auburn, WI.





Photo by Danielle Endvick

The River Street building, purchased by Wisconsin Farmers Union in 2022, is adjacent to the family farm organization's long-time state headquarters (right) and creates ample business opportunities for the future.

WFU INVESTS IN THE FUTURE WITH RIVER STREET PROJECT

By Jackie Boos, Facilities Director

“

CHIPPEWA FALLS IS OUR HISTORIC HOME AND WE WANT TO HELP RESTORE VITALITY TO BOTH THE COMMUNITY AND TO WISCONSIN FAMILY FARMS THROUGH OUR EFFORTS. WE ARE SO EXCITED ABOUT THE FUTURE.

JULIE KEOWN-BOMAR
WISCONSIN FARMERS UNION
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

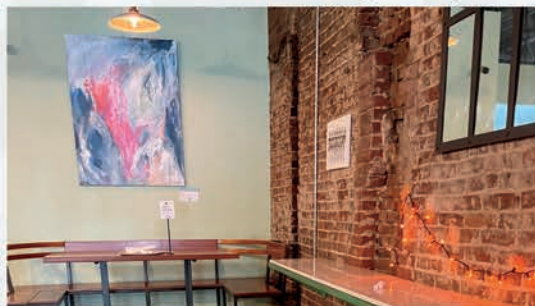
”

Wisconsin Farmers Union has purchased a perfectly positioned property in downtown Chippewa Falls to centralize our State Headquarters, accommodate our growing team, and enhance the organization's visibility. This location has a high daily traffic count of just under 8,000 vehicles and is accessible by walking bike trails, and vehicles.

WFU has planned a large-scale economic development project that will benefit members and create a hub of activity that includes a food hall, professional studio spaces, venue rental, and apartments. There will also be a natural tie-in with supporting you, our farmer members, and we want to hear from you!

The design of the building is underway and will be a custom build for the right businesses that fit our vision for local food destination. If you are interested, please get in touch with Jackie Boos at 715.450.4322 or jboos@wisconsinfarmersunion.com to schedule a call or tour. This project is moving rapidly so a swift response time is appreciated.

Below: The vision is inspired by food halls like this one in Nashville.



VISION

This historic River Street building will serve as a downtown destination, featuring local food vendors that procure ingredients and products from Wisconsin farmers, community event spaces, office space, rooftop solar panels, and desirable housing.

GOALS

- Bolster downtown economy
- Leverage the new downtown Riverfront Park
- Support small businesses through financial opportunity
- Help farmers access markets to improve their bottom line



Boos signs on to spearhead River Street project

Jackie Boos has been hired by Wisconsin Farmers Union (WFU) to coordinate the management of its properties, including its state headquarters on Spring Street, Kamp Kenwood youth camp and event venue, and a historic building the nonprofit recently purchased on River Street in downtown Chippewa Falls.



As Facilities Director, Boos will manage the properties to their fullest potential within the mission of the organization. Prior to signing on with WFU, Boos was the Tourism Director at the Chippewa Falls Chamber.

"Jackie brings exceptional skills and expertise to Farmers Union at a critical time," said WFU Executive Director Julie Keown-Bomar. "With the launch of our renovation project in Chippewa Falls, we were looking for someone with business acumen, creativity, and local knowledge. Jackie is the perfect fit. Her passion for rural revitalization will be put to use starting on day one."

The 128 W. River Street building, which historically housed the Chippewa Valley Mercantile Co., is adjacent to the Spring Street building that has housed WFU's headquarters since the 1940s. WFU purchased the new 45,000 square foot building last spring when Machine Tool Camp outgrew the space. The organization plans to turn the stately brick building into a downtown destination featuring local food vendors, shifting its office space to the second floor, and offering apartments on the third floor. The first phase of construction is anticipated to begin this summer.

"I'm looking forward to being a part of creating an amazing platform for our mission to shine through with the efforts of the redevelopment of River Street, Kamp Kenwood, and our existing headquarters," Boos said. "There is a lot of growth happening in Chippewa Falls and Farmers Union will be at the helm of the advancement. I am joining a force of talent within the WFU staff, and I look forward to advancing our messaging, support, and membership."

Boos has been an active member of the community and lives in Tilden with her family. She began her new duties on March 27th and can be reached at jboos@wisconsinfarmersunion.com or 715-450-4322.



Above: St. Croix County Farmers Union is known for its famous deep-fried Ellsworth Cheese Curds.

St. Croix County Farmers Union set to sling curds, host events

St. Croix County Farmers Union will be selling deep-fried cheese curds again this summer. Catch them at:

- Music on the River at Riverfront Park in Amery from 4-9pm on June 16th, July 21st, and August 18th
- Amery Fall Festival on September 16th
- Baldwin Chilifest on September 23rd

The chapter is excited for St Croix County's Farm City Day at the Croes Udder Dairy Saturday August 12th.

Save the date for a special on-farm harvest dinner on September 16th, too!

Mark your calendar for the Annual Meeting October 16th at Stanton Town Hall, too.

Want to connect and find out how you can plug in with these fun events? The St. Croix County Farmers Union board welcomes visitors to their meetings:

- June 5th Stanton Town Hall
- July 9th Stanton Town hall
- Aug 13th Stanton Town hall
- Sept 11th Stanton Town hall
- Oct 16th, at Stanton Town Hall

Pepin-Pierce County Farmers Union plans summer events

It's been a long winter and a somewhat cruel spring, but soon the weather will be good for those activities we all love, such as gardening, getting the fields planted, and watching young animals frisk on healthy pastures.

Pepin-Pierce Farmers Union invites you to the following events:

- April 30, 9am (alternate date in case of wind: May 1 at 9 am), Barringer Family Farm, N4815 810th Street, Ellsworth, 651-755-1600. Work party and potluck lunch. The chapter is piloting a new activity, Many Hands, designed to share farming skills while providing help to members with tasks that benefit from, well, many hands. Our first event will be a hoophouse skinning. RSVP to Heather at barringerfamilyfarms@gmail.com for food count and so we can contact you in case wind is high.

- June 3, 1pm, Baldur Farm, N7659 950th Street, River Falls. Renting small acreage for specialty crops, farm tour and discussion from both renter and landowners. Maureen Ash and Rich Purdy have been renting a small plot to Joyce for several years. Joyce will talk about her garden and how she markets it to the Kenyan community in the Twin Cities. Juliet Tomkins and Prescott Bergh have considerable experience with renting acreage to a variety of farm endeavors, from livestock to small grains to vegetables, and Juliet will address the positive and negative aspects of their experience and how to make it a better experience for both renters and landowners.

- August 9, 7pm, A-Z Produce and Bakery, N2956 Anker Lane, Stockholm. Building cultural understanding of immigrant farm workers. Short documentary viewing and a conversation with Puentes/Bridges director Mercedes Falk. Since 2001, dairy producers and community members have been traveling to Mexico to visit families and better understand the culture of the employees who come to work on farms in southeastern Minnesota and west central Wisconsin. Info: puentesbridges.org

The chapter is offering scholarships to Farmers Union Camp. If you would like a scholarship or mileage for camp, the chapter will reimburse or pay directly. Please contact Faye Jones at faye02@wwt.net or 715-495-2064.



Spring meeting set in Waukesha

Interest has been growing for the formation of a Wisconsin Farmers Union chapter in southeastern Wisconsin. All are welcome to learn more and join Wisconsin Farmers Union for a spring meeting at 11am May 9th at Gwenyn Hill Farm, N130 W294 Bryn Drive, Waukesha. Hear from Wisconsin Farmers Union President Darin Von Ruden about efforts to protect family farms. Hear updates on our top priorities and learn more about the benefits of being a Farmers Union Member. Local lunch will be provided. Limited to the first 40 registrations.



South Central teaching fly fishing

The WFU South Central chapter invites you to enjoy the camaraderie that in-person learning provides with a series of spring classes:

FLY FISHING 101 – SUNDAY, MAY 7, 2-4 PM

Taught by Jim Hess, Conservation Chair for Southern Wisconsin Chapter of Trout Unlimited

Learn the basics of fly fishing, including types of rods, gear required, 3 simple knots, rigging your fly line, the difference between flies and how to fish them, where to fish, and, most importantly, casting instructions. No equipment required. Fly rods will be provided.

Location: Belleville Community Park, Belleville, WI

IN STREAM-FLY FISHING – SUNDAY, JUNE 4, 2-4 PM

Taught by Jim Hess, Conservation Chair for Southern Wisconsin Chapter of Trout Unlimited

Learn basics of how to fish a trout stream in the water, including basic knots required to rig up your line and tie a fly on, how to read the stream, how to present your fly, using a strike indicator with a nymph, and using streamers. Equipment needed: Fly rod with reel and line, waders, sunglasses, net, and assortment of flies.

Location: Kittleson stream, south of Daleyville, WI

Each class costs \$40. Precise directions with parking will be included in your confirmation email. To register email penny@stillpoint.farm

Iowa-Grant hosts Von Ruden

Wisconsin Farmers Union President Darin Von Ruden met with members of the up-and-coming Iowa-Grant Farmers Union chapter April 16th at Cathryn's Market in Dodgeville, where he shared some background on WFU's work to improve life for family farmers, rural communities, and all people.

Farm tour set in Monroe May 25th

Sustain & Conserve: Learn, Share & Connect at the South Central Wisconsin Farmer Union's meeting Thursday, May 25, 5-7 pm at Food Web Farm, located at N2877 Cadiz Springs Road, Monroe. Come learn all about sustainable and conservation farming practices from Food Web Farm's Michelle & Dan Harrigan on their small family farm dedicated to providing locally produced and humanely raised meat products and sustainably grown produce. Tour the farm and learn 5:15-5:45 followed by the chapter meeting to share insights and social time to connect. Snacks and drinks provided by SCWFU. Please bring a chair.

Save the date for July 30, 2-5pm for SCWFU Annual Picnic co-hosted with Soil Sisters.

Have chapter news? Send it to Danielle at 715-471-0398 or dendvick@wisconsinfarmersunion.com

THIS PLANTING SEASON ...

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Summer Adventure

STARTS HERE

FARMERS UNION CAMPS

AT KAMP KENWOOD



Grace Clardy
Education Director

Since signing on as Education Director last fall, I have had the warmest of welcomes from Wisconsin Farmers Union. I am originally from Southern California and did not grow up with rural roots. Instead my introduction to agriculture involved a professor that was in love with honeybees and a student agriculture project in my undergrad.

I've since chosen agriculture as a passion and career. I'm excited to help youth from both rural and urban backgrounds learn to love it, too.

I have been referred to as a jack-of-all-trades, thanks to my experiences ranging from behavioral therapy to a camp counselor and even to an ice cream shop manager. All of these amazing experiences have led me to this role and are what I'm pulling from to prepare for my first summer leading Farmers Union Camps at Kamp Kenwood!

Although this summer will be a little different, it will still start with flag raising and end with goodnight circle, and singing Union Button somewhere in between. Our theme this summer is diversity in farming, with lessons focused on helping campers understand where their food comes from. We'll also highlight some niche sectors like beekeeping (the love of bees has followed me), flower farming, mushroom farming, sheep husbandry, and more topics.

I am so excited to see all of our campers this summer and to continue Farmers Union Camp traditions that are 80 years strong. I strive to continue the legacy Cathy Statz has left and look forward to a summer at Lake Wissota. I have quickly become one of those people that loves talking about my job to whoever will listen, so if you have any questions, comments, or concerns please feel free to reach out to me at gclardy@wisconsinfarmersunion.com or 715-214-7887.

Located near Chippewa Falls, Farmers Union Camps at Kamp Kenwood draw hundreds of youth from throughout the Midwest each summer. Campers enjoy all the traditional fun of summer camp while also being immersed in adventures centered around Wisconsin agriculture, cooperatives, and leadership. Learn more at www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com/youth-camp

**OPEN TO AGES 8-18
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camp@wisconsinfarmersunion.com



19161 79th Ave., Chippewa Falls, WI



HIRING NOW FOR SUMMER STAFF

Seeking Counselors, camp medic, and cooks - apply today!



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Are you great with kids?
Spend your summer at camp!**



Internships available.

Wisconsin Farmers Union is hiring motivated and energetic individuals for our summer camp staff. Work and live in an outdoor setting at this beautiful lakeside camp facility in Chippewa Falls, WI.

Staff develop and lead educational lessons as well as recreation for youth ages 8-18. Employment is from late May or June through August. Internships available.

Questions?
camp@wisconsinfarmersunion.com
Call/text Grace at 715-214-7887

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We offer our team:

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- Campfires and s'mores
- Ongoing personal & professional development
- Opportunities to continue working after camp

Rural Organizer Hayden Cohan shares WFU priorities at a recent state budget hearing.



OUT & ABOUT



WFU Membership Engagement Director Kirsten Slaughter and Iowa-Grant Farmers Union member Blake Gieck recruited members to the new UW-Platteville Farmers Union collegiate chapter.



Dane County Farmers Union member Cathy Statz, National Youth Advisory Council Representative Olivia Roth, and WFU Education Director Grace Clardy caught a bite at the Minnesota Farmers Union's Farmers Kitchen+Bar in Minneapolis during the recent College Conference on Cooperatives.

A whole herd of kiddos joined in the fun as WFU co-hosted a Cowabunga Celebration at the Chippewa Falls Public Library March 21st. We played bovine bingo, colored cow pictures, enjoyed Olson's Ice Cream, and were treated to story time with Chippewa County Farmers Union member and Children's Librarian Jessi Peterson.



Above: Wisconsin Farmers Union was well-represented at the Marbleseed Conference, with Forrest Humphrey, Lauren Langworthy, Danielle Endvick, Kirsten Slaughter, Alicia Razvi, Shawn Bartholomew, Camryn Billen, Austin Frerick, and Grace Clardy gathered around the booth. The WFU crew presented workshops, greeted visitors to the trade hall, recruited members, and ran the Teen Space. Frerick, a good friend to Farmers Union, presented a keynote address about his upcoming book, "Barons." Upper left: Wisconsin Women in Conservation Communications Specialist Kriss Marion, left, leads a learning circle. Lower left: WFU Local Foods Organizer Forrest Humphrey shares a laugh while networking at the conference.





RETREAT DRAWS STRONG COHORT TO STEVENS POINT

By Danielle Endvick
Communications Director

Wisconsin Farmers Union (WFU) members gathered in Stevens Point March 10-12 for the annual Emerging Leaders Retreat. The event offers an introduction to Farmers Union and a chance to network with other members from throughout the state. Sessions focused on effective leadership, storytelling, and organizing around the issues that matter to family farms and food system.

WFU President Darin Von Ruden noted the event mirrored growing diversity in the membership. "We had a range of attendees from different farm types to ages to geography. With participants in the room from two weeks old on up to retirement age and from dairy farmers to those participating in urban agriculture, it was an inspiring group." The cohort included representation from farmers who raise beef, sheep, flowers, poultry, hemp, vegetables, and more.

"The Emerging Leaders Retreat helped me to recognize the power of my personal story as a tool for connecting with others and then presenting a vision for the future of agriculture," said Dan Kaatz, of Pennycress Studio, a flower farm and design studio in the Driftless region "The retreat was also a wonderful time for sharing and learning from other farmers' first-hand experiences, both on the farm as producers as well as off the farm as changemakers in their communities."

"The Emerging Leaders program is exactly what I've been looking for -- a passionate group of like-minded individuals, all with different backgrounds but with a similar purpose," said Jenn Rittenhouse, a farmer from Elroy. "I continue to feel more driven and connected with the organization and this event strengthened my desire to become more involved."

"The retreat was humbling and energizing," said Marci Hess, a member of the South Central chapter. "I was honored to be with so many creative, intelligent, hard-working, enthusiastic, and caring people, all sharing their passions and methods for loving our land.

Participants included Paul and Joann Adams, Eleva; Nadia Alber and Chad Backes, Arena; Hannah Alden, Dorchester; WFU Administrative Assistant Camryn Billen, Eau Claire; Becky and Ryan Brathal, Woodville; Mike and Nicole Butler, Sheboygan Falls; Julie Case, Avoca; WFU Education Director Grace Clardy, Eau Claire; WFU Communications Director Danielle Endvick, Holcombe; WFU Communications and Special Projects Coordinator Tommy Enright, Amherst; Jeremie Favre and Ellen Geisler, Mineral Point; Michael Friend, Evanston, Ill.; Jill Gaskell, Blanchardville; Brian and Pam Guthman, Holcombe; Jane Hansen, Prentice; Rufus Haucke, Viola; Marci Hess, Blanchardville; WFU Local Foods Organizer Forrest Humphrey, La Crosse; Dan Kaatz, Viroqua; WFU Special Projects Director Lauren Langworthy, Wheeler; Wisconsin Women in Conservation Communications Specialist Kriss Marion; Amos Mayberry, Belleville; Joshua Mechaelsen, Pewaukee; Samuel Odin, Oak Creek; WFU Membership Engagement Director Kirsten Slaughter, Madison; Alexandra Spaulding, Merrill; Dixie Stechschulte, Argyle; Melissa Mahon Stein, Soldiers Grove; WFU Regional Membership Coordinator Alicia Razvi, Middleton; Jenn Rittenhouse, Elroy; WFU President Darin Von Ruden, Westby; and Daniel Werchowski, Stevens Point.

For Dixie Stechschulte, the weekend felt like finding her place as a new WFU member. She was struck by the group's shared values. "We were already leaders, but now we're friends with a purpose."

Learn about WFU leadership programs and how you can get involved at wisconsinfarmersunion.com.





Soldiers Grove farmer steps up as champion for ...

RETAINING A RURAL QUALITY OF LIFE

Alicia Razvi
Regional Membership Coordinator

On a beautiful mid-April morning, Joe Childs welcomed Wisconsin Farmers Union (WFU) to his Soldiers Grove farm to talk about the whirlwind year he has had. Joe, a new member, first heard about Farmers Union through his involvement in the Crawford Stewardship Project, a group that occasionally partners with the Sterling Local Farmers Union chapter in Crawford County. Childs joined Farmers Union last fall, because, as he says, "I wanted to meet new people and bounce ideas off of those who have been farming for decades."

It didn't take long for Childs to become very involved with WFU. "I also saw it as an opportunity to make an impact on the future of farming and rural communities," he said.

It's easy to see the passion Childs has for not only agriculture but for also for building a sense of community. Like many Farmers Union members, Joe grew up in agriculture. After earning a degree in Business Management, and feeling very drawn to his contract law courses, he found himself carving out a life of farming and an interest in retaining quality of life in rural spaces. He is involved in many projects in his farming career as well as his local community. He works for Crawford Stewardship Project, custom grazes between 40-100 head of cattle, and has started a pastured sheep program at his former high school.

Childs considers himself a new but experienced farmer. He grew up working alongside his dad, but now farms for himself. He cares deeply about land and financial access for beginning farmers. He says, "As a young farmer myself, I have dealt with the challenges that come with starting out new in the farming world. Without easy access to land, equipment, or funding, most young farmers will struggle to find a foothold in the industry without some sort of help. The agriculture market as a whole hardly resembles the market that my parents or grandparents were part of. It will take some creativity for young farmers to find a niche in which they can make their living."

Joe's niche right now is finding land to rent, and farmers with herds that need grazing. He combines the two and custom grazes. Joe's stewardship of the land is apparent right away when out walking the farm. He is deliberate about improv-



... I would never have been able to make these important connections if not for being a member of an organization that truly cares about the experiences and stories of farmers in rural communities.

— Joe Childs



Above: Childs raises sheep and cattle on his Soldiers Grove farm.



Above: Joe Childs shared his lambs with a class at North Crawford Schools (submitted photo); Childs has had the chance to tour other farms and meet farmers from throughout the country as a member of this year's cohort of the Farmers Union Enterprises Leadership (FUEL) program (Photo by National Farmers Union); a calf peeks around a tree in the pasture at Childs' Boscobel farm. (Photo by Alicia Razvi)

ing the land and sees the direct benefit to the health of his herd. He talks excitedly about how the land looked when he started grazing and improved strides he has made using animals and portable fence to push back invasives, improve soil quality and bring biodiversity back.

Another journey that Childs is embarking on is the North Crawford Community Pasture Program. Joe presented a sheep grazing plan to the school board and received unanimous approval for 10 lambs to begin grazing a 40-acre plot of the school yard this spring. Funding has been secured, the lambs have been born, and the project is set to begin in the first week of May.

Childs has a couple reasons for being enthusiastic about this program. At the top of this list is promotion of the recently revitalized ag program in North Crawford Schools. He is an alumni and while the ag program has been restored, it did not exist when he was in high school. Childs says, "I often wonder how different my path would have been if the agricultural program and FFA would have been there when I was in school."

This year the sheep will graze as a proof concept but in the future, Childs hopes that the agricultural program at North Crawford will utilize this unique program and incorporate the sheep and grazing practices into the curriculum. North Crawford High School Principal Robert Sailer says, "We are very excited to work with Joe. He's making farming real to these kids. It's important to note that this program isn't costing our school district even one penny. As a matter of fact, the sheep will save our custodial staff around 8 hours of mowing and upkeep every week.

As a small herd sheep farmer myself, I couldn't be more pleased."

The custodial staff is in support of the program as well. "Freeing up time working on the school yard allows us to get to other projects," said Harry Heisz, director of maintenance for the school district. "If we can make this work, we can make it permanent and maybe we can help others get their plans started. I see this as something that makes our school special."

A North Crawford Community Pasture Program Open House is being planned for June (see details below).

Leaning into Leadership

Additionally, Childs was selected as the Farmers Union Enterprises Leadership (FUEL) program representative for Wisconsin this year. FUEL is a one year program that starts with the National Farmers Union Convention, which Childs recently attended in San Francisco. He will continue to meet with FUEL participants from North and South Dakota, Minnesota and Montana throughout the year.

"I took my first flight, saw California for the first time and saw what the National Convention was all about in March then got home just in time for lambing," Childs says. Of his experiences so far, Childs says, "Being a Farmers Union member has allowed me to have conversations with people who have years of experience in the farming world as well as much different experiences than my own. I have been able to speak with representatives at a state level on the issues that affect my everyday life as well as the lives of those in my community. After being selected for the FUEL Leadership program, I was able

NORTH CRAWFORD COMMUNITY PASTURE PROGRAM OPEN HOUSE

Saturday, June 17th at 10:30am

Meet at the football field behind North Crawford Schools, 47050 County X, Soldiers Grove



From page 19 ► **FUEL** to speak directly with the vice president of the National Farmers Union. I would never have been able to make these important connections if not for being a member of an organization that truly cares about the experiences and stories of farmers in rural communities."

Childs readily dives into conversations around agriculture and rural life. "There are multiple issues that I feel passionate about when it comes to farming. At the top of the list is sustainable and regenerative agriculture. In this, I mean that a farm must be able to sustain financially, environmentally, and socially. If any of these criteria are not met, the long term outlook for that farm is failure. I wholeheartedly believe that agriculture can be an asset when it comes to combating climate change. However, the policies that promote the current model of factory farms sacrificing the environment and the communities that surround them will need to see drastic revisions if we are to see the day where sustainable family farms can make a comeback."

When asked why Farmers Union is important to him, Childs said he sees issues that need fixing and enjoys finding creative ways to fix those issues. Likewise, he sees a love of the land in fellow Farmers Union members that deeply resonates with him.

"I see a passion for agriculture in every member that I have spoken with to this point," Child said. "The policy sessions, though long, are always filled with creative ideas and members who truly care about what is hap-



Above: Childs, second from left, stands beside National Farmers Union Vice President Jeff Kippley (far left) and WFU President Darin Von Ruden at the National Farmers Union Convention, where he represented Wisconsin in the Farmers Union Enterprises Leadership program.

pening in their industry."

As a new member who has found many avenues of involvement and success with WFU programming, Childs offers this advice: "Utilize the networking opportunities that Farmers Union offers. It is by far the largest benefit that I have experienced. I have gotten tips and tricks from long-time farmers as well as been able to personally help others who are just starting out. The ability to meet in person or stay connected via email has been absolutely invaluable to my journey as both a farmer and a member of my community."

Razvi can be reached at arazvi@wisconsinfarmersunion.com or 715-577-5778.



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WISCONSIN FARMERS UNION POLICY UPDATES

Proposal would improve Farmland Preservation Program



Michelle Ramirez-White
Policy Coordinator

On April 13th, the State House held a public hearing for AB 133, related to modernizing Wisconsin's Farmland Preservation Program.

The loss of farmland is a sad reality in our country. Over the years, the land available for agriculture has dwindled. In fact, since 2010, farmland has declined by about one million acres. According to the USDA Census of Agriculture, Wisconsin lost 6,300 farms between 2012 and 2019.

Unfortunately, the lack of access to affordable farmland is one of the biggest barriers to new farms getting started. This problem will continue to grow as the amount of farmland in Wisconsin shrinks. This bipartisan bill in the Wisconsin legislature would give a significant boost to the state's Farmland Preservation Program.

What is the Farmland Preservation Program?

Wisconsin's Farmland Preservation Program (FPP) was established in the 1970s. It is administered by the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP) and provides land use tools to help ensure the availability and viability of farmland for current and future generations of farmers. The FPP protects soil and water by requiring that landowners meet state conservation standards if they wish to claim the annual tax credit. In other words, in exchange for farmers keeping agricultural land in production and meeting baseline conservation standards, they receive a renewable tax credit.

The program also encourages farmers and local governments to work together to promote local agriculture. County conservation departments play an integral role in the success of Wisconsin's farmland preservation program. In order to participate in the program farmers need to complete a 590 nutrient management plan. Each year, in addition to the statutory obligation to conduct soil and water conservation compliance checks, these departments support local efforts to certify new farmland preservation zoning districts, designate new Agricultural Enterprise Areas (AEAs) and enroll landowners in farmland preservation agreements. The increased number of zoning districts and AEAs opens the door for

more farmland owners to participate in FPP. In order for landowners to participate in the Farmland Preservation Program in Wisconsin, the land must be located in an AEA, an area of productive farmland that communities petition the State to designate as critical to the future of Wisconsin agriculture.

Throughout the years, there have been many conversations on how to improve our state's farmland preservation. The most recent changes were adopted by 2009 Act 28, which established the framework of the program by creating a three-tiered system of tax credits.

Assembly Bill 133, introduced this session by Representatives Oldenburg, Novak, Shankland, Tranel, C. Anderson, Considine, Hurd, Jacobson, Mursau, Schmidt, VanderMeer, Bare, Joers, Krug, Nedweski, Penterman, Subeck, Myers and Pronschinske, and its companion bill, Senate Bill 134, introduced by Senators Testin, Taylor, Pfaff, Spreitzer, Ballweg, Hesselbein, Marklein, Quinn, Smith, Tomczyk, Carpenter, Roys and Wanggaard, would:

- Shorten the farmland preservation agreements that farmers enter into with DATCP from 15 years to 10 years.
- Increase per-acre tax credit amounts for farmers:
 - From \$7.50 to \$10 for acres located in a farmland preservation zoning district without a farmland preservation agreement.
 - From \$5 to \$10 for acres covered by a farmland preservation agreement but not located in a farmland preservation zoning district.
 - From \$10 to \$12.50 for acres located in a farmland preservation zoning district and covered by a farmland preservation agreement.
 - Add a new \$10 per acre credit for farmland located in a farmland preservation area, if the acres are covered by an agriculture conservation easement.

This bill will help both farmers and the conservation of Wisconsin farmland. Participation in our state's Farmland Preservation Program has dropped significantly, according to DATCP's 2018 program survey. In that survey, respondents reported numerous factors as being prohibitive to signing a farmland agreement, including the 15-year minimum contract being too long, the tax credits being too small to make it worthwhile, and concerns with how they can use their land **See page 22 ► LAND**



Finding ways to connect at WFU's Kamp Kenwood



Brad Henderson
Facilities Manager

We've got some great opportunities to connect with Farmers Union friends out at our historic camp property, Kamp Kenwood, over the next couple of months.

Our Spring Fling on May 6th is a day to celebrate volunteers and get some work done towards opening camp for the summer. This year we are prepping a new space for planting a pollinator garden, sweeping out the youth cabins, prepping the bunks for kids, and putting some new coats of paint on the outside furniture. Chainsaws are always welcome. We will start at 8am and provide lunch – feel free to pop in for the whole day or as long as you are able to. Helpers will get a sneak peek at the new lodge kitchen renovations, which were made possible in part through the generosity of donors at the WFU Convention silent auction. We'll also have some helpers here from the Chippewa County 4-H.

On June 23rd, we're looking forward to being a part of the "From Land to Lakes" tour that is being organized by the newly formed Chippewa Valley Producer-Led Watershed Council. See page 23 for further details on this exciting event that will connect farmers, lake owners, and other citizens who care about improving water quality in the region. Hope to see you out at camp this summer!

From page 21 ► **LAND** throughout the duration of the contract. This legislation addresses these concerns and will help preserve farmland.

Dane County Farmers Union member Daniel Kvalheim testified in support of AB 133 in April stating, "My family's experience with the Farmland Preservation agreements started with my dad and mom in the 1970's and we have been a part of the program since that time. My wife Lori, and I purchased the farm on land contract in 1985 and in 2016 brought our son Kristen into the ownership also on land contract completing a succession plan to the next generation. We have benefited from the program every year monetarily: our property tax bills for the last 9 years totaled \$120,547. Our return from farmland preservation was \$10,704. This is appreciated. As a former Agriculture Educator I also believe the strong component of conservation practice and nutrient management is extremely important and a lasting benefit of farmland preservation involvement. As legislators, anything you can do to help make farming and rural life more affordable will be appreciated. Removing more of the burden of property tax through farmland preservation is one step."

It is important to note that this bill was created with DATCP, DOR and the Wisconsin Land and Water Association during the past two legislative sessions. This bill is also widely supported by agricultural and conservation groups who know the importance of Wisconsin Farmers and conservation including: Wisconsin Farmers Union, Wisconsin Agri-Business Association, American Farmland Trust, Clean Wisconsin, Dairy Business Association, Wisconsin Association of Professional Agricultural Consultants, Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association, Wisconsin Conservation Voters, Wisconsin Corn Growers Association, Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, Wisconsin Farm Credit Services, Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Association, Inc., Wisconsin Pork Association, Wisconsin Potato and Vegetable Growers Association, Wisconsin Soybean Association, Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association.

So what's next for the bill? Now that it has received a hearing in the House, it is awaiting a hearing in the State Senate Committee on Agriculture and Tourism. From there it will proceed to the floor of the Senate and Assembly for a favorable vote. If you support this legislation, please be sure to call your legislators and let them know!

You can find your legislators' contact information easily using the Wisconsin Legislative District Viewer tool at maps.legis.wisconsin.gov

Ramirez-White can be reached at mramirezwhite@wisconsinfarmersunion.com or 715-450-9507

Wisconsin Farmers Union
KAMP KENWOOD
SPRING FLING
CAMP CLEAN-UP
& VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION DAY

Saturday, May 6th
19161 79th Ave.
Chippewa Falls, WI

Volunteers needed. Food served.
RSVP to Brad - 715-214-7244



FROM LAND TO LAKES

WORKING TOGETHER FOR THE
HEALTH OF OUR WATERSHED



JOIN US FOR A DAY ON THE FARM + AT THE LAKE!

JUNE 23, 2023

Tour Stop #1 - Noon-3pm

**Mike and Rosanne Zwiefelhofer farm
8358 County Hwy. C, Bloomer, WI**

- Tour of the farm highlighting conservation practices, field plots, edible beans, cover crops, and more
- Ice cream treats locally produced by Klemish Creamery of New Auburn



Tour Stop #2 - 3:30-7pm

**Wisconsin Farmers Union's Kamp Kenwood
19161 79th Ave., Chippewa Falls, WI**

- Lake Wissota Improvement & Protection Association will offer pontoon tours highlighting water quality efforts
- Cookout featuring Zwiefelhofer farm's beef and beans, paired with local beer & cheese

FREE TO ATTEND - RSVP BY JUNE 16TH!



920-539-8728



tbpanzer@gmail.com



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A FARM BILL FOR ALL

The Farm Bill is a comprehensive legislation package that is passed by the United States Congress every five years to set federal agricultural and food policy. The bill covers a wide range of programs and policies, including crop subsidies, nutrition assistance programs, conservation efforts, and rural development initiatives.

The Farm Bill is one of the most significant pieces of legislation for the agricultural industry in the United States, as it provides funding and support for farmers and ranchers, helps ensure a stable food supply, and promotes environmental conservation efforts. The bill also includes provisions for research, education, and international trade related to agriculture and food production. Family farmers, ranchers, consumers, and our communities all benefit from a strong and resilient farm and food system. National Farmers Union has identified the following policies and provisions that should be included or addressed in the 2023 Farm Bill.

COMPETITION

NFU supports establishing a dedicated competition title in the next farm bill, which should include Fairness for Farmers priorities, including:

- Address inadequate cattle market price discovery and transparency.
- Establish an “Office of the Special Investigator for Competition Matters” at USDA to ensure strong enforcement of the Packers & Stockyards Act (P&S Act).
- Protect ongoing P&S Act rulemakings, including addressing meatpacker retaliation against growers.
- Reinstate mandatory country-of-origin labeling (COOL).
- Improve the Livestock Mandatory Reporting (LMR) Act to ensure consistent and complete data availability.
- Ensure checkoff programs are producer controlled and regularly reviewed.
- Support the expansion of diverse, local, and regional market opportunities in farm and food supply chains, including in production, processing, distribution, and retail.

FARM PROGRAMS AND RISK MANAGEMENT FARM PROGRAMS

- Increase loan rates and other price-based triggers to reflect higher commodity prices and input costs.
- Establish a dual enrollment option for Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC).
- Authorize a voluntary update of base acres and yields.

PERMANENT DISASTER ASSISTANCE

- Expand and enhance permanent disaster assistance programs to address implementation delays and inequitable or incomplete support associated with ad hoc disaster assistance.
- Establish a permanent disaster assistance program that supplements crop insurance indemnities when widespread disasters occur.
- Avoid undermining existing risk management products.

CROP INSURANCE

- Make risk management products more accessible for specialty crop producers and diverse cropping systems, including through improvement of Whole Farm Revenue Protection.
- Expand the availability of market risk protection policies for more crops and production methods, similar to Livestock Risk Protection (LRP).

DAIRY

- Support dairy growth management principles to stem the loss of family dairy farms.
- Strengthen the Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) program, which, with improvements, can serve as a useful risk management tool.

CLIMATE, CONSERVATION, AND ENERGY

The next farm bill should give farmers the tools and resources they need to address climate change through conservation programs and by expanding renewable energy and energy efficiency opportunities. Key provisions include:

- Increase funding for voluntary, incentive-based conservation programs and conservation technical assistance.
- Expand incentives for farmers to adopt climate mitigation and adaptation practices.
- Provide crop insurance discounts to farmers for planting cover crops or for using other conservation practices that increase resiliency or decrease risk.
- Build on programs that support biofuels infrastructure development.
- Support and improve the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP).
- Maintain a strong Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).
- Increase research investments that support on-farm climate mitigation and adaptation.

ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES

NFU supports increasing farm bill funding to ensure we comprehensively meet the needs of family farmers, ranchers, and our communities. Additional important priorities and reforms include:

- Maintain a strong farm bill nutrition title that supports food and nutrition security, reduces hunger in our communities, and expands access to locally and regionally produced farm products.
- Ensure beginning, veteran, and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers are supported by all farm programs.
- Expand and fund the Farm and Ranch Assistance Network (FRSAN) to support the mental and behavioral health of farmers, ranchers, farmworkers, and our communities.
- Expand and fund the Rural Cooperative Development Grant (RCDG) program.
- Address ongoing staffing shortages at USDA and require USDA to streamline program applications and procedures.

GET LOUD ABOUT THE FARM BILL

There are several ways that citizens like you can advocate for the Farm Bill:

1. Educate yourself about the issues: Learn about the Farm Bill and the issues it addresses.
2. Contact your representatives: Reach out to your elected officials in Congress and let them know your thoughts on the Farm Bill. You can call, email, or write to your representatives to express your support or opposition to specific provisions in the bill.
3. Attend town halls and public meetings: Many members of Congress hold town halls and public meetings to hear from their constituents. Attending these events can give you an opportunity to speak directly to your representatives and share your views on the Farm Bill.
4. Use social media: Share information about the Farm Bill and mobilize others to take action. You can also tag your representatives in your posts to get their attention.

By taking these steps, you can help shape a Farm Bill that reflects your values and priorities.



WISCONSIN WOMEN *in* CONSERVATION

Spring Learning Circles
On-farm Field Days
Summer Camp



*Digging
into Soil!*



RSVP for
free NOW
at WiWiC.org

Wisconsin Women in Conservation is hosting women-only Learning Circle gatherings across the state this Spring with the theme "Digging into Soil!" All women farmers, landowners and conservationists - and those who identify as such - are welcome to attend, whatever their backgrounds, from beginners to experts! Participants are invited to bring a small bag of their own soil to analyze. Snacks are served at all events, and children are welcome to attend.

North West Spring Conservation Gathering Thu, May 11, 3-6pm, The Enchanted Barn, Hillsdale

West Central Spring Conservation Gathering Fri, May 12, 1-4:30pm, Freedom Park, Prescott

North Central Spring Conservation Gathering Thu, May 18, 1-4pm, Nine Mile Rec Area, Wausau

North East Spring Conservation Gathering Fri, May 19, 1-4pm, Mosquito Hill Nature Ctr, New London

WiWiC's 2023 Virtual Summer Camp to feature "Critters of Conservation"

WiWiC's virtual Summer Camp lunch series is BACK BY POPULAR DEMAND for a third year and this season they will be bringing friends: animals! Each session will focus on creating healthy habitat for a different beneficial critter. There will be a content expert sharing resources and how-tos along with an inspiring "citizen scientist" - a woman landowner sharing her personal experience with and love for that species.



Thurs May 18; 12-1 pm
Creating a Habitat for Birds:
Women Championing Feathered Friends

Thurs July 20; 12-1 pm
Creating a Habitat for Bugs & Beetles:
Building Healthy Soil through Little Friends

Thurs June 22; 12-1 pm
Creating a Habitat for Turtles & Snakes:
How the "Unhuggables" Support Conservation

Thurs Aug. 17; 12-1 pm
Creating a Habitat for Bats:
Mother Nature's Undervalued Rock Stars of the Night



Summer Field Day
BLUE OX FARM
June 1, 3-6pm
Wheeler

*hosted by
Conservation Coach
Lauren Langworthy*

RSVP for free



Women farm. And they often do it with babies on board, in one way or another. That's why children are always welcome at WiWiC events.

NFU CONVENES IN

The Golden City

Hundreds of farmers gather to discuss Farm Bill and shape national policy

By Danielle Endvick
Communications Director



SAN FRANCISCO – Wisconsin Farmers Union members traveled to San Francisco March 5-7th for National Farmers Union's 121st Anniversary Convention, where hundreds of farmers and ranchers from throughout the nation gathered to set the farm organization's 2023 policy.

"National Farmers Union has a rich history dating back to 1902, when its founding farmers saw the need to strengthen the voice of rural America," WFU President Darin Von Ruden said. "We're proud to take up that torch yet today and work together to ensure the future of the next generation of family farmers."

Representing WFU as delegates in policy deliberations were (pictured, from left) Paul Adams, Eleva; Tina Hinchley, Cambridge; and Darin Von Ruden, Westby.

Krist Kvalheim of Sun Prairie guided delegates through the policy process as the convention parliamentarian. Joe Childs of Soldiers Grove attended the convention as the first step in a year-long experience with the Farmers Union Enterprises Leadership Program. Olivia Roth of Albany addressed the delegation as a member of the NFU National Youth Advisory Council, a role in which she is serving as a voice for youth throughout the country.

Former long-time WFU Education Director Cathy Statz received the Bruce Miller Membership Award, which recognizes individuals who display a passion for family farming and rural America while promoting the work of Farmers Union. Statz wrapped up her WFU career and 30th year staffing the camp program in 2022. She left to pursue other work in the cooperative education realm and to move to Poland with her husband, Tom Pamperin, who teaches in an international school.

Eight WFU chapters were recognized for engaging members and increasing membership in 2022, including Amnicon-Douglas, Eau Claire, Polk-Burnett, Dane, Lake to Bay, Marathon, South Central, and Sterling Local.



From top: Regional Membership Coordinator Alicia Razvi soaks in the view of the Golden Gate Bridge; WFU delegates deliberate on policy; Cathy Statz accepts the Bruce Miller Membership Award from NFU President Rob Larew.



Representing WFU at the convention in San Francisco were, left to right, (front row) Alicia Razvi, Middleton; Olivia Roth, Albany; Sarah Lloyd, Wisconsin Dells; Julie Keown-Bomar, Chippewa Falls; Michelle Ramirez-White, Madison; Linda Ceylor, Catawba; Danielle Endvick, Holcombe; (second row) Paul Adams, Eleva; Cathy Statz, Wroclaw, Poland; Grace Clardy, Eau Claire; Darin Von Ruden, Westby; National Farmers Union President Rob Larew; (back row) Krist and Rachel Kvalheim, Sun Prairie; Chuck Bomar, Chippewa Falls; Joe Childs, Soldiers Grove; Caitie and Dave Rosen, Glenwood City; Patty Edelburg, Scandinavia; Michael and Nancy Slattery, Maribel.

Delegates set special orders of business around Dairy Policy Reform, Fairness for Farmers, and the Farm Bill. These frames will guide NFU's work over the next year. The Wisconsin delegation was pleased to have language passed that urges Congress to pass a farmer-led, incentive-based dairy production growth management plan to match milk supply with profitable market demand.

Highlighting 'Fairness for Farmers'

Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack addressed the convention-goers, sharing progress the U.S. Department of Agriculture has made to strengthen the food supply chain, promote competition, and protect consumers and producers. Vilsack earned a standing ovation as he announced a proposed rule that would strengthen standards and close loopholes for the voluntary 'Product of USA' label for meat, poultry and egg products.

"This rule is about truth in labeling, plain and simple," NFU President Rob Larew said. "For too long, family farmers and ranchers have been competing in a market where imported products were fraudulently labeled as a product of the United States."

Larew noted the change will bring more fairness for farmers and ranchers across the country but also vowed that NFU will continue to fight for mandatory country of origin labeling.

In a hopeful State of the Farmers Union address Larew emphasized the importance of farmers sharing their stories in the upcoming farm bill process.

"Our members are leading the way on farm policy from the local to federal level," he said. "One thing we've learned is that when Farmers Union members speak with a united voice and tell our story, we get results. A great example of this is how the Fairness for Farmers campaign is catching the eyes and ears of lawmakers across the country and Farmers Union priorities are being put into action. 2023 is a big year for agriculture policy and because of our unity, NFU is well positioned to be a leader."

Attendees heard from key players in NFU's efforts to boost competition. Tom Undlin, Partner at Robins Kaplan LLP, discussed how legal action can help spur greater competition and fairness in the food system and the market marketplace. Kevin O'Reilly of the U.S. Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) discussed Right to Repair and updates on NFU and PIRG's efforts for legislation and regulations to guarantee the Right to Repair. Michael Kades, Deputy Assistant Attorney General with the Department of Justice discussed antitrust efforts in the Administration. Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi, a key player in previous farm bills, provided a special welcome for the farmers gathered in her district.

View NFU policy & learn more at www.nfu.org.

2024 NFU Convention - Scottsdale, AZ

WFU elects delegates during our State Convention!
December 9-10th at Chula Vista, Wisconsin Dells

MORE COVER CROPS, FEWER CARROTS

TIME TO RETHINK CROP INSURANCE & CONSERVATION



Brittany Olson
Rural Voices Correspondent

When the 1985 Farm Bill was signed into law, those stewarding the milk veins and breadbaskets of the United States were trudging through low prices, overproduction, double-digit interest rates, and record numbers of bankruptcies. Chances are, if they hadn't been foreclosed on, they certainly knew someone who had. It suffices to say that, when you're in day-to-day survival mode, you aren't necessarily thinking about nature.

That considered, the 1985 Farm Bill was the first to feature a conservation title by birthing into the ether cost-share programs known as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). In 1996, CRP and WRP welcomed a set of younger sibling programs like EQIP, WHIP, and CSP into the conservation title family, and today federal spending on farmer-focused and taxpayer-subsidized conservation programs has grown to approximately \$5 billion per year. Furthermore, federal crop insurance, like its conservation program cousins, is still heavily subsidized by the taxpayer at about 62 percent per premium.

Over the last four decades, though, have these programs and billions of dollars dangled in front of farmers and landowners brought about tangible improvement? Data, both quantitative and anecdotal, suggests otherwise. While cover crop adoption increased by 50 percent between 2012 and 2017, a mere 7.2 percent of Midwestern acres saw some sort of cover crop in 2021.

We've all seen the benefits of no-till, strip till, cover crops, rotational grazing, variable rate application, and crop rota-

tion in person or in print but overall adoption of conservation practices remains measly.

Meanwhile, the Midwest has lost over a third of its topsoil, 54 percent of Iowa waters were impaired in 2022, and Wisconsin added 92 new waters to its impaired water list in 2022 as well. 'Snirt' photos of, well, snow and dirt, abound on social media after wintertime wind events, and it is not uncommon to see rivers and streams turn brown and foamy with 'nutrients' when the snow melts every spring.

Finally, subsidies - whether in the form of direct payments or crop insurance - have abetted farm consolidation instead of abating it. I could go on, but as the 2023 Farm Bill gets underway I too question whether taxpayers (aka consumers and drinkers of water) have gotten a return on their yearly investment in proverbial carrots. Those carrots, through means of voluntary adoption, have not been enough to drive industrywide change.

Creating Purposeful Change

One of my favorite Twitter accounts is Stock Cropper @zebulousprime, aka Iowa farmer Zack Smith. Shortly before Christmas last year, he put out a YouTube video regarding the upcoming omnibus spending bill and three ideas to drive meaningful change on the conservation front. I found myself nodding in agreement with Smith on each of his points.

Farmers are a stubborn bunch and don't like change, and the older they get the less they like it. However, unless they are tied to a string of purposeful change, it might be time to take the carrots away altogether to drive tangible change and innovation by new farmers entering the fold.

One idea to consider: taking the federal crop insurance subsidy to 0 percent unless farmers can prove they are actively adopting and implementing best management prac-

tices to safeguard soil health and water quality. If the subsidy is removed, crop insurance costs per acre will go up dramatically.

With adverse weather events increasing in frequency and severity, not to mention corn flirting with \$7/bushel and soybeans at \$15/bushel at press time for this column, having some kind of risk management is nonnegotiable. Smith proposed using a rubric or matrix to determine degrees of conservation adoption and mentioned the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy as a launch point.

Adages abound regarding tillage, or lack thereof, such as 'turning it black' in the spring and 'no-till, no yield.' In the words of Farm Policy Facts, "These [conservation] programs are important tools for farmers, as often conservation practices do not translate to profit." Conversely, a look at the National Corn Growers Association 2022 yield contest proves such thinking to be logical fallacy; the top non-irrigated no-till non-Corn Belt entry beat the top conventional non-irrigated Corn Belt entry by 18 bushels per acre.

If farmers are on the hook for losing out on subsidies, landowners should be as well, given that 40 percent of U.S. farmland is rented, and 38 percent of those landlords are retired farmers. Farmer or not, though, landowners should want to see their land improve by whoever is running it. Therefore, if landowners renting out their acres in the name of crop production cannot prove that soil health practices are being used on their land, Smith proposes (and I agree) that they should be assessed an extra property tax unless and until soil health practices are adopted.

Lastly, the average American farmer is pushing 60 years old. A widespread reluctance to relinquish control is part of why there are a lot of farmers unable to do things like drive the combine, run the planter, or make major management decisions until they are well into their 40s because Mom and Dad (usually Dad) just couldn't let go of the reins. Smith proposed eliminating subsidies for all landowners and operators after the age of 62 unless they can prove they are using soil health practices on their farms.

I should disclose that, while I agree with everything Smith proposed, these are merely talking points and conversations worth having with ourselves, our fellow farmers, and our landlords. The taxpayers funding subsidies for crop insurance and conservation programs deserve a return on their investment, as well, in addition to clean water to drink, clean air to breathe, and a safe and plentiful food supply.

All told, change is hard, especially when land and capital are involved. However, sometimes it needs to be encouraged a little harder than with a carrot on a stick, even if it means rented acres end up being 'lost' to a cover cropper with a man bun or someone wanting to grow cut flowers instead of corn.

In the spirit of taking it a step further, those folks who are the loudest at decrying welfare payments to single parents in inner cities should be on board with this idea of less government funding overall, especially for programs that have not brought about a lot of meaningful change.

Olson is a Barron County Farmers Union member and a dairy farmer, writer, and photographer from Chetek, WI.

FREE GRANT ADVISING for WFU members

Michael Fields Agricultural Institute's Grant Advising & Resources can help you apply for grants and cost-share programs of state or federal sources that could help you achieve your farming or ag-related business goals.

[michaelfields.org/
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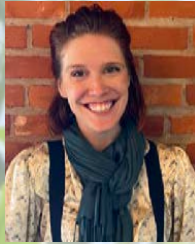
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Examining Nitrogen in 2023



Tara Daun
Watershed Coordinator

As the cover crops are stretching out in the sunshine, our farmer-led councils are prepping for their summer plans. This summer promises to be a busy one as council farmers manage their farms and work with their neighbors and community to improve stewardship in fields. We have a lot going on in farmer-led councils including another round of "Soil Your Undies" underwear to be buried in May, a slew of potential field days focusing on field borders, livestock management, diverse rotations, and test plots. A priority for the year is nitrogen research.

Those familiar with watershed work may be more used to examining phosphorous, since it is usually considered the "nutrient of impairment" in local lakes. However, monitoring research suggests that while phosphorus levels are decreasing in surface waters, nitrogen levels appear to be rising. Of further concern is nitrate in drinking wells. Many counties across the state are struggling to deal with wells testing over the 10 ppm safe limit set by the Environmental Protection Agency. Nitrogen is also a major factor in the hypoxic zone, or dead zone, in the Gulf of Mexico. Because of these concerns, as well as the rising cost of nitrogen fertilizer, folks are interested in ensuring that the nitrogen many farmers depend on for crop growth is being used efficiently.

At the end of last year, DATCP provided funding for farmers through the Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Program (NOPP) to do on-farm trials of nitrogen to dial in just how much nitrogen farmers can confidently put on fields for maximum profit and minimum waste. Although research standards did exist for nitrogen, they were commonly not followed by farmers or matched by co-op recommendations. The logic being that the risk of potentially over-applying is less than the risk of under-applying and losing profit per acre. The hope is that multi-year research performed across the state and done at field

scale will provide farmers with confidence in the numbers and being able to dial in based on regional climatic and soil differences to find a sweet spot where nitrogen isn't wasted and profit maximizes.

This funding is also useful for groups that want to explore the interaction of nitrogen with factors like type and biomass of cover crops, termination time, and timing of fertilizer side-dress applications. Across the state 20 applications to the NOPP program have been approved, many for farmer-led councils. Here in the northwest region, the Western Wisconsin Conservation Council will work with Dry Run and Horse Creek farmers in irrigated fields to take moisture out as a variable. The Red Cedar Conservation Farmers of eastern Dunn county will be running trials to see the interaction of cover crop biomass and available nitrogen credits. Barron County farmers will look at the efficacy of the Haney test to accurately predict maximum return on nitrogen fertilizer rates.

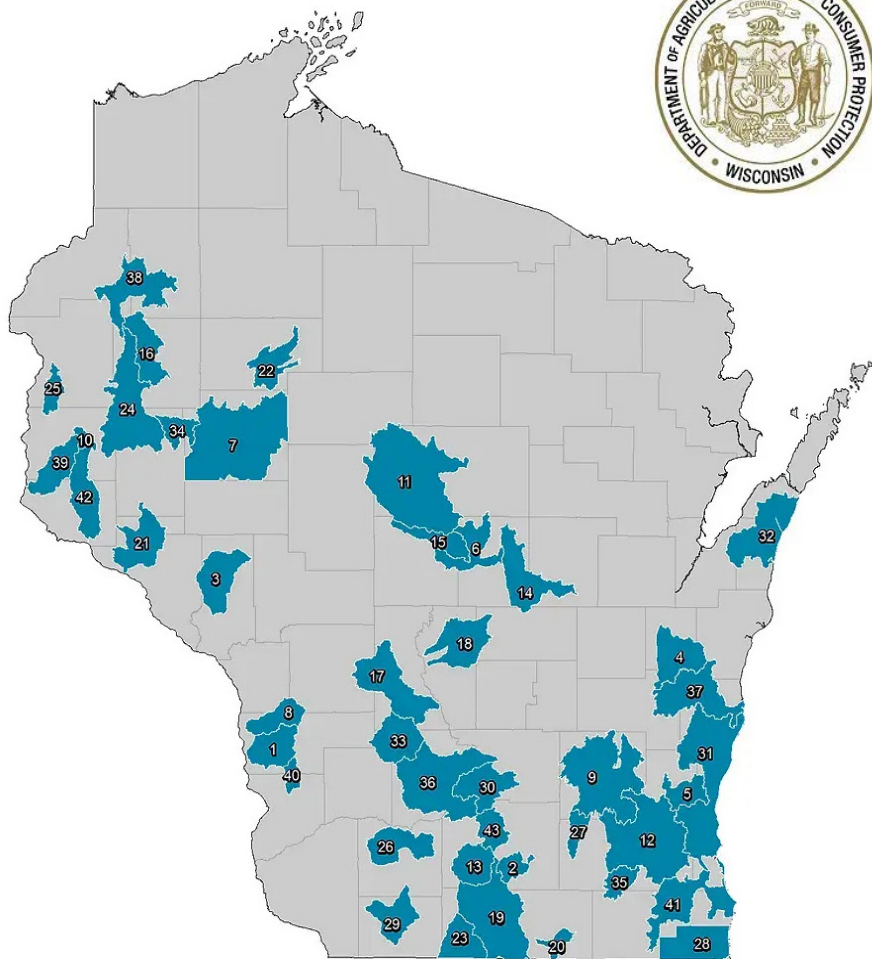
These trials are rigorous, requiring replications across the field and several nitrogen rates, not including other factors farmer-researchers choose to explore. That makes for a heavy investment of plots, planning, and data collection. For this reason, one farmer-agronomist partnership in Pierce county opted to do their own research trial comparing performance of a biological product interacting with optimum nitrogen application rate. Glenwood City farmers will also be expanding on a nitrogen trial from last summer, where they decreased side-dress applications based on Haney testing recommendations, increasing field profitability.

Efficient use of nitrogen means farmers are more profitable per acre, but it also means that less nutrient is left vulnerable to groundwater infiltration or runoff onto surface waters. Learn more about the NOPP program on the DATCP website. To learn how farmers can increase nitrogen efficiency, check in with your local farmer-led council. I bet you'll have find field days and research to help you get started.

Learn more at farmerledwatershed.org or contact Tara at 715-492-0329 or tdaun@wisconsinfarmersunion.com.

Agronomist Joe Ailts checks corn at a farmer-led field day to see if reduced side-dress nitrogen application affected yield.

2023 Funded Producer-Led Watershed Protection Groups



Map ID	PRODUCER-LED GROUP	Map ID	PRODUCER-LED GROUP	Map ID	PRODUCER-LED GROUP	
1	Bad-Axe Farmer-Led Watershed Council	15	Farmers of Mill Creek Watershed Council	29	Lafayette Ag Stewardship Alliance	
2	Biological Farming Friends	16	Farmers of the Barron County Watersheds	30	Lake Wisconsin Farmer Watershed Council	
3	Buffalo Trempealeau Farmer Network	17	Farmers of the Lemonweir Valley	31	Milwaukee River Watershed Clean Farm Families	
4	Calumet County Ag Stewardship Alliance	18	Farmers of the Roche-A-Cri	32	Peninsula Pride Farms	
5	Cedar Creek Farmers	19	Farmers of the Sugar River	33	Producers of Lake Redstone	
6	Central Wisconsin Farmers' Collaborative	20	Farmers on the Rock	34	Red Cedar Conservation Farmers	
7	*Chippewa Valley Producer Led Watershed	21	FARMERS4HEALTH/Bear Creek Chippewa River	35	Rock River Regenerative Graziers	
8	Coon Creek Community Watershed Council	22	*Flambeau Valley Watershed Group	36	Sauk Soil & Water Improvement Group	
9	Dodge County Farmers for Healthy Soil & Healthy Water	23	*Green County Clean Waters	37	Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers	
10	Dry Run Farmer-Led Watershed Council	24	Hay River Farmer-Led Watershed Council	38	Shell Lake, Yellow River Watershed Council	
11	Eau Pleine Partnership for Integrated Conservation	25	Horse Creek Area Farmer Led Watershed Council	39	South Kinni Farmer Led Watershed Council	
12	Farmers for Lake Country	26	Iowa County Uplands Watershed Group	40	Tainter Creek Farmer led Watershed Council	
13	Farmers for the Upper Sugar River	27	Jefferson County Soil Builders	41	Watershed Protection Committee of Racine County	
14	Farmers for Tomorrow River Watershed Council	28	*Kenosha County Regenerative Producers	42	Western Wisconsin Conservation Council	
				* New Group	43	Yahara Pride Farms, Inc.

Now is the Time to Join a Farmer-Led Watershed Council

Before planting gets underway, consider connecting with your local Farmer-Led Watershed Council. With 43 councils funded across the state in 2023, it's likely there is a network of farmers near you who are looking to promote stewardship and efficiency on farms. Groups may have monetary and educational opportunities for you and your farm.

What does a farmer-led council do?

Farmer-Led Watershed Councils are groups of farmers who work together to share ideas and resources on adopting practices like limiting tillage, planting cover crops, diversifying rotations, increasing nitrogen efficiency, and engineering structures that limit erosion. They host field days, network to share tips, and provide incentive funds to farmers for adopting conservation practices.

If you're interested in connecting with a council, check to see if there are existing watershed councils near you. All councils are truly farmer-led by local farmers, which means that each council has different incentives, field programs, and priorities.

Examples of incentivized activities: buffer strip adjacent to stream, \$650/acre (Dry Run Area Watershed); soil health bundle: cover crops, no-till, planting green, \$60/acre (Red Cedar

Conservation Farmers); cover crop planting, \$15-35/ acre (many watersheds); planting small grains 1st time, \$15/acre (Farmers of the Sugar River Conservation); walkover \$250 (South Kinni Area FLWC); contract with an independent soil health agronomist, \$500 (Hay River Area FLWC); low disturbance manure injection, \$20/acre (Yahara Pride Farmers); reduce phosphorus runoff, \$25/ lbs (Dodge County Farmers); phosphorus indexing, \$1/acre (Horse Creek Area Farmers).

Why do farmers join these councils?

- To learn more about soil health and improve their farm & community by learning from other farmers.
- To reduce erosion after seeing larger rainfall events.
- To show the community that farmers care about stewardship.
- To prevent water quality issues from getting worse and prevent onerous regulation related to water quality for farmers.

How do you plug in to these councils?

Find your local council at https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs_Services/ProducerLedProjectSummaries.aspx

If you need help connecting with a group, contact WFU Watershed Coordinator Tara Daun at 715-492-0329 or t Daun@wisconsinfarmersunion.com.



We Can't Buy Our Way Out of Climate Change



Alan Guebert
Correspondent

In the final book of his *Annals of the Former World* anthology, writer John McPhee tackles the geology and geography of the still-young, barely holding-together Golden State. His title, like his writing, is brilliant: "Assembling California."

Assembling, indeed, because most of California's land, water, and history are as violent and ever-changing as its San Andreas fault. For example, McPhee writes, "So radical and contemporary (are) the regional tectonics that the highest and the lowest points in the contiguous United States (are) within eighty miles of each other in California."

That wild dichotomy was on full display again this winter as much of California's worst drought in centuries drowned under "atmospheric rivers" of pounding rain. January through March, for example, Los Angeles measured 15.2 inches of rain, twice its usual amount and, incredibly, two times more than fell on Seattle over the same three months.

The storms have also brought devastation. On March 17, the *San Francisco Chronicle* estimated overall storm damage to the state's highways at almost \$700 million. That price guess is sure to climb.

The rain brought a different challenge to California's Central Valley, a mostly flat, 20,000 sq. mi. agricultural Garden of Eden, where water-and in the last decade, the lack of it-is critical.

Unforeseen, however, is that 2023's rains are fast filling the long-dry Tulare Lake in the valley's Kings County. Now, after the winter storms, reported the April 2 *New York Times*, the intensively farmed lakebed has become "a 790-square-mile bathtub" equal to "the size of four Lake Tahoes."

And that's before an expected massive snowmelt-triple the historical average, another consequence of the freakish winter weather-from the nearby Sierra Nevada mountains adds to the still-expanding lake.

The return of so much water-precious lifeblood in the dry-but-bountiful Central Valley-is the perfect, if unwelcome, metaphor for where many U.S. farmers and ranchers now find themselves. The now underwater "landscape is among the most heavily engineered in the nation" and yet, one official rightly notes, "we have no control over nature..."

We never were in control but don't tell that to the

Times which, for some reason, thinks we're still in charge: "For now, nature seems determined to win in an era of climate change..."

Well, nature is winning because, as farmer and philosopher Fred Kirschenmann has preached for decades, "Mother Nature always bats last."

And that's just in the far West; other parts of the U.S. face their own climate woes.

For example, as California soaks under too much of everything, "The abundant snow in the Rocky Mountains this year... is not enough to overcome two decades of drought that has pushed major reservoirs along the Colorado River to dangerous levels," Camille Calimlim Touton, commissioner of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, told the *Washington Post* April 3.

That means local officials representing 40 million water users in seven western states must develop a plan for "unilateral cuts to water usage" this year or face an unprecedented federal plan (announced April 11) on "how those [cuts] could be distributed if the states" can't agree.

Whatever route is followed, trouble is certain to be a byproduct for several reasons-many tied to California's historical grip on Colorado River water. "Under laws and court rulings dating back decades, in times of shortage," explains the *Post*, "Arizona would lose its right to its water before California."

Of course, Uncle Sam's checkbook will accompany any federally-supported-imposed or not-allotment plan. Last year's Inflation Reduction Act "includes \$4 billion for the Western drought that includes payments to farmers who are willing to conserve Colorado River water..."

That concept, almost as old as the river itself, will push "fallowing or making irrigation more efficient" because, Touton explained, "'we want agriculture to continue in the [Colorado] basin as well as... support'... all the other uses, including for cities, ecosystems and Native American tribes."

Of course "we" want everyone "supported," but "we"-no matter the size of our checkbook-can't buy our way out of climate change.

But here we stand, still swinging at every pitch and believing we are winning.

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WELCOME NEW FARMERS UNION MEMBERS!

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 2023 Camp Program
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 Jerry Thompson Agency
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 Nolan Insurance Agency

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 Rod & Marcia Berger, Durand
 Ronald Daane, Brandon
 Ronald Marx, Cross Plains
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 2023 Camp Program
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 Julie Keown-Bomar
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 Darin VonRuden





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

Legislative Office: 30 W. Mifflin St., Ste. 905
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(715) 723-5561

www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com

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ON THE COVER: Sheep on pasture at Blue Ox Farm in Wheeler, owned and operated by Dunn County Farmers Union members Caleb and Lauren Langworthy.