



WISCONSIN FARMERS UNION NEWS

UNITED TO GROW FAMILY AGRICULTURE

July/August 2022



IN THIS ISSUE

Producer-Led Watershed Groups
Making a Difference

NFU Women's Conference Heads
to Nashville this Fall

Polk Burnett Leader 'Builds a Buzz'

Scholarships Available for Fly-in



Danielle Endvick
Communications Director

At just shy of two years old, over-all-clad Orlin was far more focused on petting the farm cats and practicing his dinosaur roar than he was on the group of adults milling around outside the barn. Little did he know that the group visiting his family's Goplin Homestead Farm that day included some of the Governor's highest-ranking cabinet members.

As the entourage toured the Osseo dairy farm and met with the Goplin family, who are members of the Jackson-Trempealeau County Farmers Union, the conversation focused on the realities and challenges of dairy farming, along with the cabinet members' buzzing excitement over their northward journey for the Governor's role in the fishing opener. The day also included an entertaining misadventure in petting an over-exuberant calf that led to one participant missing a ring – but that's a story for another day.

As the delegation toured the barn and met the Goplins, my camera was drawn to young Orlin's antics as he tagged along with his Grandpa in a jaunt down the barn walk, then contentedly busied himself with racing up and down the ramp into the barn, howling his most impressive wolf and dinosaur impressions. He was a farm kid with nary a care in the world.

This is what the work of Farmers Union is about, I was reminded. Orlin's sheer joy took me back to days spent following my own father behind the grain cart as he scooped out feed for our dairy herd. Each cow got a

pat on the nose and a few friendly words from me as I trailed Dad and his cloud of ground corn dust down the feed alley.

The feeling struck again when Polk-Burnett Farmers Union member Mike Miles passed along the photo backdropped on this page – his granddaughter Juliet gleefully taking part in a farm kid right of passage: a bit of mutton busting, dressed in unicorn garb no less.

The photo came with a heartwarming note from Mike: "Getting recruited to WFU is one of the best things that ever happened to me." Just a few hours earlier that day, one of his fellow chapter members had shared a delightful video clip from a recent "Chewing the Cud" meeting, where farmers in attendance had released some pent up post-pandemic energy with a barn dance. The laughter and sense of community was contagious.

These injections of hope often land in the most timely moments, renewing our team's energy as we dig in on tough topics that sometimes feel like an uphill climb – curbing consolidation in agriculture, securing dairy policy reform, addressing climate change, etc.

For those who open your farms for visits, take the time to drop a line, or are quietly hard at work in your chapters, thank you. These moments are grounding. They remind us of the next generation and the importance of WFU's work to enhance life for family farmers, rural communities, and all people.

Cheers to the farm kids who are out there enjoying this way of life that we're fighting so hard to protect. If we can come at this fight for family farms with the same energy as Orlin comes at perfecting his t-rex call, we're gonna do just fine.



WFU Revives Service Association

The business arm of our organization, the Wisconsin Farmers Union Service Association was recently revived to oversee the newly purchased River Street building in Chippewa Falls. The building will be renovated to house the new WFU state offices, event space, retail food and beverage operations, and residential apartments.

The Board of Directors provides high-level strategy, oversight, and accountability to the service association. Two seats are open for WFU members who have an interest and experience in farm-to-fork retail operations, developing local food systems, marketing, economic development, and/or housing development. Please contact WFU Executive Director Julie Keown-Bomar for more details at jbomar@wisconsinfarmersunion.com.

Compeer Seeks 'GroundBreakers'

Compeer Financial is seeking nominations for the 2023 GroundBreaker of the Year Award, which recognizes young, beginning and small farmers who have an unparalleled passion for agriculture and who are making a positive impact in the agriculture industry.

Nominees must be actively involved in farming in Illinois, Minnesota or Wisconsin and meet at least one of the following criteria: Age 35 or younger, 10 years or less of farming or ranching experience, generate less than \$250,000 in annual gross sales. Potential recipients may nominate themselves, or be nominated. Nominees will be evaluated on ag leadership and advocacy, involvement, perseverance and commitment to the industry.

Nominations are now being accepted at compeer.com/groundbreakeroftheyear through August 31, 2022. The winner will receive a \$5,000 cash award will be featured in a video and an article in Compeer's *Cultivate Magazine*.

WISCONSIN FARMERS UNION NEWS

117 W. Spring St.
Chippewa Falls, WI 54729
715-723-5561 • 800-272-5531
www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com

WFU BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Rick Adamski <i>President</i> District 8 - 920-373-7105	Dave Rosen <i>District 2</i> 715-781-0846
Darin Von Ruden <i>Vice President</i> District 5 - 608-634-4695	Jen Schmitz <i>District 4</i> 608-487-0766
Ed Gorell <i>Treasurer</i> District 3 - 715-287-3383	Sarah Lloyd <i>District 6</i> 920-210-7335
Linda Ceylor <i>Secretary</i> District 1 - 715-567-1010	Tina Hinchley <i>District 7</i> 608-764-5090
	Rachel Bouessa <i>At-Large</i> 608-228-6617

WFU STAFF

Julie Bomar <i>Executive Director</i> 715-723-5561 • jbomar@wisconsinfarmersunion.com
Jessica Ryba <i>Administrative Assistant</i> 715-723-5561 • jryba@wisconsinfarmersunion.com
Cathy Statz <i>Education Director</i> 715-214-7887 • cstatz@wisconsinfarmersunion.com
Danielle Endvick <i>Communications Director</i> 715-471-0398 • dendvick@wisconsinfarmersunion.com
Tommy Enright <i>Communications & Special Projects Coordinator</i> 715-563-2169 • tenright@wisconsinfarmersunion.com
Julian Emerson <i>Communications Specialist, Rural Voices</i> 715-450-0733 • jemerson@wisconsinfarmersunion.com
Michelle Ramirez-White <i>Policy Coordinator</i> 715-450-9507 • mramirezwhite@wisconsinfarmersunion.com
Forrest Humphrey <i>Rural Organizer</i> 715-450-9179 • fhumphrey@wisconsinfarmersunion.com
Camryn Billen <i>Rural Organizer</i> cbillen@wisconsinfarmersunion.com
Lucia Possehl <i>Rural Organizer</i> lpossehl@wisconsinfarmersunion.com
Tara Daun <i>Farmer-Led Watershed Council Coordinator</i> 715-492-0329 • tdaun@wisconsinfarmersunion.com
Kriss Marion <i>Communications Specialist</i> <i>Wisconsin Women in Conservation</i> 608-844-3758 • kmarion@wisconsinfarmersunion.com
Lauren Langworthy <i>Director of Special Projects</i> 715-225-0432 • llangworthy@wisconsinfarmersunion.com
Kirsten Slaughter <i>Membership Engagement Director</i> 608-514-2031 • kslaughter@wisconsinfarmersunion.com
Shawn Bartholomew <i>Regional Membership Coordinator</i> 715-577-0306 • sbartholomew@wisconsinfarmersunion.com
Alicia Razvi <i>Regional Membership Coordinator</i> 715-577-5778 • arazvi@wisconsinfarmersunion.com
Lavane Hessler <i>Accounting Manager</i> 715-450-9441 • lhessler@wisconsinfarmersunion.com
Brad Henderson <i>Facilities Manager, WFU Kamp Kenwood</i> 715-214-7244 • bhenderson@wisconsinfarmersunion.com

WFU NEWS COVER PHOTO CONTEST

SUBMIT YOUR BEST RURAL LIFE PHOTOS!



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

On this month's cover:

Orlin Goplin, son of Brad and Jada, entertains visitors to his family's Goplin Homestead Farm in Osseo with his best dinosaur impression.

Newsletter Editor, Layout & Design: Danielle Endvick
Printed by: Badgerland Printing, Eau Claire, WI
Bulk Rate postage paid in Eau Claire, WI

Grassroots Input Sought in Strategic Planning Work



Julie Keown-Bomar
Executive Director

Strategic planning is important to an organization like WFU because it provides a sense of direction and outlines goals and priorities for our work. Good strategic planning should engage us all – staff, board and members with a renewed sense of direction and purpose. In terms of operations, a solid plan can help direct resources and even signal when we need to say no to a project or have more focus in a particular area. As a member of WFU, you are a key player in strategic planning, and we want your insights about the organization and our future.

We've been working with experts from Ethical Leaders in Action, a small company from Minneapolis that provides leadership and strategic consulting. They came highly recommended based on consulting work with other Farmers Union states and partners. Those of us that have interacted with Chad Weinstein or Jamie Fischer feel positive about their philosophy and practice.

We ask you to watch for and fill out an electronic survey from WFU that will be appearing in your email in the next couple of weeks. Spend a few minutes completing the questions to help evaluate how effective WFU is at carrying out our mission. We also want you to prioritize important issues for the next five years. In some ways, WFU members take part in a similar process each year as we deliberate our Special Orders of Business. Strategic planning helps push us a step further by digging deep into evaluating our effectiveness as an organization and our collective hopes for the future.

We will be sharing results from the survey at our annual WFU Summer Conference on July 21st, where the next layer of this process will involve gathering insights from chapter presidents. You may also want to call or visit with your chapter president in advance if you have input that you'd like to be considered. Contact information for all chapter leaders is listed at www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com/chapters. What would you like them to share on your behalf?

I am looking forward to planning and pie at our next get together! See you soon!

Wisconsin Farmers Union
Summer Conference
JULY 21, 2022
KAMP KENWOOD
CHIPPEWA FALLS, WI



Chapter leaders are invited to join the WFU staff and board in envisioning the future, as we update our organizational strategic plan.

RSVP today! wisconsinfarmersunion.com/events

Standing Up for 'Fairness for Farmers'



Rick Adamski
President

Fairness for Farmers is a campaign launched last fall to raise awareness of the devastating impact monopolies have had on family agriculture and to propose solutions. In 1950 farmers were receiving about 50 cents of every dollar consumers spent on food. Today that figure is only around 14 cents. This is one of the core reasons that the number of family sized farms has dropped precipitously.

A major reason for this concentration of power is that the government has encouraged consolidation of all sectors of the economy on the belief that there is an economy of scale that is achieved by consolidation. The results show that any efficiencies have been concentrated in the control of larger and larger firms. The benefits have not been shared equally and often are not reaching the farm gate.

This concentration of market power has resulted in excessive farm input costs in sectors like seed, fertilizer, fuel, and equipment. It has created a fragile food supply chain that is disrupted easily by problems at any one of the concentrated processing centers. Consumers have had to pay higher prices and have had choices limited – all while that farmers' share of the food dollar dwindles. Farm equipment costs have risen excessively, and with all of the advancements in "innovation" with modern technology in equipment, farmers are required to hire a certified repair technician -- often at higher prices. All of these factors have contributed to devastating our rural communities.

Politicians have justified these actions by claiming that everyone benefits when our economy grows. This is called the utilitarian economic view, because it suggests that some may have to experience losses for the greater good of the whole community. This view has been exposed to be false during the pandemic, when food supply chains were compromised. When 'essential workers' were forced to work with limited safety measures and limited increases to their salaries.

National Farmers Union (NFU) does not have the bankroll or lobbying capacity of these large, consolidated corporations. However, there is a growing realization and sentiment in our country that we need

to start doing things differently. That is why NFU is highlighting consolidation – and the need to fight for fair policies and prices for farmers, in their campaign, Fairness for Farmers. This movement is dedicated to rallying national political leaders, organization, and all people to work together on the following actions.

We want to strengthen and enforce the Packers and Stockyards Act. We are advocating for more transparency in agricultural markets and procedures to discover the true prices instead of those prices being determined in a corporate boardroom. There is great potential to increase competition by creating more diverse market opportunities. An essential element of all of this is to enforce antitrust laws, which is why NFU has been working to educate officials at the Department of Justice about the injustices happening today in rural America. This is essential to see if we the people have enough power to control the behemoth of corporate power.

Learn more about Fairness for Farmers at <https://nfu.org/fairness-for-farmers/>. There is a link to report any violations of anticompetitive practices to the US Department of Justice and the US Department of Agriculture. United around this issue we can reduce the loss of family farms across our country.

Rick Adamski is the president of the Wisconsin Farmers Union. He and his family run Full Circle Farm near Seymour.



Support competitive markets for farmers and fair prices for consumers.



OUT & ABOUT WITH FARMERS UNION



Jackson-Trempealeau Farmers Union members Eric, Jackie, Brad, Jada, and Paul Goplin hosted Lieutenant Governor Mandela Barnes, DATCP Secretary Randy Romanski, and other members of the Governor's cabinet. While at Goplin Homestead Farm, the group learned about Dairy Together and life on the Osseo farm.



On May 24th, the Hay River and Red Cedar Farmer-Led Watershed councils co-hosted a field day centering on rye as a cover crop, forage, and grain. Held on Steve Olson's farm, Maple Hills Dairy, over 30 folks showed up in the middle of planting season to learn.



WFU Executive Director Julie Keown-Bomar poses a question of US Senate candidates Sarah Godlewski, Kou Lee, Tom Nelson and Steven Olikara at a June 22nd event discussing issues affecting small business owners and farmers in Madison. The event was co-sponsored by WFU and Main Street Alliance.



Wisconsin Women in Conservation (WiWiC) Climate Smart Soil Solutions participants enjoyed meeting in beautiful locations this spring, including this Megalithic Garden at Kinstone in Fountain City. WiWiC is a collaborative by the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute, Renewing the Countryside, Marbleseed, and WFU.



WFU President Rick Adamski and his family hosted a Feast on the Farm at Full Circle Community Farm near Seymour in June. Those gathered shared a meal of homegrown beef and pork and fresh vegetables.



In April, WFU met with representatives from the Chippewa Co. Dept of Land Conservation & Forest Management at WFU Kamp Kenwood to discuss the intersection of farmers and conservation efforts.

Dietmann, Nelson join WFU Foundation Board of Directors

The Wisconsin Farmers Union Foundation is pleased to welcome two new faces to its Board of Directors. Following a call for nominations this spring, Paul Dietmann and William Nelson have been appointed to the board.

The foundation supports programs that foster family farming, enhance the quality of rural life, provide opportunities for public education and dialogue on key issues, and encourage cooperative economic development. As a 501(c)3, the foundation provides a charitable structure to solicit and manage financial support for WFU educational programs and initiatives. The full board now includes:

Rick Adamski, President

Rick and his family own and operate a 240-acre farm near Seymour in Shawano County. The farm has been in the Adamski family since 1900 and converted from a dairy to a grass-fed beef and custom heifer raising operation in 2014. The family has diversified to include pastured pork, free range laying hens and fresh vegetables and markets these products directly to customers through farmers markets, a CSA and the SLO Farmers Cooperative.



Darin Von Ruden, Vice President

Von Ruden is a third generation dairy farmer who is very active with Farmers Union on local, state, and national levels, earning several awards for member recruitment. He grew up attending Farmers Union Camps and has served on the WFU Board of Directors in 2008. He also serves on the boards of the Wisconsin Farmers Union, Farmers Union Enterprises, and National Farmers Union. Von Ruden and his wife, JoAnn, live in Westby and have two children.



Linda Ceylor, Secretary

Ceylor operates Hillside Dairy, a 50-cow organic dairy. She moved to Catawba from Washington State in 1997 and is a founding member of the Taylor-Price Farmers Union chapter. Ceylor serves on the state Farm Services Administration Board. She is a leader of the KC Clovers 4-H Club and was a Price County Fair Board member for 10 years. She is currently President of Price/Taylor National Rural Letter Carriers Association and serves as a local steward.



Ed Gorell, Treasurer

Gorell and his wife Kristi started their 320-head veal barn and 50,000 bird broiler facility in 1983, later transitioning into raising steers. In 2018 Gorell retired from full-time farming; he now works as a part-time milk



hauler. Gorell has received Farmers Union awards for membership and chapter building, has led numerous committees, attended National Farmers Union conventions and fly-ins to Washington D.C. and serves as the Eau Claire County Farmers Union Vice President.

Michelle Miller, Director

Miller serves as Secretary for Dane County Farmers Union (2019-present) and has served on the Wisconsin Farmers Union Foundation board since its inception in the 1990s. A third-generation Farmers Union member and 1979 Torchbearer, Miller has worked in sustainable agriculture and food systems since 1980, largely due to her Farmers Union youth and adult education opportunities. Since 1996, she has served as a practicing economic anthropologist at the UW Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems. Miller is a Wisconsin native, starting out in the Chippewa County youth program and since college has lived in Madison, WI.



William Nelson, Director

Nelson is an independent consultant who works with a range of educational and agricultural organizations as they address future needs and opportunities. He previously served as vice president of Corporate Citizenship for CHS Inc., the nation's leading cooperative and a global energy, grains, and foods business, and as the president of the independent CHS Foundation. Nelson's professional and personal efforts also have supported organizations such as National FFA, the North American Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture (NACTA), the National Association for Agricultural Education (NAAE), and the National Teach Ag Campaign. He previously taught at the University of Minnesota-Waseca, where he focused on education around agriculture, co-ops, entrepreneurship and rural leadership.



Paul Dietmann, Director

Dietmann is a Senior Lending Officer of Mission Financing at Compeer Financial, a role in which he provides loans to emerging market farmers. He and his family live in Prairie du Sac. Dietmann spent 11 years as county agriculture agent and department head with UW-Extension in Sauk County and 5 years as Director of the Bureau of Farm and Rural Services at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture. He received a Bachelor's degree in agricultural economics from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Campaign and a Master's degree in continuing and vocational education from UW-Madison. Dietmann is the author of *Fearless Farm Finances: Farm Financial Management Demystified* and a member of the Farm Financial Standards Council and the UW-Madison School for Beginning Dairy and Livestock Farmers Advisory Committee. He also has a small pasture-based farm.





thus far, with the assumption that each agency has until the end of the Biden administration's first term to complete these directives. Each report card was followed by an assessment that justifies the basis for these grades, as well as the specific steps agencies must take to improve their marks.

"Really one of the reasons we wrote this report is we are seeing the stage set for some on-the-ground impact, but we are looking to push these agencies along so we can feel the impact more strongly," Carden said.

Report cards were as follows. To see the full report, visit farmaction.us

DOJ overall grade: B-

DOJ has made a commendable effort in a short time – they are investigating mergers that may have previously been waived through, and have shown perseverance throughout a tough price-fixing trial in the poultry industry. In their merger review process, the agency has been reaching out to farmers and workers to learn about real-world harms of corporate consolidation.

In order to improve their grade, the FTC must at a minimum issue strong merger review guidelines, issue and begin to act on their report on beef cattle market manipulation, and bring at least one major monopolization case that seeks to break up a harmful food industry monopoly.

FTC overall grade: B-

FTC leadership has made it clear that they're seeking to overhaul an agency with substantial untapped authorities as part of a larger effort to strengthen antitrust enforcement. Open Markets Institute and Farm Action would like to see fair competition rules banning non-compete agreements and exclusive dealing, more development of Robinson-Patman enforcement (especially in tandem with USDA), and bolder actions to bust grocery monopolies.

USDA overall Grade: D+

USDA has notably shifted to highlight issues of competition and has made significant investments to diversify supply chains, but they have large-



Tommy Enright
*Communications
& Special Projects
Coordinator*

On July 14th, farmers, ranchers, workers, rural advocates, policymakers, and media gathered in Washington, D.C. and online for an event titled "Making the Grade? A Midterm Review of the Biden Administration's Commitment to Food System Competition," hosted by Farm Action and Open Markets Institute. The organizations released a report by the same name featuring report cards assessing how the Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Department of Justice (DOJ), and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) are progressing on measures within President Biden's July 2021 executive order to revive antitrust enforcement and promote competition throughout the US economy.

In his opening remarks, Open Markets Institute Executive Director (and 2020 Wisconsin Farmers Union Convention Keynote) Barry Lynn illustrated the gravity of unchecked monopolization in agriculture. "The political result is concentration of power in the hands of the few and we've seen more than a million family farmers driven off the land, their property taken from them, their livelihoods taken from them ... It is a political revolution that has taken place in this country and no one has

done anything about it for 40 years."

Farm Action Vice President Angela Huffman outlined the importance of the moment.

"This executive order represents a once-in-decades opportunity to take action against the corporate power that's driving farmers and ranchers off the land, putting workers in harm's way, closing down small businesses in our rural communities, and leading to fewer choices and skyrocketing prices for all of us who eat," Huffman stated. "Today, the control over our economy is a threat to our democracy and our national security."

Farm Action Policy Advocate Sarah Carden pointed out that though the administration made some big promises in the executive order issued last summer, they have failed to follow through on a number of promises, such as addressing unfair labeling. "As it stands today, beef and pork products raised outside of the U.S. can be repacked in the United States and labeled as a 'Product of the USA,'" Carden said. She noted that while a comment period has been opened on the issue, back in March, there has been no further movement, which she notes is, "basically the definition of 'beating around the bush.'"

The report cards were intended to be a progress report of how the administration is addressing issues of monopolization and consolidation

ly or entirely failed to take substantial policy action. USDA needs to issue new rules and fully enforce the P&S Act, strengthen "Product of USA" labeling, improve price discovery and transparency, and identify clear procurement targets that support fair and regional food systems.

Panelists and testimonials

Following the report were video testimonials from farmers and stakeholders from across the country, including Wisconsin Farmers Union District 6 Director and Columbia County dairy farmer Sarah Lloyd, who provided a real-life example about how our current system incentivizes larger farms and firms, punishing small farms. "And you're smaller," Lloyd says, "so you're not really going to be able to push back."

One of the most engaging speakers was John Boyd Jr., a fourth generation farmer and President of the National Black Farmers Association, who took aim at corporate discrimination and abuse from the likes of Cargill and John Deere. "When we challenge these companies, they immediately go out and find a black face and run a television commercial. 'Oh, we've changed the way that we look.' But you haven't changed the way you do business."

"They take away the choice and they take away the voice of not only Black farmers, but [of all] the American [farmers] in this country," he went on to say. "Large scale farmers should be opposed to it, too."

Overall, the event and report did an effective job of highlighting what has transpired over the last year to address monopoly power in our food system, as well as what still needs to be addressed. Following the event, USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack told *The Hagstrom Report* that he believes the administration has accomplished a lot, but that there is more to be done, particularly in enforcement of the Packers and Stockyards Act. He went on to say that he expects to get "guidance and direction" from the groups.

Wisconsin Farmers Union would be happy to lend our voices as well. For the last several years, WFU members have voted to adopt "Concentration in the Agriculture Industry" as a policy priority at our annual convention.

The clock is ticking. It's time to get loud.

Farmers Union Fly-In Scholarships Available

The Wisconsin Farmers Union Board of Directors has approved scholarships for first-time attendees to the National Farmers Union Fly-In, set for September 11-14.

Attendees will have the opportunity to hear from U.S. Department of Agriculture officials about initiatives the department is undertaking on behalf of farmers. We expect to meet with officials from the Biden Administration about their important work on competition and resiliency in the food system. Participants will also receive briefings from key Congressional leaders, especially related to the preparations for the 2023 Farm Bill.

The most important agenda items of the fly-in, however, are the meetings with legislators, which are a hallmark of our organization's grassroots structure. Farmers Union members will meet with their members of Congress to highlight their priorities, the challenges they are facing, and goals for future legislation. If interested in applying for a scholarship, contact the WFU State Office at 715-723-5561 or watch for the scholarship application to be posted soon at www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com and promoted in the e-news. For more information about the fly-in, contact Government Relations Associate Michelle Ramirez-White at mramirezwhite@wisconsinfarmersunion.com or 715-450-9507.



NFU Women's Conference heads to Nashville

The National Farmers Union Women's Conference provides valuable programming and a network of women farmers and ranchers to reach out to throughout the year. Farm women from throughout the country will gather for this year's event in Nashville November 6-8th.

Topics will include business management and community building, cooperatives, farming with family, insurance, leadership, and more. Participants will have the opportunity to network with other attendees and win prizes!

Learn more at nfu.org/womensconference. WFU is offering scholarships for first-time attendees. Contact the State Office at 715-723-5561 or visit www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com for more information.





Farm & Fiber Tour includes Member Farms

Join Three Rivers Fibershed (TRF) and Wisconsin Farmers Union (WFU) local chapters for a series of on-farm events highlighting local fiber farms, soil-to-soil farming practices, and regional textile systems in Wisconsin! Featuring WFU and TRF members, attendees will have the chance to connect with local farms and shepherds engaging in climate-beneficial, pasture-based farming practices and learn about the groups' work to support farmers and cooperative efforts to promote local agricultural systems.

Events will feature farmer-led pasture walks, hands-on fiber activities, and educational booths hosted by partner organizations.

- Saturday, August 6th, 2-5pm, Autumn Larch Farm, Jane Hansen, W7120 County Road O, Prentice WI 54556. Co-hosted by Taylor-Price Farmers Union.
- Saturday, August 6th, 6-8pm, Hillside Dairy, WFU District Director Linda Ceylor. Join us for a twilight farm tour and interact with cows milking in the parlor, feed calves, and enjoy farm fresh food from Farmers Union members.
- Saturday, August 27th, 9:30-12:30am, Curlee Acres, 159th Ave & 160th St., Balsam Lake, WI 54810. Co-hosted by Polk-Burnett Farmers Union.
- Sunday, September 25th, 3-6pm - Priory Farms and Kubb Farm, Aaron Ellringer, S5001 William Ct. Eau Claire, WI. Co-hosted by Eau Claire County Farmers Union.

The Farm & Fiber Tour is a free event open to all community members. Learn more at www.threeriversfibershed.com. This project is supported with funding from the WFU Foundation and Local Initiative Grant programs.



South Central seeks silent auction donations

Want to support the South Central Wisconsin Farmers Union by giving to their July 24th Summer Picnic silent auction fundraiser? The chapter is looking for donations from area restaurants, wine, beer, cider, spirits, services (massages, vets, farm sitting, farm hand workers etc.), items (tools, gift baskets, etc.), gift certificates, handcrafts (soaps, baked goods, aprons, paintings, dried herbs, etc) and more. All items must be new.

Please send donation form by July 15 to penny@stillpoint.farm and include: donor name/company name, email address, phone number, description of item or service donated, approximate retail value. Please also indicate if you will bring the item to the event, if it requires pick-up, or if it can be mailed or emailed (certificates).



St. Croix County Farmers Union Slings Summer Cheesecurds

The St. Croix County Farmers Union cheesecurd stand is ready for summer fun! In June, members rolled into downtown Chippewa Falls to sell their deep-fried delicacies at the Northwoods Blues Festival.

Catch chapter members selling cheesecurds at Amery Music on the River, Amery Fall Festival, and this fall at the Baldwin Chili Fest.

At left, St. Croix County Farmers Union members Dave Rosen and Ryan Brathal hold down the fort June 18th as the group sold cheesecurds from the parking lot of the new Wisconsin Farmers Union building near Riverfront Park in Chippewa Falls.

Sharing Wisconsin Farmers Union



Kirsten Slaughter
Membership
Engagement Director

Wisconsin Farmers Union does a lot of great work in a lot of different areas. We host numerous events, work on issues ranging from dairy to rural broadband to climate change to antitrust, and offer a lot of ways for members to get involved.

Our organization is strong because of our members. We have a rich history because of past members, and we do the work we do today because of members like you.

You play an important role in bringing new people to WFU. Sometimes when talking to someone for the first time about WFU it can be hard to know where to start. How can you identify a special connection that will make them want to join? Here are some of the ways the membership team talks to people when we are out at events, fairs, and shows.

Start broad then narrow your focus

I am a member of the organization, as well as on staff, and the work that we do is very important to me, so my instinct is to share as much about the organization as fast as I can. That is a lot for one person to hear all at once. Instead, try starting broadly and then narrow it down to specific issues that we are working on or upcoming activities. The mission of the organization is a powerful tool and good starting point: *"Wisconsin Farmers Union, a member-driven organization, is committed to enhancing the quality of life for family farmers, rural communities, and all people through educational opportunities, cooperative endeavors, and civic engagement."*

I talk about how WFU is a grassroots organization where the members set the policy and educational initiatives. Our goal is to have more farms, not fewer, and we have a lot of different avenues of accomplishing that goal through policy advocacy, cooperation, or education of youth, our members, or our broader communities.

Ask them about themselves

The best way to ensure that you are connecting WFU with the individual is to ask them about themselves. What they are concerned about?

If it's a policy issue, tell them about how powerful our democratic process is at convention. Share how every member gets a voice and a vote to reason together and create policy. Invite them to attend Lobby Day, where members travel to Madison to talk to elected officials. Tell folks about the scholarships for members to travel to Washington, DC to participate in a fly-in.

If educational programming is important to them, share how we have programs organized at the state level like our meat processing webinars or Dairy Together meetings. Share how our camp and youth programs provide fun and educational environments for kids to talk about co-ops, family farms, leadership, and conservation.

If community is what that person is seeking, invite them to a local chapter event. Our members are doing great work, and we want to welcome and invite new folks into our community gatherings.

Ask them to join

The final, but maybe most important step, is to ask someone to join WFU. People want to – and need to – be asked to join. Start by telling them why you are a member, and then ask them to join. Leave some space for them to think about it. You may feel like you need to jump in with something else but the best practice is to hold that space. If they say they are not ready to join yet, try inviting them to an upcoming chapter event or other WFU activity. If someone is ready to sign up the best place is on our website at www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com/application. If you would also like membership brochures we can make sure to get some to you.

Members are the foundation of our organization. We need more people like you to make sure we can all create a place that works for "family farmers, rural communities, and all people"

So, will you ask someone to join Wisconsin Farmers Union?

FARMERS UNION HAPPENINGS

Kenosha/Racine/Walworth/ Jefferson Farmers Union Pasture Walk Grazing Warm Season Grasses

July 12, 6-8pm, Clover Valley State Habitat Area, N8153 Hwy. 89, Whitewater. Info: Kirsten Jurcek, 920-342-9504

WFU Summer Conference Chapter Leader Strategic Planning

July 21, Kamp Kenwood

Kenosha/Racine/Walworth/ Jefferson Farmers Union Pasture Walk

July 21, 5-8pm, Gwenyn Hill Farm, N130W294 Bryn Dr., Waukesha
Info: Kirsten Jurcek, 920-342-9504

WFU South Central Chapter and Soil Sisters Potluck

July 24, 4-6pm, 5:15 farm tour
Green Fire Farm
N5305 Ringhand Rd., Monticello
Info: FL Morris, 608-636-3999

Starting Up Farmer Led Watershed Councils in Chippewa County

July 28, 1-3pm
Kamp Kenwood Lodge
19161 79th Ave., Chippewa Falls

Deadline to notify WFU of annual meeting date

August 12

Local Initiative Grant Deadline

August 15

wisconsinfarmersunion.com/chapters

Happy & Healthy: Farmers' Wellness

August 25, 5-7:30pm
Minhas Kitchen, Back Garden Patio
1408 13th St., Monroe

WFU Policy & Bylaw Resolutions Due

October 1

Chapter Reports Due

October 31

Chapter Presidents Meeting

November 12

Local Initiative Grant Deadline

November 15

wisconsinfarmersunion.com/chapters

WFU State Convention

December 10-11
Chula Vista, Wisconsin Dells



Welcome New Faces to Farmers Union Team



LUCIA POSSEHL, RURAL ORGANIZER With roots in the Driftless Region and Columbia County, Lucia has always been drawn towards rural resilience building, expanding an ethic of land stewardship, and engaging in meaningful community-based organizing. In her undergraduate work at the University of Vermont, she studied human geography and environmental studies with a focus on rural communities, food systems, and participant-led qualitative research. Lucia previously worked as a program manager and administrative coordinator for rural public health nonprofits to coordinate people-centered responses to the overdose epidemic in rural Minnesota and Vermont. She has also worked with UW-Stout's LAKES REU program conducting qualitative research on farmer perceptions of conservation and watershed management efforts in the Red Cedar River Watershed. In addition to her work at WFU, Lucia works as a communications coordinator for an educational and demonstration farm in Southeastern Minnesota.

"I am overjoyed to join the organizing team at WFU. I look forward to engaging in meaningful conversations with members and working to create purposeful change in the state based on the lived experiences of our community."



CAMRYN BILLEN, RURAL ORGANIZER Camryn Billen grew up in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin and has been involved in the Wisconsin Farmers Union since she was 14. She quickly moved from attending Kamp Kenwood to staffing it. Camryn has served on the National Youth Advisory Council, where she worked with people from all across the United States in educating the Farmers Union Youth. She planned WFU's Lobby Day as part of her work as the Government Relations Intern. After her internship, Camryn went to Chippewa Valley Technical College for a degree in Agronomy Management. Her involvement with Farmers Union, from grassroots to federal levels, has led her to develop a strong appreciation for member-driven policy implementation. She plans to use the knowledge and skills developed both at school and from Farmers Union to support and expand existing communities and chapters.

"I believe that all members of the Farmers Union should strive to understand and engage in policy implementation and development processes, and I am looking forward to working closely with members in this role."



JULIAN EMERSON, RURAL VOICES COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST For the past three decades, Julian has worked as a journalist in the Eau Claire area. After graduating from UW-Eau Claire with a journalism degree in 1993, he worked at two weekly newspapers and a small daily before working as a freelance journalist for numerous newspapers, such as the *Eau Claire Leader-Telegram*, the *La Crosse Tribune* and the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. He was hired full-time in 1997 by the *Leader-Telegram*, where he worked until 2019. He subsequently worked at the statewide digital outlet *UpNorthNews*.

"After growing up part of my childhood in rural communities in west-central Wisconsin, I am honored to have the opportunity to write for Wisconsin Farmers Union about the challenges and successes in the state's rural areas, and about the people who live and work in those regions."



BLAKE GIECK, POLICY INTERN Blake grew up in Cambridge, WI, where he was active in FFA. He first got involved in agriculture by visiting his grandparents farmette in Sauk County, where they raised miniature horses. As his love for agriculture grew, Blake joined FFA in 7th grade. In middle school he met WFU member Anna Hinchley, who showed him the ropes of showing sheep, a path that led him to showing market lambs. Blake currently attends the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, studying both Political Science and AgriBusiness. He is also a member of a few agricultural organizations including the Pioneer Dairy Club, the AgriBusiness Club, and the Alpha Gamma Rho Fraternity.

"I look forward to being a voice for family farms across Wisconsin and to helping the Government Relations team this summer!"



THOMAS RUOHONIEMI, CAMP FACILITIES INTERN Thomas grew up in Pine River, MN, while also spending a good amount of his childhood traveling for his parent's work as Christian missionaries. He spent five years in the Navy, training for medical duty and working as a surgical technician. He attends UW- Eau Claire and is majoring in geography.

"I'm enjoying helping out wherever I'm needed. It's something different every day, which I'm enjoying and you can't beat the scenery of Kamp Kenwood."

Farmers Collaborate for Change of Ag Tourism Zoning Laws

Sheila Everhart

Wisconsin Agricultural Tourism Association Interim Executive Director

What do you get when farmers, members of the Farmers Union and Farm Bureau, Soil Sisters and the Wisconsin Agricultural Tourism Association collaborate? Years of knowledge and experience that precipitate the changing of a 1979 Agricultural Zoning Ordinance to now encourage and advocate for farms and other agricultural producers that invite the public onto their operations for education, recreation, nourishment, products, and accommodation.

Collectively these individuals provided tools, networking, advocacy, and a promotional platform to encourage farms' sustainable economic growth and preserve the rural lifestyle while creating awareness of Wisconsin agriculture. What started in March of 2021 with barriers for farmers interested in diversifying their operations by adding Agricultural Tourism Activities to their operations ended in a new Agricultural Zoning Ordinance adoption in March 2022.

Special Thanks to Penny and Phil Molina, Still Point Flower Farm, for taking the lead on these grassroots efforts. To assist the Green County zoning committee, a core group of stakeholders reached out to partner organizations to let them know Green County was considering updating its current Agritourism Zoning Codes and to help gather input to aid in the decision-making process.

The grassroots group hosted a Zoom Call to gather stakeholders' information and build partnerships with organizations, citizens, and legislators.

This year-long grassroots process required research, education, and understanding how to ask the correct questions and be able to express the desires of local farmers. Many thanks to the following agricultural tourism advocates and farmers who made sure their voices were heard at Green County public hearings; Cara Carper, Dan Wegmueller, Josh Schenk, FL Morris, Jen Riemer, Scott Timm, and Phil and Penny Molina.

The groups collectively asked how all rural communities, – from townships up to the county level – could benefit from the economic engine of agricultural tourism. The agricultural tourism industry tripled in the U.S. between 2002 and 2017, according to the most recent U.S. Census of Agriculture report. Agricultural tourism continues to gain popularity and is projected to reach nearly \$63 billion in annual revenue by 2027, according to Allied Market Research.



Left: Hop Garden Brewing owner Rich Joseph demonstrated how to string up hop vines at his farm in Belleville during a tour with the South Central Chapter Wisconsin Farmers Union and Wisconsin Agricultural Tourism Association.

Wisconsin Farmers Union's South Central chapter hosted a May meeting at the Joseph Farm Hop Garden in Belleville. The day included a panel on agricultural tourism featuring Green County Supervisor Sue

Nelson, Hop Garden farmers Rich and Michele Joseph, WATA President Dave Muehl, Advocacy Committee Chair Jean Bahn, and Interim Executive Director Sheila Everhart.

The group reviewed the new Green County Zoning Codes and how they will impact agricultural tourism and celebrated the success of this collaborative endeavor.

The Wisconsin Agricultural Tourism Association (WATA) promotes and advocates for farms, ranches and other agricultural producers that invite the public onto their operations. Learn more at wiagtourism.com.

A CELEBRATION OF WISCONSIN FARMS AND RURAL LIFE

August 5 - 7, 2022

- ✓ Soil Sisters Share: Full Day Program for Beginning Women Farmers
- ✓ Taste of Place
- ✓ Workshops & Intensives
- ✓ Pizza Night on the Farm
- ✓ Cheese Tasting Finale

ALL EVENTS OUTDOORS!

LEARN MORE AND REGISTER:

www.soilsisterswi.org

Harvest Cattle, Slaughtered Markets



Alan Guebert
Correspondent

You don't need to be a vegan to know that livestock and poultry aren't "harvested," the squeaky clean verb that's become fashionable among farm and ranch groups to minimize the end-as in The End-of most animals their members grow.

Soybeans are harvested; pigs are slaughtered. Wheat is harvested; cattle are slaughtered.

It's not a minor point, insists C. Robert Taylor, Eminent Scholar of Agricultural Economics and Public Policy at Auburn University, in his recently released treatise on today's badly broken cattle markets. Taylor telegraphs the paper's theme through its title, "Harvested Cattle, Slaughtered Markets?"

The semantic sarcasm isn't accidental: While U.S. farm and commodity groups spent decades polishing meat's image ("harvesting"), global agbiz spent their time and resources buying up, then dominating—ahem, slaughtering—farm and food sectors like seed, cattle, poultry, and grocery retailing.

Now, one market, cattle, is so near death that both the Senate and House Ag committees recently held widely publicized hearings to push ideas on how to resuscitate it. Two plans were showcased. The first "would create a new U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) office to monitor for anti-competitive practices in the meat and poultry industries," reported the Washington Post April 27.

The second, labeled "The Cattle Price Discovery and Transparency Act," hopes to establish "minimums for negotiated sales and require clear reporting of marketing contracts to ensure ranchers are getting a fair shake in a highly consolidated cattle market," it continued.

Either or both ideas may have had merit 20 years ago when it was already evident that major meatpackers were tightening their grip on cattle markets. Today, however, both plans are window dressing from late-to-the-party politicians. Neither will have a nickel's worth of impact on prices paid by packers for cattle or for altering any "anti-competitive practices in the meat and poultry industries," says Taylor.

Why? Because, as his readable, 49-page report makes clear, major packers long ago learned how to minimize competition in the live cattle market while maximizing confusion over today's USDA maze of re-

porting requirements. The data bears witness to their ever-growing prowess at the expense of both cattle growers and consumers.

Over the last two decades, Taylor writes, "Retail beef prices in constant [deflated] dollars have trended strongly upward... from about \$500/cwt [per one hundred pounds] to over \$700/cwt... Grocery store profitability has also trended upward, about doubling in the last three decades..."

"Profitability of independent cattle feeding has trended downward... from an average profit of \$50/head to an average loss of \$50/head."

Moreover, these "Sustained financial losses for independent feeders likely explain, in part or in whole, the loss of 83,000 feedlots with a thousand or fewer head capacity in 25 years and 48,000 in the last decade" alone.

These feedlots' get-out-while-you-can math was pretty simple, offers Taylor. The \$50-per-head loss they faced in just the past decade alone would have totaled a devastating \$1.5 million-per-feeder had they stayed.

Somehow, though, the uber-big feeders escaped similar losses and a similar fate: The number of feedlots with over 50,000 head capacity actually increased from 45 in the late 1990s to 77 today. How?

"Sweetheart deals with large captive feeders"—independent feedlots contractually-tied to one of the big four packers—"may explain, in part or in whole, how they have survived and even (grew) in the last decade... Publicly available data on costs or returns for giant feedlots are not available to address this question."

If neither Congressional effort holds little to no hope to even partially repair today's broken cattle market, what might? Taylor offers four "options for further discussion." All hold some merit, he explains in a May 9 telephone interview, but also, all require a level of government intervention that hasn't been seen in most ag markets for decades.

"The bottom line," Taylor admits, "is that after decades of watching cattle markets become more integrated with meatpackers and meat retailers, I don't have a good solution that's politically workable."

Bottom line? If the experts say it's slaughter, it's slaughter.

© 2022 ag comm – The Farm and Food File is published weekly throughout the U.S. and Canada. Past columns, supporting documents, and contact information are posted at farmandfoodfile.com.

WFU celebrates investment in meat processing infrastructure

Wisconsin Farmers Union commends Governor Tony Evers and the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP) for a recent announcement of a \$10 million investment in Wisconsin's meat processing industry.

"This funding is very needed and will be appreciated throughout rural Wisconsin," said Wisconsin Farmers Union President Rick Adamski. "There are a lot of facilities out there operating on a shoestring budget. These grants will help them modernize and better meet the needs of their communities. Continued investment in infrastructure and the diversification of Wisconsin's meat processing will make the whole industry more resilient."

The funding helps fill a gap that was left when the inaugural meat processing grant program in the 2021-2023 biennial state budget was slashed from \$2 million to \$200,000 by the legislature. Demand for those grants far exceeded the budget, with DATCP receiving 100 requests totaling more than \$4.4 million for the initial round of funding. The investment will offer grants of up to \$150,000 through the Meat and Poultry Supply Chain Resiliency Grant Program, distributed by DATCP.

In the early onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, WFU convened a Meat Processing Task Force that developed a series of webinars and panel discussions to explore the complexity of the issue and potential solutions. Task force members also helped develop a network analysis and collect resources to further address issues within meat processing.

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

Investments in infrastructure, such as the one announced today, are among the report's proposed solutions to meat processing bottlenecks.

Meat Processing Infrastructure was identified as a Special Order of Business by grassroots members of WFU over the last three years.

"Wisconsin Farmers Union responded to this crisis because of our members' clearly defined struggles and needs in this area," said WFU Executive Director Julie Keown-Bomar. "We hit this issue full-force with all parts of our mission -- education, cooperation, and civic engagement -- and we are delighted that our efforts have had some impact in helping the Governor's office and legislators to recognize needs across our communities."

Other state-level efforts over the past year included a \$5 million allocation for meat industry training, aimed at reducing barriers to careers in meat processing, providing new opportunities to workers, and ensuring the food supply chain remains resilient.

Learn more at www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com/processing.

Farmers Union Industries invests in increasing meatpacking competition

Farmers Union Industries is looking to create some competition in the meat packing industry with an investment in a project to build a one-million square foot, next-generation beef and bison packing facility near Rapid City in western South Dakota.

"This investment will create another major buyer for cattle," notes Darin Von Ruden, who represents WFU on the FUI board. "The current lack of competition for the purchase



Von Ruden

of live cattle has been an issue Farmers Union has been striving to address, and this project will provide an alternate avenue for producers rather than the Big Four meatpackers who currently control 85 percent of meat processing in the United States."

Von Ruden added that the project will create tremendous opportunity for expanded capacity for development of other income enhancing projects and advocacy.

Farmers Union Industries will focus specifically on efficient processing of the blood and bone meal byproducts

The state-of-the-art facility is scheduled to break ground at the beginning of 2023. Learn more about Farmers Union Industries at www.fuillc.com.

WFU Seeks Volunteers for Convention Committees

Wisconsin Farmers Union is seeking members to serve on committees for the Annual Convention, set for December 9-11th, 2022 at Chula Vista Resort in Wisconsin Dells.

Learn more and fill out the interest form at: www.tinyurl.com/WFUconv





Building a Buzz

By Danielle Endvick

Polk Burnett Farmers Union President Kristy Allen has been keeping busy beekeeping and building community in her neck of the Northwoods.

GRANTSBURG – Akin to the queen bees she values in her hives, beekeeper Kristy Allen has become a pivotal part of her community.

"When I first got into beekeeping, I was so captured by the way that bees function as a society – and how they are woman-run by the queen bee," Allen said. "I have a global studies degree and I was connecting all the dots."

Likewise, Allen has realized how many rural issues are interconnected in ways that affect the climate, economy, and fabric of our communities. As president of the Polk-Burnett Farmers Union, she has helped the group emerge from the pandemic stronger than ever and launch into a new project that could revitalize the local food scene in the St. Croix River Valley.

Allen grew up in rural Minnesota, not far from St. Cloud. Though her parents didn't farm, they were avid gardeners, and her grandpa worked for an ag consulting company in Iowa. Wanderlust set in after high school, and Allen spent some time traveling abroad. She graduated from the University of Minnesota in 2008 and took an internship in Arkansas through Heifer International, a development organization working to end hunger and poverty around the world by provid-





Above: Polk-Burnett Farmers Union members at a recent Chewing the Cud event at Whetstone Farm.

St. Croix Valley
Food Alliance
Launch Party!

Wed., Aug. 10th, 6-9pm
Community
Homestead Farm
501 280th St.
Osceola, WI

ing livestock and training to struggling farmers.

"It was there that I really caught the spark of wanting to be involved in agriculture," she recalls. Allen spent a year in the AmeriCorps program, serving as the livestock coordinator in a program that worked to connect inner-city youth with the origins of their food, hunger, and poverty.

Through that experience, Allen met a man from Ecuador who was seeking help to start a CSA farm. Allen made the leap from Arkansas to Ecuador, but not before returning to the Midwest to work on her uncle and aunt's bee farm during honey production season.

"I was really hooked on the honey bees and was flirting with the idea of becoming a vegetable farmer," she said.

In Ecuador, Allen's experience was sweetened by the opportunity to manage hives on the farm and plug in with a local beekeeping club.

"I was managing the farm in Spanish and English and working with these beekeepers who talked about their bees so romantically," she said. "They were building these colmenas [hives] and working on rainwater capture with tanks. It was very formational for me and my view of farming to see this community of farmers working together."

Around that time, a number of natives had been kicked off their land as sharecropping took hold in the region.

"They were manipulated into signing contracts that were little more than indentured servitude," Allen said. "The mountains of Ecuador were not meant for growing corn and soy; the farms I was working with were focused on rebuilding the soil and being self sustainable."

Pedal Power

As her time in Ecuador came to a close, Allen felt the pull back to Minnesota – and into the growing buzz of the beekeeping world. She joined her aunt and uncle, who are migratory beekeepers, on their farm near Deer River in northern Minnesota. While helping with honey harvest, Allen's aunt asked if she would consider marketing honey

in Minneapolis, where she was now residing.

A business was born – and it started with a bee costume.

In that summer of 2010, Allen was pulling double duty, working at restaurants and at Foxtail Farm near Osceola, WI. She had landed in a wonderful community in Minneapolis, where she was building partnerships and excitement around her love for bees. Around Halloween, Allen decided she would paint her bike like a bee, toss on a bee costume and hand out honey samples.

"From there on it was like a train, one thing after another pushed me in this entrepreneurial direction," she said.

The bee-themed bike stuck around and inspired the invention of a pedal-powered honey extractor. Allen organized a Kickstarter and raised \$40,000 to support the project. The honey house was open to hobby beekeepers to come and rent out the Beez Kneez honey cycle.

Meanwhile, growing relationships with Twin Cities chefs led to fun antics like the "Annual Dandelion Honey Pastry Challenge," where the only sweetener allowed is honey.

Twelve years later, the business has weathered a pandemic, an uprising, and a move from Minneapolis to a quieter setting at Trade Lake Ranch, on the border of Polk and Burnett Counties in western Wisconsin.

"I got married in 2017 and moved out here," Allen notes. "I settled into a business model where I teach intensive beekeeping courses."

In 2021, she built a new honey house on the property (with the help from fellow WFU member James Dodge of Black Brook Farm). She sells bees and value-added products like mustard, rents out the Beez Kneez bike, and offers classes at her picturesque spot along the Trade River.

Finding Farmers Union

Like many Farmers Union members, Allen's was a meandering path that eventually led to the organization. She met Farmers Union members in her early years of beekeeping, putting hives on some of **See page 21 ► BUZZ**

Producer-led Watershed Groups Making a Difference



During the first year of the Wisconsin Producer-Led Watershed Grant Program in 2016, \$242,550 was awarded to 14 groups. This year, \$1 million was awarded to a program-record 36 groups across the state.

Jim Massey
Rural Voices Correspondent

For more information about the Producer-Led Watershed program, visit <https://bit.ly/3bx1a2o> or contact Dana Christel at 608-640-7270.

MADISON – Hundreds of Wisconsin farmers have gravitated to producer-led watershed groups for a variety of reasons over the past half dozen years.

Some have joined groups to learn about innovative farming practices such as cover crops, minimum tillage or low-disturbance manure application. Others are looking for ways to protect streambanks on their property or keep nitrates out of the groundwater. Still others are looking for ways to demonstrate to their urban neighbors that farmers care about clean water.

Wisconsin's Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant program has been a success beyond the expectations of those who crafted the initiative in 2015. Program funding to help farmers implement conservation practices on their

farms has continued to increase, with \$1 million distributed this year to 36 watershed groups across the state.

Dana Christel, a conservation specialist at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, oversees the grant program for the state agency. She said about \$4.2 million has been allocated to 41 watershed groups since funds were first distributed in fiscal year 2016.

"As far as I know, this is the only state program that provides funding specifically for farmer-driven (conservation) efforts," Christel said. "I know there are other farmer-led conservation groups popping up throughout the country, but I think our program is unique in the way it's structured. Our groups can focus on things they feel really meet the needs of their local resource concerns."

Each farmer-led group must partner with a county land conservation department, UW-Extension, the Department of Natural Resources, or another nonprofit conservation organization on projects. The emphasis is on innovation and practices not already covered by state or federal programs.

The watershed groups use DATCP grants to provide financial incentives to farmers to implement conservation practices, for education and outreach, on-farm demonstrations and water-quality testing and monitoring efforts.

Tara Daun, Wisconsin Farmers Union farmer-led watershed coordinator, works directly with four farmer-led councils in Dunn, Pierce, Polk and St. Croix counties. She

Fiscal Year	Total Requests	Total Awarded	Number of requests	Number of groups awarded
2016	\$262,550	\$242,550	15	14
2017	\$197,065	\$197,065	11	11
2018	\$619,721	\$558,246	21	17
2019	\$869,815	\$750,000	27	24
2020	\$1,051,871	\$750,000	27	24
2021	\$1,043,910	\$750,000	33	30
2022	\$1,194,543	\$1,000,000	36	36

Courtesy WI Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

said each of the groups has a different emphasis, depending on the local culture and goals of the involved farmers.

"The groups are incentivizing a lot for cover crops to hold the soil on the ground and help scavenge nitrogen," Daun said. "It's not just manure causing (ground-water contamination) problems, it's also fertilizer.

"So many farmers don't have control of the narrative. The watershed groups provide an opportunity for farmers to get together and organize to talk to the public about what they're doing and prove they're part of the water quality solution. Farmers are not trying to pollute the water, they're doing their best to keep it clean."

Daun said farmers know if they can take care of water quality challenges voluntarily, it will reduce the amount of regulation coming down the pike from state or federal agencies.

Watershed meetings and field days provide farmers with an opportunity to speak freely about challenges they are facing and come up with practices they can try on their farms.

"A lot of farmers feel as if they have a target on their backs," Daun said. "Within these groups they can talk about things with other farmers. 'Yes, I have a challenging spot in my field, too, and this is how I handled it.' They're able to talk through the practical challenges with other folks who have similar problems."

One of the more active watershed groups has been in Lafayette County, where the Lafayette Ag Stewardship Alliance has partnered with The Nature Conservancy to work on implementing conservation practices. Steve Carpenter, LASA's vice-chairman who farms near Darlington, is one of 36 farmers who are part of the group.

"I think we all want clean water, that was one of the big topics we talked about from the beginning," he said. "Working together to be better stewards of our land is key to our watershed project. Every meeting when we get together I learn something new. It's nice that other farmers can try some different practices and we can share what does or doesn't work."

Before LASA was formed it wasn't uncommon to see county highway department personnel shoveling soil off local roads after a big rainstorm – erosion from farm fields that lacked soil-saving practices.

"It was a big problem," Carpenter said of soil erosion in the county. "I think you see a lot of people changing in recent years, learning from each other. At the end of the day we still have to have productivity. We can't go out there and not get the yields. I think we're learning how we can get that productivity and still be good stewards of our land by using good conservation practices."



Photos by Kriss Marion

Members of the Water Assessment by Voluntary Evaluation (WAVE) team, including farmers, monitor the quality of water in the Pecatonica River.

One of the latest practices being tried in Lafayette County and other parts of the state is "planting green," or planting corn or soybeans directly into a growing cover crop (often a small grain like rye or wheat) without killing it by herbicide or mechanical means first.

Some of the \$40,000 watershed grant money LASA received this year is being used to incentivize the practice on member farms, Carpenter said.

"Once again, it's a learning curve," he said. "We had a field day on it this spring. It's kind of neat to see how it works."

LASA has been a strong promoter of a years-long study looking at well-water contamination in southwest Wisconsin. The Southwest Wisconsin Groundwater and Geology study, or SWIGG, tested 816 wells during 2018 and 2019. Of those 816 wells, researchers found 32 percent had contamination, a higher percentage than the statewide average.

The study sought to identify the causes of the contamination, not just the presence of it, and found that human wastewater was the cause of water contamination more than livestock manure.

"It shows we all need to work together in this, not just farmers," Carpenter said.

See page 20 ► WATER



From page 19 ► WATER

Kriss Marion is a farmer-member of the Pecatonica Pride Watershed Association, a group that has focused primarily on streambank restoration and trout stream improvement between Blanchardville and Argyle in Lafayette County.

The group helped establish a WAVE team – which stands for water assessment by voluntary evaluators – to monitor the quality of water in the Pecatonica River.

Marion said watershed groups such as Pecatonica Pride and LASA knew there were a lot of polluted wells in Lafayette County before the SWIGG study provided concrete results.

“Lafayette County has really greened up a lot since (the watershed groups formed) and I think we are having a really big impact,” Marion said.

“I think we certainly have an understanding that we don’t want to lose our soil, because our soil is our wealth. That’s where all the fertility comes from. Generally what these watershed groups are doing is keeping soil in place and keeping it healthy. That has the dual effect of keeping the water clean.”

Patty Edelburg, who farms near Amherst Junction with her husband, Gary, has been involved in the Farmers for Tomorrow River Watershed Council in the Tomorrow River/Waupaca River watershed. The group was the first of the farmer-led groups to work on mitigating nitrates in groundwater.

“Most work on phosphorus levels, we have been working on nitrates,” Edelburg said.

The watershed group formed primarily in response to belief by local residents that a large farm in the area

was polluting the groundwater.

“We really set this up to try to offset a lot of the conversations saying that farmers aren’t doing anything to prevent groundwater pollution,” she said. “We wanted to educate the public and say, ‘This is what farmers are doing. We’re not the culprits. Work with us. We can all go forward together.’”

Farmers for Tomorrow, like many of the watershed groups, offers per-acre cost-share incentives for farmers to plant cover crops and implement no-till planting methods.

“Farmers are really starting to get into some of these practices,” she said.

Christel has worked on a tracking project to collect information from the groups on the conservation practices they’ve implemented and the water quality outcomes from those practices.

Data released in 2021 showed that conservation practices among the producer-led groups grew by 82 percent from 2019 to 2020.

While the producer-led grant program has grown exponentially over the past six years, Christel believes there are still more opportunities for farmers to get involved in watershed groups.

“Since the start of the program, we have funded 41 groups,” she said. “Each year we continue to connect with groups of farmers that are interested in applying. It hasn’t seemed to slow down or be saturated yet. We’ve received more requests for funding than we have been able to fund pretty consistently.”

Farmer-Led Watershed Efforts Starting in Chippewa County

Farmers across Wisconsin are evaluating how they might adopt and expand farming practices that affect the quality of soil and water and address climate mitigation. Wisconsin Farmers Union, Chippewa County Farm Bureau, Chippewa County Land Conservation, and the Chippewa County Farmers Union are hosting a conversation about farmer-led watershed councils and incentive programs from 1 to 3pm on July 28th. The meeting will be held at Wisconsin Farmers Union’s Kamp Kenwood in the lodge, 19161 79th Ave. Chippewa

Falls. Snacks will be provided.

Farmers can expect to hear from other farmers and agricultural professionals about the many kinds of incentive programs, challenges farmers face, the benefits of conservation practices, and how to organize groups in the Chippewa River watershed.

Farmers who have adopted practices such as no till, contour buffer strips, cover crops, prescribed grazing, and stripcropping have noted that over time they see:

- Reduced input costs and improved profitability

- Erosion control
- Improved soil health
- Enhanced water availability
- Weed control by smothering
- Pest and disease control
- Increased biodiversity

The wider benefits to all include sequestering atmospheric carbon (CO₂) in the soil to offset greenhouse gas emissions and improving water quality in local watersheds.

Farmers are invited to this meeting to ask questions and learn from other. RSVP at wisconsinfarmersunion.com/events

From page 17 ► **BUZZ** their farms.

"Many I met in a farming capacity – getting stuck, getting pulled out, working and volunteering together," Allen noted. "Over the years, I made a lot of connections to Farmers Union members because I was focused on putting my bees in places that were safe."

After suffering two pesticide kills in hives, Allen gained some notoriety lobbying at the Minnesota capitol for bees.

"It taught me a lot about our government, and the connection to industrial agriculture and bees is something I'm still passionate about," Allen said, noting she has appreciated connecting with farmers of all types and gaining new insights through Farmers Union.

"I've been passionate about improving the food system for a long time," she said. "I like Farmers Union because they have the effort put toward the grassroots chapters but also are reaching the political sphere – people don't understand how much work that takes and how difficult it is to have the issues we care about brought to the stage. Having a say in those issues as a Farmers Union member is huge."

She also values the connections and leadership development that come from opportunities like annual convention and the Farmers Union Emerging Leadership program.

"A good leader empowers people, and that's just what Farmers Union does," she said.

Connecting within the WFU community also staves off the effects of isolation, she added, noting, "Sometimes you feel kind of alone, especially if you live in a rural area," Allen said. "Having those opportunities to discuss the issues and talk with people from different parts of the state has been wonderful."

'Chewing the Cud'

For members in the Polk-Burnett Farmers Union, such opportunities have come via cleverly named "Chewing the Cud" monthly meetings.

When Allen took the reins as president of the chapter in 2021, her team was looking to create an opportunity for members to connect more. "All that people were talking about was COVID, and we wanted to create a space to talk about farming and what we love."

The first Chewing the Cud event kicked off at Allen's Trade River Ranch. Held on the last Tuesday of every month, the informal gathering moves around to other area member farms.

"There's always good food and good conversations," Allen said. "It's been a nice way to keep our chapter strong."

The group has had plenty to talk about – over the past year the chapter has played a leading role in development of the St. Croix Local Food Alliance, which is set to launch soon.

The alliance recently received a Local Initiatives Grant from the Wisconsin Farmers Union Foundation to support the project, which aims to create a brand for the region and create a more vibrant local food economy.

A challenge in the local food economy is that "it's more economically advantageous to go to the city and sell to people from Minneapolis," Allen said. "But that creates supply chain issues and also the area is changing. The people who are liv-

ing here want access to good food, so we're looking at, 'how can we serve both markets?'"

Twenty-six farmers have already signed on to be a part of the alliance. The group recently submitted a grant proposal for the USDA Local Food Promotion Program. The planning committee pulled the grant together in a flurry of activity this spring but needed to find a 25 percent funding match.

"We raised over \$60,000 in two weeks — this is something people really want," Allen said.

The grant would allow the group to hire a full-time coordinator to connect the local food community with consumers, libraries, schools, etc. They'll find out this fall if the application was successful.

"Our goal is to make it easier for farmers to start out here and work on issues like climate change, supply chains, and connecting people to the food system," Allen said.

The group plans to build a website, creating promotional videos, and host a launch party over the coming months.

"Our hope is to become known as a marketing cooperative where you can go to one place and trust the food alliance is representing farmers who are doing right by the environment and growing healthy food. There is a market out here but people aren't getting connected with the farmers."

Allen said there will be clear criteria, guided by farmer and consumer input, for how food marketed through the alliance is grown.

"People don't want to be greenwashed. They want the genuine real deal farming that's from family farms and not corporations using and exploiting that idea in order to be the largest insurance company in the country."

As for her vision? "I want to live in a world where the food comes from the farm down the road and the farm producing the food makes a living. And the people on the other end of that know that product was produced in a way that was not extractive and exploitative ... it leaves the world in a better place."

The Polk-Burnett chapter has had some tough conversations around the future of farming, spurred by a proposal by an out-of-state investor to drop a 26,000-hog CAFO into their watershed, just upriver from Allen's farm.

The chapter hosted a series of rallies last summer to raise awareness about the potential impacts of an operation of that size on the community.

"The values that I want, I've seen are not that different than what most in this community want, and the Local Food Alliance can help bridge the gaps we're seeing," Allen said.

Just as the bees she cares for feel the ripple effects of shifts in their hive, Allen recognizes that many of the issues her community is on the brink of could determine the future of the local foodshed.

"The good news is, people seem keen to start digging in on solutions ...," she said. "We would love to grow the membership base with people who want to be involved and have these conversations. We hope the local food alliance can serve as a model for people to build local food connections."



New Podcast Explores Solutions to Dairy Crisis

Wisconsin Farmers Union has launched a resource for anyone seeking to learn more about solutions to address dairy farm loss and price instability. The Dairy Together Podcast explores the Dairy Revitalization Plan, a farmer-led, research-backed growth management plan for the dairy industry.

In the first episode, dairy economist Chuck Nicholson provides an overview of what could have been accomplished if the growth management program (that became the Dairy Revitalization Plan) had been implemented in the 2014 Farm Bill. The presentation was based on his and fellow dairy economist Mark Stephenson's "Analyses of Proposed Alternative



Growth Management Programs for US Dairy," which was funded by the University of Wisconsin (UW) "Baldwin Wisconsin Idea" program, the Grassland 2.0 project, the Wisconsin Cover Crops

Research and Outreach Program, and UW Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems.

"We've lost an average of one to two dairy herds a day in Wisconsin in recent years," said Dairy Together Podcast host Bobbi Wilson. "This program does not seek to pit small farms against large farms; instead, we're looking at how we can pull together to create meaningful dairy policy reform in the next farm bill."

The Dairy Together Podcast is free and available for download on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or at dairytogether.com/podcast. The podcast was produced by Wisconsin Farmers Union. Learn more at dairytogether.com.



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



Let's Make Dairy Markets Fair



Bob Thompson
Michigan Farmers Union President

Over the past few weeks, as June Dairy Month was in full swing, it was a perfect time to reflect upon our state's largest agricultural commodity here in my home state

of Michigan and in neighboring Wisconsin: dairy. As a third-generation farmer on my family's centennial farm in Isabella County in central lower Michigan, I've witnessed many changes. For years, we enjoyed raising cows on pasture. But as time went on, it became financially impossible to continue this way of life.

The dairy industry is rife with problems. As the number of U.S. dairy farms has rapidly declined in recent years, just five percent of dairy operations produce 56 percent of our country's milk. Key drivers of this concentration are overproduction and policies driven by big dairy corporations and their well-paid lobbyists who get the upper hand at the expense of independent farmers and people who buy dairy products.

I'm not the only one who's been affected. Thousands of other dairy farmers across the country share a similar story, and it shouldn't be this way.

As president of the Michigan Farmers Union (MFU), I'm working with allies and elected officials to advocate for the needs of independent family farmers who are too often ignored in policy decision making. We need fairness for farmers, which means encouraging equitable outcomes for rural farming communities and ending policies that favor just a few large corporate farms.

MFU has been working with Wisconsin Farmers Union and other partners on a campaign called Dairy Together. It is a farmer-led movement to create thriving family farms and vibrant rural communities. We're calling for a national growth management program to level the playing field for family dairy farms of all sizes. We must also break up large corporations that have a stranglehold on our system.

Rather than competing with one another, producers should pull together. It is unsustainable for large-scale industrial operations to reap a larger market share to benefit wealthy investors while indepen-

dent farmers struggle to stay afloat. We can't allow Big Ag to continue to promote overproduction and consolidation, decimating independent family farms and our collective voice in the process.

When milk production isn't under control, the system becomes volatile, which is the last thing that farmers and eaters need. When prices fluctuate, farmers don't have a good estimate of how much money they'll take home month-to-month or year-to-year. It's not workable nor fair for a producer to discover their pay amount until well after their product goes to market just because the middleman got a better deal.

As designed, the current system squeezes farmers' incomes when there's too much milk, which is why we must avoid milk overproduction. By coordinating milk production growth to better align with demand, dairy farmers would be able to anticipate how much milk they need to produce to reach their desired level of profitability, giving them a greater ability to budget out and make capital improvements.

These reforms require oversight, and farmers must be part of the process. No longer will the Big Dairy lobby set the rules; independent farmers should have a voice in getting to decide major decisions affecting their livelihood. Democratically elected boards at the national and regional levels, controlled by farmers, will set annual production growth levels to keep prices stable and profitable for the majority of farmers.

We should also protect farmers and eaters from market manipulation and corporate control over our food system. In addition to curbing overproduction and prioritizing farmer profitability, we must strengthen and enforce antitrust laws and block mergers and acquisitions that result in monopoly power and unfair prices for farmers and families who purchase food.

Throughout the next few months, the Dairy Together coalition will be educating farmers and the public about these important reforms to the dairy industry.

We need everyone — milk producers, people who buy and consume milk products, cooperatives and ag stakeholders — to get to the bottom of this crisis and work toward fairer and better dairy that will benefit all.

Bob Thompson is president of the Michigan Farmers Union, one of many groups in the growing Dairy Together coalition. Learn more at DairyTogether.com.

PULL TOGETHER

**SUPPORT
FAMILY
FARMERS**



dairytogether.com



Bridge Over Troubled Coffers



Julian Emerson
Communications Specialist

Each workday, as he travels from his home in northeast Lafayette County to Madison for his job driving truck and then back again, Mike Berg feels the winding, deteriorating roads of the region he calls home, one bump and sharp curve at a time.

Berg has lived on his farm west of Blanchardville all of his 64 years, and in recent years he has noticed that more roads in the county's eastern half are increasingly in need of repair. He worries those subpar roadways not only make for more dangerous driving but are limiting economic development in his part of the county.

That fear came to life recently, when organizers of the annual county dairy breakfast called off the event because so many roads and bridges were in disrepair that it made simply getting to the event difficult for many residents. In addition to numerous poor stretches of roads, seven bridges in the county need fixing.

"That's just a sign of how bad our roads are," Berg said of the canceled dairy breakfast. "It's getting hard to even put on events, much less attract businesses to come here."

In addition to his truck driving job, Berg raises beef cattle on his 540-acre farm.

*Photos by Julian Emerson
Top and lower right:
Workers build a replacement bridge June 16 along Kowahl Road south of Strum. In 2018 Trempealeau County had 18 bridges with structural deficiencies, the most among Wisconsin's 72 counties.*

Lower left: Mike Berg, a farmer and truck driver who lives near Blanchardville in Lafayette County, discusses how winding roads in poor condition on the county's eastern side hinder economic development.

Following page: This stretch of Highway 39 in Lafayette County is in need of upgrades, one of numerous roads in the county in disrepair.



Large trucks and farm equipment have difficulty navigating some of the poor county roads, he said, sometimes causing motorists to go out of their way to avoid trouble spots and to take alternate routes to do field-work or get products to market.

"There are plenty of rough roads out there around the state, and our county certainly has its fair share of them," Berg said during a recent evening while driving the winding, hilly roads that make up his home county. "We have our work cut out for us to get some of these roads up to par."

Lafayette County is far from alone among Wisconsin county highway departments struggling to keep up with needed road repairs. Highway commissioners in counties across Wisconsin report that keeping up with fixes to roads is becoming more challenging as revenue for those improvements is far outpaced by the rising price of that work.

Substandard bridges are especially problematic in western Wisconsin. The state Department of Transportation rates 980 bridges across the state as structurally deficient, meaning one or more bridge elements is significantly deteriorated. Of those, 75 percent are in the state's western part.

The gap between allowable road and bridge repair funding and the price tag of improvements has become especially acute in recent years, highway commissioners said, and is exacerbated by price spikes attributed in part to supply chain issues prompted by the coronavirus pandemic. Local governments in Wisconsin are limited as to how much revenue they can raise by a state revenue cap.

To generate additional road repair funds, some counties have adopted a vehicle registration tax, commonly referred to as a "wheel tax," with money raised used for road repairs and snowplowing. Many counties have borrowed money to keep pace with road maintenance, as those dollars are exempt from the revenue cap. However, that practice means more money is spent paying off debt, leaving less for services and programs.

"No matter what we do, it doesn't feel like we can keep up," Chippewa County Highway Commissioner Brian Kelly said.

Help On The Way

The infrastructure bill proposed by President Joe Biden's administration and approved by Congress in November will provide a much-needed boost to upgrade roads and bridges. As part of the legislation, Wisconsin is projected to receive \$5.5 billion during the next five years to update not only roads and bridges but for mass transit improvements, lead pipe removal, stormwater controls and PFAS abatement.

Those dollars are welcome news to county highway

commissioners, who said any additional infrastructure funding will help stretch existing dollars that don't go far enough. The first round of funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) for Wisconsin road and bridge projects was announced earlier this month, and applications for the second round were recently received and are scheduled to be announced in July.

St. Croix County recently received BIL funds for bridge repairs, and the town of Somerset in that county is also the recipient of dollars to upgrade a substandard bridge.

"Certainly BIL is going to help improve our bridges and roads in need of repair across the state," St. Croix County Highway Commissioner Robbi Krejci said. "We are sorely in need of a capital increase for those projects, and any additional money we get for them is greatly appreciated."

Chippewa County received nearly \$1 million in the first round of BIL money to reconstruct a section of Highway C. County officials submitted three projects for the second round of that funding and also is part of a \$33 million reworking of Highway T in conjunction with Eau Claire County and the city of Eau Claire.

Roads and bridges in Chippewa County will receive additional help from \$8 million in American Rescue Plan Act funding in upcoming years. Such federal and state infrastructure money is critical to catching up on past-due road repairs, Kelly said, noting the current funding level allows for repairing 10 miles annually, about half of what is needed.

Federal infrastructure dollars will help fund numerous road and bridge projects across northern Wisconsin, including in Ashland County, where 10 miles of Highway 13 south of Mellon will be resurfaced. Another section of that highway through Ashland is scheduled for repaving in 2025.

Because they are home to much federal forestland, some northern counties qualify for Federal Lands Access Program funding, additional federal dollars that pay for road and bridge repairs. That money is critical to maintaining county and state highways in a region with little tax base, Ashland County Highway Commissioner Matt Erickson said.

"Without the federal grant funding, we would simply not be able to fix a lot of our roads. We simply wouldn't have the money for that," Erickson said.

Challenges Remain

While BIL and other federal and state highway spending will provide much-needed dollars for road and bridge maintenance, work remains to find a long term solution to improving infrastructure funding across Wisconsin, transportation experts said. The fact that requests for BIL dollars far outnumber projects granted those dollars is a sign **See page 26 ► BRIDGE**

From page 25 ► BRIDGE

of the extreme need for such funding, they said.

In the first round of BIL funding in Wisconsin, 40 projects of 306 applicants were chosen to receive funding.

"A lot of people think we have all of this infrastructure money coming, that we will have all of our roads and bridges rebuilt. But that's not exactly how it works," Trempealeau County Highway Commissioner Al Rinka said. "This is a competitive application process, and there is no guarantee you are going to receive this money."

Krejci and other highway commissioners said they realize many of the projects they submit for BIL funding may not be approved. However, they said they're grateful for the assistance those dollars will provide.

"Those (BIL grants) are competitive, and they're certainly not a magic bullet," Krejci said. "But any additional revenue, any increase in transportation funding is very helpful."

St. Croix County has among the fastest-growing populations in Wisconsin as the Twin Cities spreads eastward. That population boom is stretching the county's infrastructure, Krejci said, causing roads and bridges to wear out faster. Transportation experts typically expect roads to last for 30 years before they need replacing. But increased vehicular traffic is shortening the life of more highly traveled roads in St. Croix County, Krejci said.

St. Croix County, along with Milwaukee County, were the first in Wisconsin to adopt a wheel tax, when they did so in 2008. But even that added revenue hasn't been enough to maintain roads properly, Krejci said.

"That's really the name of the game, how long can I stretch the useful life of that road," he said. "Right now, some roads we just need to make passable until we can afford to do a quality fix."

Searching for Answers

Maintaining roads and bridges has become even more difficult in recent months, as price spikes for materials and challenges finding enough available labor make each mile of road repairs increasingly expensive. Highway commissioners across the state said the price of asphalt and other construction-related costs have grown over time and skyrocketed in recent months, with

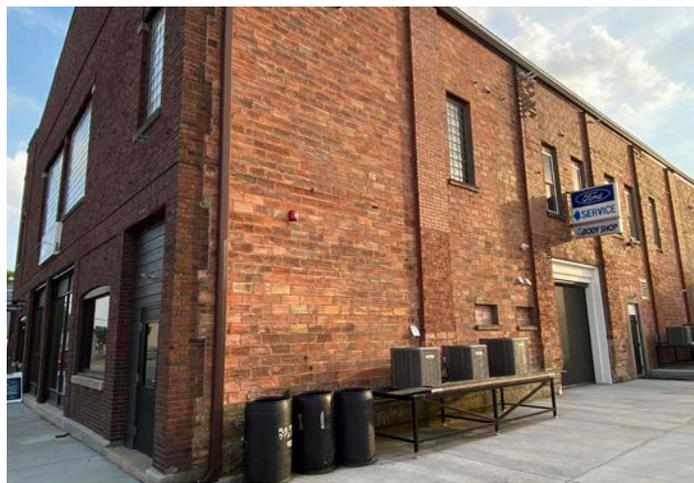


Photo by Julian Emerson

The village of Blanchardville was once home to several farm implement dealers, auto dealers and multiple grocery stores. But businesses like this John Deere/Ford dealership have left town in recent decades. With a network of surrounding deteriorating roads, attracting new businesses is difficult, local residents say.

many paying 35% or more this year compared to just one year ago.

Krejci's department must repair at least 15 miles of roads annually to maintain current conditions, but this year higher repair prices mean that figure likely will be 10 to 12 miles, he said, noting that number has dipped to as low as eight or nine miles in recent years because of a lack of funding. Rinka said he faces the same predicament.

"When costs rise so much and you don't receive additional revenue, it means you can't pave as many miles," Rinka said.

La Crosse County must upgrade nine miles of roadways each year to keep up current road conditions, but a lack of money and rising costs in recent years means that isn't happening, county Highway Commissioner Joe Langeberg said. His county received nearly \$400,000 in the first round of BIL funding to highway repairs, and he plans to apply for additional road project dollars.

"The need for replacing bridges, or reconditioning roads, has been consistent" and funding has not kept pace, he said.

While BIL money will help boost needed road and bridge improvements for the next several years, more must be done to address infrastructure funding statewide on an ongoing basis, transportation experts said. The Republican-led state Legislature has discussed adopting a gas tax and other possible means of raising additional revenue to fix roads and bridges in recent years. But so far lawmakers have not adopted measures that would more fully fund those costs.

That situation has highway commissioners like Erickson concerned about how to pay for that upkeep down the road. Like many counties, Ashland County has borrowed money to help pay for road upgrades. A referendum vote last year that would have allowed the county to exceed the state spending cap to pay more for roads and other services failed, and property tax growth in the county isn't nearly enough to keep pace with expenses.

"For sure I worry about that, how are we going to pay for our roads going forward?" Erickson said. "As you look into the future, we will have a huge shortfall in that area. And right now, we don't have any answers."

Momentum Building Around Stewardship



Brad Henderson
Facilities Manager

Upon leaving a 20-year career behind me at the Wisconsin DNR, I commented that I was leaving to join a more environmentally conscious organization - the Wisconsin Farmers Union. That was 2015 and I am proud to say that since that time, WFU's commitment to water quality has only accelerated.

My position as Facilities Manager at Kamp Kenwood gives me an opportunity to join in work to monitor and improve the quality of the water we swim, fish and boat in. As a board member of the Lake Wissota Improvements and Protection Association (LWIPA), I am tasked with attending meetings and recognizing opportunities to connect Lake Association members with WFU.

As a member of the Lake Wissota Stewardship Project, I support our members' work to meet three key goals: Conservation on the land to reduce runoff, Monitoring water quality and Community outreach.

In order to reduce runoff, sediment basins are installed to collect and infiltrate runoff before it reaches surface water. Tree and shrub buffers are planted along waterways. Acres of land within the Lake Wissota watersheds are placed in permanent easements or returned to wetland.



Monitoring programs involving volunteers such as local Boy Scout Troops and lake residents (including yours truly) have been continued and expanded. LWIPA volunteers also conduct stream monitoring for eleven sites in the Lake Wissota watershed. These studies examine the level of phosphorus in each waterway and collect macroinvertebrate samples to help show the current health of the fish population.

Community outreach efforts impact our Kamp Kenwood campers but also the greater Chippewa county area. LWIPA and LWSP have provided opportunities to improve awareness of water quality through Canoes for a Cause tree planting, training water monitoring volunteers, and initiating a successful Healthy Lakes best practices grant process for riparian and owners. Signs highlighting the projects are posted at completed project locations including Kamp Kenwood.

After 6 years, I have seen continued momentum toward improving Lake Wissota water quality. While understanding that an improvement of this magnitude will take decades to realize, I am confident that my time as "caretaker" of our camp will continue us along a course toward better lakefront conditions for campers and all people who wish to enjoy their time here at Kamp Kenwood.

Volunteers Help Ready Camp for Summer

Members of the Chippewa County 4-H and Wisconsin Farmers Union gathered together in early May at Wisconsin Farmers Union Kamp Kenwood to tidy up damage from a tornado that hit on December 15th, 2021. The group repurposed fallen trees as benches and landscape timbers, utilizing the ample wood chip supply to improve trails, and helping with maintenance projects.

With wind speeds of up to 85 miles per hour, the tornado that struck Kamp Kenwood traveled nearly six miles, starting in the Town of Lafayette and crossing Highway 29 as it traveled along the east side of Lake Wissota. Now confirmed as an EF0, the tornado brought down towering pines, though it thankfully did no structural damage at the camp. The historic lodge, built with the donated labor and funds of Farmers Union members, remains standing. The building is a popular venue for weddings in the Chippewa Valley and opens its doors to hundreds of youth campers each summer. Camps kicked off in June.

"We have been focusing on revitalizing the camp after nearly 100 trees came down," WFU Facilities Manager Brad Henderson said. "I'm grateful for the volunteers who have taken the time to pitch in with clean-up efforts so we could be ready back to being shipshape for the summer camp season."

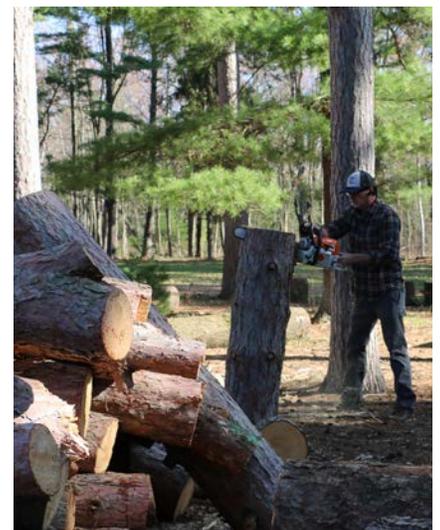


Photo by Danielle Endvick
Volunteers repurposed fallen trees into camp benches and landscape timbers May 7th.



Faces of Farmers Union

Meet Deb Jakubek & Tom Moos

Alicia Razvi

Regional Membership Coordinator

Each summer, June Dairy Month offers us the chance to shine a light on one of our most beautiful agricultural industries here in America's Dairyland. Within Wisconsin Farmers Union, we have members who run dairies of all types and sizes – conventional and organic, big and small, from beginning farmers to farms that have been in the same family for generations. We have farmers who continue to milk in old-style tie-stall barns, and others who use parlors and even robots. We pride ourselves in being a “Big Tent” in Farmers Union, and, as one can see, that diversity isn't just in the variety of sectors we represent, from beef and poultry to produce and dairy. No matter the type or size of farm we call home, Farmers Union members look forward to reasoning together.

This month, our member spotlight focuses on Tom Moos and Deb Jakubek, who milk 40 cows on their organic grass fed dairy farm near New Auburn. The farm is comprised of roughly 135 acres of hay ground and 100 acres of pasture, with topography that makes it a good fit for the grazing operation. Moos transitioned to organic dairy farming in 2005. For the last 2.5 years, Tom and Deb have been milking the herd once a day and utilizing nurse cows to cut down on their labor investment.

“Over the years, [Tom] looked outside of the box to less labor-intensive management systems to operate his farm, eventually becoming grass-fed, milking once-a-day and using nurse cows to raise calves,” *Dairy Star* writer Danielle Nauman noted in a recent feature on Tom's approach to dairying. This method has allowed Tom and Deb to be more active throughout the year in activities for their children – Colton, 18, McKenna, 15 and Austin, 7. Being 100 percent grass-fed also lessens their workload since they do not have to worry about planting and harvesting row crops.

“We are able to focus on pasture management and making quality hay for winter feed,” the pair note. The



Submitted photos

Above: Chippewa County Farmers Union members, (back row) Tom Moos and Deb Jakubek, (front row) McKenna, Austin, and Coltin.



Knowing that we are doing our best to steward the land and animals in our care while raising our kids on the farm to learn the value of hard work and dedication keeps us motivated. Our love of the land, cattle and lifestyle make the hard days bearable and the good days better.

– Deb Jakubek



Below: The herd grazes on the Moos Farm near New Auburn. Right: Deb visits with another attendee at a National Farmers Union Women's Conference.



FARMERS UNION PRODUCE SAFETY PODCAST

Want to learn more about food safety on your farm and the FSMA Produce Safety Rule? Check out the new Farmers Union Food Safety Podcast series today!

wisconsinfarmersunion.com/podcast

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



management changes that Moos and Jakubek have made have turned out to be the right fit for them, allowing them to continue dairy farming while experiencing a good quality of life off the farm, Tom noted in the *Dairy Star*. This also allows them to enjoy time away from the farm, enjoying riding their Harley for an afternoon ride with friends or for a weekend away enjoying the beautiful scenery the Midwest has to offer.

Tom grew up on a dairy farm that his older brothers bought when their parents were ready to retire from full-time dairy farming. The brothers milked for 5-6 years then sold the cows, leaving the farm empty. Tom moved into the house and eventually decided to buy his own herd and milk full-time. He has now been milking on the property for just over 20 years.

The whole family pitches in to help when needed, from Tom's dad helping to move bales and spread manure to his cousin doing field work and both their moms helping to keep the yard and buildings looking nice. Tom's brother lives across the road and feeds or moves cows when Tom and Deb are away from home, and he pitches in to help with fieldwork. Deb's daughter McKenna enjoys milking, working with her show calves and has now completed her tractor safety course so will be helping with more field work this year.

Deb acknowledges the many challenges of dairy farming; including those out of anyone's control such as the weather and animal behavior. Other challenges such as fluctuating markets, farm/family balance and general isolation on the farm make life hard as well. "We depend heavily on our member organizations of Wisconsin Farmers Union, National Farmers, Organic Valley and Grassworks to alleviate these challenges and make farming better for everyone involved."

So what keeps Deb and Tom motivated? According to Deb, "Knowing that we are doing our best to steward the land and animals in our care while raising our kids on the farm to learn the value of hard work and dedication. Our love of the land, cattle and lifestyle make the hard days bearable and the good days better."

Deb previously worked in membership for Wisconsin Farmers Union and has attended numerous Farmers Union fly-ins, national conventions, lobby days, and is a graduate of the Farmers Union Enterprises Leadership Program. She and Tom have participated in Dairy Together and are active members of the Chippewa County Farmers Union. Both serve in leadership positions in the organizations they are a part of, noting, "We believe it's up to us to connect friends and neighbors to strengthen the future of family farms."



OUR FAMILY FARM



From our friends at North Dakota Farmers Union, in partnership with author & illustrator Dana Sullivan, come two fun children's books about family farming.

\$15 each
(Includes tax; shipping available for an additional \$5.)

Available at the Wisconsin Farmers Union State Office:
117 W. Spring St., Chippewa Falls
715.723.5561

WiWiC Creating Conservation Connections



One of the primary goals of the WiWiC program is to connect new and beginning farmers and conservationists with highly trained and experienced practitioners like Rebecca Christoffel, in orange, who holds a PhD in Fisheries and Wildlife and was formerly State Wildlife Extension Biologist.

By **Kriss Marion**
WiWiC Communications Specialist



Wisconsin Farmers Union Members Kristy Allen and Becky Brathal join a WiWiC Soil Solutions Learning Circle at Farm Table Foundation Restaurant in Amery.



Dana Swanson, Resource Conservationist with NRCS, goes over a Conservation Plan map with Leslie Svacina of Cylon Rolling Acres. Wisconsin Women in Conservation has funding for participants to have site visits and professional Conservation Plans prepared for their land.

In June, Wisconsin Women in Conservation (WiWiC) wrapped up a busy spring series of 8 Climate Smart Soil Solutions events in inspiring locations across the state. Nearly 100 women farmers, landowners, and conservation professionals attended, making local connections and building the capacity to protect more soil, water and wildlife on their land.

"I like to be part of a community of people who are interested in things I'm interested in. I get energy from that," said Melody Walker, from Clyde, during a Soil Solutions event at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve in La Farge. WiWiC employs a peer-to-peer "Learning Circle" model for their gatherings, based on research

suggesting that women learn and implement best when engaged relationally and sharing expertise with each other. Conservation experts and peer coaches present at each event, but a majority of the time is allocated to peer conversations. WiWiC is helping to create regional networks of women landowners who are pursuing conservation on their properties.

WiWiC is launching into Summer Field Day season, with five farm tour events scheduled July through September. All of the field days are led by women, for women, and are FREE. If you are a woman farmer, landowner or conservation professional or enthusiast you are welcome to attend! RSVP at WiWiC.org.

Below: WiWiC enjoyed the patio, the food, and the garden at Farm Table Foundation during Climate Smart Soil Solutions event in Amery in May.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Friday, July 15, 2-6pm

Field Day

Sweet Springs Farm, Gays Mills

Monday, July 18, 5-7pm

Educator Network Happy Hour

Alice's Garden, Milwaukee

Tuesday, July 19, 5-7pm

Educator Network Happy Hour
Central Waters Brewing, Amherst

Wednesday, July 20, 5-7pm

Educator Network Happy Hour
Brix Cider, Mount Horeb

Thursday, July 21, 5-7pm

Educator Network Happy Hour
Together Farms, Mondovi

Thursday, July 28, Noon-1pm

Conservation Summer Camp
Zoom, Managing Your Wetlands

Thursday, August 11, 3-6pm

Field Day
Brattset Family Farm, Jefferson

Friday, August 12, 1-5pm

Field Day
Together Farms, Mondovi

Thursday, August 25, Noon-1pm

Conservation Summer Camp
Zoom, Managing Your Land Legacy

Sunday, August 28, 1-5pm

Field Day
Red Door Family Farm, Athens

Thursday, September 8, 1-5pm

Field Day
Bouressa Family Farm, New London

Saturday, September 10, 1-4pm

Field Day
Blackbrook Farm, Amery

Wednesday, October 19, 10-11:30am

Educator Network Meet-Up
Zoom

RSVP TODAY!
www.WIWIC.org



Meet the Conservation Coach: Harriet Behar

The Wisconsin Women in Conservation project is based on a peer-to-peer relational learning model, and one of the most powerful practices in the program is connecting women farmers and landowners with experienced Conservation Coaches. Few farmers in Wisconsin have as much conservation education experience as WiWiC Conservation Coach Harriet Behar, who has been a teacher, organic inspector and mentor for over 40 years. In her different roles, Harriet has walked on over 2,500 farms across Wisconsin for site visits. She's also a Wisconsin Farmers Union member!

She and her husband have managed Sweet Springs Farm in Gays Mills, a certified organic property, since 1981. Over the years, they have continually improved their landscape with conservation practices while growing bedding plants, vegetables, herbs and small grains and selling eggs and honey.

But Harriet's history didn't start on a farm. She grew up in New York City. Her family's annual summer vacations in the Catskill Mountains fueled a childhood desire to live rurally and be immersed in nature, so after attending college at UW Madison, Harriet started farming in Driftless Wisconsin. She went on to grow organic vegetables for Organic Valley, eventually serving as their Marketing Director - which also got her out on hundreds of farms.

"My farmstead is at the end of a dead end road, with numerous springs and

natural reproduction of brook trout in our creek. Over the years, we have continually improved our landscape, which included planting thousands of trees and native shrubs for wildlife and erosion management, along with 25 acres of flowering prairie," says Harriet. "We plant a wide variety of cover crops, throughout the season, and strive to provide a variety of benefits from those cover crops including nitrogen fixing legumes, aggressive growing grasses to smother out problem weeds and flowering plants throughout the season for pollinator and other beneficial insect forage. We rotationally graze our bees!"

Harriet's farm is solar powered and has a unique earth berm greenhouse. Through grants provided by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Behar is available to provide on-farm consultations, technical advice, and site-specific Conservation Plans for WiWiC participants.

"It is very satisfying to know that you are taking care of your environment, since a healthy landscape is a beautiful and enriching place to call home," says Behar. "I look forward to helping other women identify their goals and implement practical conservation strategies."

Harriet is hosting a WiWiC Field Day at her farm on July 15, from 2 to 6pm. RSVP for free at WiWiC.org under Events. Listen in to the June episode of the Queen Bee Sessions podcast on Spotify to hear the conversation with Harriet.



New farmers market links farmers, consumers while ...

BUILDING COMMUNITY



Story and Photos
by Danielle Endvick

Above: Cadott Farmers Market Manager Jessica Ryba celebrates a successful market, along with her partner Lance and daughter Addison Left: Kyes Guys Pizza, cooked on-the-spot in a wood-fired stove is among the market offerings.

CADOTT— Laughter and the scent of wood-fired pizza fill the air at Riverview Park in Cadott on Saturday mornings. The small Chippewa County community now has its very own farmers market, thanks to the dedication of one visionary community member, Jessica Ryba.

Wisconsin Farmers Union (WFU) members may recognize Ryba as the friendly face who greets visitors as our administrative assistant at the state headquarters in Chippewa Falls. When the idea to start a farmers market took root over winter, Ryba didn't dwell on it – instead she launched into action, forming a nonprofit, getting the necessary permits, and pouring her heart into making it happen.

"I just decided I was going to do it, and it was going to start this year," Ryba said, laughing at her naiveté of the enormity of the undertaking.

The need for a market was clear, though, she notes.

"Cadott doesn't have a grocery store anymore and the community has been talking about it for 5 to 10 years that a farmers market would be really nice to get the fresh produce in," Ryba said. "It's a really big lift to get it going, though, so nobody ever took the initiative."

Since signing on with Wisconsin Farmers Union in 2021, Ryba has seen how buying direct generates a greater share of the food dollar going back to the farmer.

"When I was doing research to see how much money stayed in the local area compared to shopping at a big chain store, the benefits of a market were so clear," she said. "For every \$100 spent at a large chain grocery store, \$25 is re-spent locally; versus that same \$100 spent at a farmers market, you'll see \$62 re-spent locally."

Below: Market-goers can find meat, eggs, honey and beeswax products, local crafts, baked goods, and produce at the market.



Ryba had just three months to secure vendors and sponsors and worked round the clock to get the market ready for an early June launch.

"My Farmers Union team has been amazing at letting me bounce ideas off of them and talk marketing ideas."

The WFU Foundation is a sponsor of the market.

Community response has made the work worthwhile.

"People are coming out and supporting us and talking about it," Ryba said. "They are coming up with ideas to bring in more vendors. It's the talk of the town."

When word started getting out about the market, farmers and potential vendors starting coming forward, surprising Ryba at the volume of local food that community members could potentially access.

"I try to support local whenever I can, but even prior to starting this, I had no idea how many farmers there are who do meat, produce, and homemade lotions and soaps within a 20-mile radius of town."

She encourages other communities to support farmers markets. And for communities that are lacking a market, she advises that making the leap isn't just good for connecting farmers and eaters – it can connect an overall community more deeply, too.

"I loved seeing how the community came together – the people talking to each other and kids running around and playing," she said. "They didn't come to just shop and leave. They shopped, and stayed and talked to neighbors they don't see all the time or that classmate that they haven't seen in 5 years."

"If you're thinking about starting a market, talk to people who've been successful with ones they've started," she advises. "Talk to your community members and gauge their interest and level of support."

The market is open from 9am to noon on Saturdays, just off Highway 27 at Riverview Park. For more information, email cadottfarmersmarket@gmail.com or visit www.cadottfarmersmarket.com



A young visitor to the Cadott Farmers Market checks out some local crafts.

WFU Foundation announces grants

The Wisconsin Farmers Union Foundation announces recipients of grants from the two quarters of 2022:

- Cadott Farmers Market
- Bayfield Farmers Market
- Envision Greater Fond du Lac Agri-Business Council – Breakfast on the Farm
- Wisconsin School for Beginning Dairy and Livestock Farmers – Ride to Farm
- Soil Sisters: A Celebration of Wisconsin Farms and Rural Life
- 5th Annual Hill and Valley Exploration Tour: A Celebration of Rural Living
- Huey's Hideaway Children's Museum of Medford – Barn Exhibit
- Northern Wisconsin State Fair – Barn Replacement Project
- Fairshare CSA Coalition – Bike the Barns

Local Initiative Grants:

- Pepin-Pierce County Farmers Union Farm Tour - Rising Sun Farm and Orchard
- St. Croix County Farmers Union Farm Scoot and Riverwood Potluck
- Taylor-Price, Eau Claire, and Polk-Burnett chapters – Three Rivers Fibershed Tour
- Polk-Burnett Farmers Union – St. Croix Valley Food Alliance
- Kenosha/Jefferson/Racine/Walworth Farmers Union – Twilight Pasture Walk Series
- Lake to Bay Farmers Union – Art on the Farm Tour

The WFU Foundation reviews grant applications quarterly. Deadlines are Feb. 15, May 15, Aug. 15, and Nov. 15.

Grant requests must meet the WFU Foundation's mission of supporting projects and programs for all ages that foster family farming, rural life and public education on the important role of cooperatives and agriculture in society.

Learn more about WFU Foundation grant opportunities at www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com/grant-program.



Homeward Bound

Levendofsky returns to home state to lead Kansas Farmers Union

In June, WFU Government Relations Director Nick Levendofsky headed back to his home state of Kansas, where he landed a great gig as the Executive Director of Kansas Farmers Union. We caught some of his thoughts before he headed off to the Great Plains!

Share some of your background and backstory with WFU.

Back in 2016, when I was living back home in Kansas, I saw a job posting for the Wisconsin Farmers Union Government Relations Associate come across in an email, and I thought, "Why not apply?" I had never been to Wisconsin before, but I had met then-president Darin Von Ruden, and Chris Holman and Kriss Marion – two incredible WFU members – were in my National Farmers Union Beginning Farmer Institute class, so I knew that good people lived, worked, and farmed in Wisconsin. After getting the job, my first event was the Summer Conference at Kamp Kenwood, and it felt like one big family reunion. I knew then I made the right decision to leave everything I had known my whole life and try something new. It wasn't long before I was recruited to go to Rocky Mountain Farmers Union in 2018 and serve as their Director of External Affairs, which gave me another opportunity to grow in my work. Luckily, I got the chance to come back to WFU in December 2020 as Government Relations Director, and have been building coalitions and relationships across the agricultural, environmental, and legislative scope of work we do here at WFU.

What was it about Farmers Union that drew you in?

My first National Farmers Union event was the D.C. Legislative Fly-In back in 2010. I had been to D.C. in the past, but never with an organization the size of NFU, and I was immediately impressed. Seeing 300+ farmers from across the country assembled at USDA to hear from Secretary Vilsack, then trek up to Capitol Hill and meet with legislators on issues that weren't just words on paper, but actual issues they lived and dealt with every day, was very empowering and moving. I knew then that I had found my organization and my people.

What are some of the changes you've seen in the organization in your time here?

There have been many changes at Farmers Union in the past 12 years, from leadership within the organization itself to administration changes on the federal level. One change I'll never forget is when NFU introduced a new logo back in 2011. NFU hired a consultant to go around the country and "shop" the logo around and get members' thoughts on the change. I recall the Nebraska Farmers Union convention being one where the new logo was not well-received, and tensions mounted quickly. Farmers don't like change, especially when it comes to their farm organization and identity, and many felt the long-time emblem of the triangle, plow, rake, and hoe still deserved to be our official logo. Of course, tensions cooled and we moved forward, but I still love the old logo, and wear it often. Change is inevitable, it's how we handle that change that matters more than anything else.

Do you have any favorite memories from your time with WFU?

There are so many wonderful memories from my time at WFU, but I especially enjoyed the trips we made to D.C. Fly-Ins and national conventions across the country. Travel is always something I've enjoyed, and getting to spend some of that travel time with coworkers and members who have now become close friends made it even better. I'm so glad we'll still get to cross paths at those NFU events in the future.



What lessons from your time at WFU will you take with you into this next chapter?

I think the biggest lesson from my time at WFU is the importance of building coalitions in the work we do. We can rarely do anything alone, whether it's dairy policy or clean water initiatives, and bringing people together is something we're very good at here at Farmers Union. After all, we've been "reasoning together" here in Wisconsin since 1930, and since 1902 on the national level. This will be especially important as we head into discussions around the 2023 Farm Bill.

Tackling ag policy can be tough. What fuels you?

For me, it has always been about the people. When you can put a face and voice to an issue then you have someone, not just something, to fight for. Coming from an agricultural background, seeing the highs and lows, and hearing those kitchen table discussions from an early age helped me become a better listener. My work with Farmers Union over the past decade also gave me the experience and connections to navigate the political system to find the right person or program to address the issues our members raise.

What's up next for you?

I'm headed back to where it all started for me: my home state of Kansas and Kansas Farmers Union. I'll be living back on the farm that my great-great grandparents homesteaded in 1912 north of Courtland, KS, about 15 miles west of where my parents live and farm. I will also be closer to my sister's family, which means more time with my nephew and neice, Ezra and Stella. On June 1st, I began serving in my new role as Executive Director of Kansas Farmers Union, which is headquartered in McPherson, KS. We have a lot of work to do at KFU, but I'm always up for a challenge, and look forward to working with the board and membership to set some realistic and attainable goals for the coming years.

What advice do you have for WFU and its members?

Years ago, KFU President Donn Teske said, "There are some organizations that claim to be the voice of agriculture, but I like to think Farmers Union is the conscience of agriculture." Our policy is our conscience, and the fact that it comes from the grassroots of our membership proves that our conscience is clear and true. I challenge all of you to continue to be the conscience, not just of agriculture, but of rural communities and those who live in them. Remain thoughtful and mindful of those around you in your community, but especially those downstream, and those who may be less fortunate. Keep up the good work. You should all be very proud of your organization, its policy, staff, board, and values. I know I am.

**Give a Stronger Voice to Rural America
Join Wisconsin Farmers Union and
help preserve the economic health and
sustainability of our rural communities.**



Membership Application

Name: _____

Spouse's Name: _____

of Children under 21: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: ____ Zip: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Household Type:

Farm Rural Small Town Urban

Type of Farm: *Check all that apply.*

Dairy Poultry Vegetables or Fruit
 Beef Crops Organic
 Hogs Horses Other _____

Membership: *Fee includes family unless student or organization is checked.*

New Member Renewing Member

1 Year (\$30) 2 Years (\$55)

4 Years (\$100) Lifetime (\$2000)

Student (\$15) Organization (\$50)

Join today!

Mail this card to:

Wisconsin Farmers Union

117 W. Spring St. • Chippewa Falls, WI • 54729

Or sign up online:

www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com

For more information, call 800-272-5531



Wisconsin
Farmers
Union

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

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

(715) 723-5561

www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com

info@wisconsinfarmersunion.com

Follow WFU Online

 /wisconsinfarmersunion

 @wifarmersunion

 wisconsinfarmersunion.com/blog

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
EAU CLAIRE, WI
Permit No. 1557



SOUTH CENTRAL

HEMP
COOPERATIVE

WFU Members:
use code
WFU10
for \$10 off your
first oil order!

NOW AVAILABLE ONLINE



WWW.SOUTHCENTRALHEMP.COOP



PHOTO TAKEN AT JAHNKE FAMILY FARM IN LANCASTER, WISCONSIN