



WISCONSIN FARMERS UNION NEWS

UNITED TO GROW FAMILY AGRICULTURE

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Getting to the Root of the Problem

Danielle Endvick
Communications Director

My years spent entrenched in agriculture – first as a farmer's daughter, then journalist, advocate, and rancher – have taught me a few things. Not least of all, that when it comes to ag organizations, there tend to be two kinds.

There's a bad habit among agricultural groups to take a cheerleading approach, rather than risk acknowledging issues within the industry. Instead of working to genuinely make things better for farmers, they apply a lot of make-up, do a fair amount of fancy acrobatics, and make a lot of noise. But they also tend to be so wrapped up in public image – often while fronting special interests, buying candidates, and spouting off buzz words – that they don't seem to be getting much done to help their members out in the countryside.

Thankfully there are also groups, like Farmers Union, that recognize there are serious systemic and structural issues that need to be addressed if we want to have a future for farmers that doesn't resemble serfdom.

Our Wisconsin Farmers Union convention keynote Zach Ducheneaux hit the nail on the head:

"There are a lot of groups out there doing a lot of work around farmer stress and mental health; my mindset is that we need to do that work, but we also need to get to the root of the issues and the structural problems in agriculture that are causing that stress in the first place."

Ducheneaux is an authentic breath of fresh air in his trademark leather vest and cowboy hat – in a world of suits and polished talking points. He was appointed the Administrator for USDA's Farm Service Agency in 2021. In this role he provides leadership and direction on agricultural policy, administering loan programs, and managing conservation, commodity, disaster, and farm marketing programs through a national network of offices.

Known for his refreshing straight talk and a habit of sharing his cell number (202-941-4675) with the

audiences he addresses, Ducheneaux is on a mission to reconnect farmers with those who serve them in Washington, D.C. and in FSA offices throughout the nation.

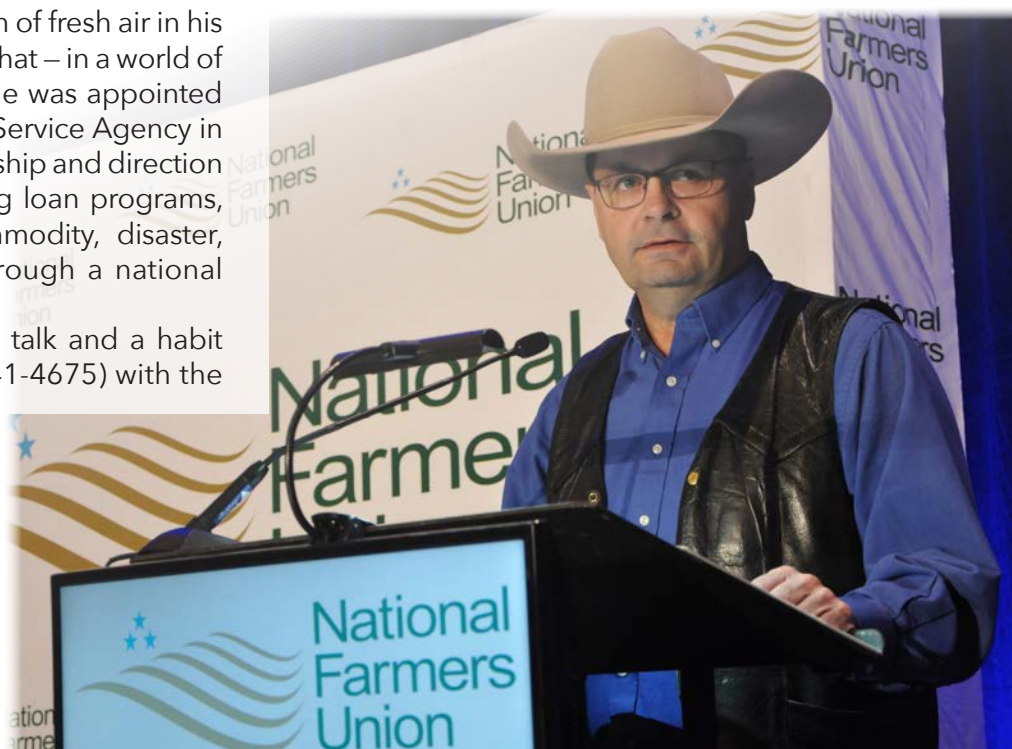
He previously served as the executive director of the Intertribal Agriculture Council (since the 1990s) and as a tribal council representative for the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe. He has spent his career educating people about the critical role of improved food systems, value-added agriculture, and foreign exports to respond to the enduring economic and social challenges facing Native Americans and reservations. He also serves on the board of directors for Project H3LP!, a nonprofit founded by his family to provide life lessons through horsemanship.

The Administrator comes from ranching roots; he transitioned his 4th generation cattle ranch on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation to his daughter upon his appointment. As he shared his hopes for establishing greater trust between the Farm Service Agency and the farmers it serves, a moment of emotion brewed beneath the rim of his cowboy hat.

"It occurred to me in my travels today, that the man who wore this vest before me, my father, has been gone 10 years today," Ducheneaux said. "I like to think he'd be proud of the work I'm doing."

We can all safely agree, he would. And while we're at it, we could all take a page from the radical candor this leader is bringing to American agriculture.

*Photo by National Farmers Union
USDA Farm Service Agency
Administrator Zach Ducheneaux
spoke at National Farmers Union's
120th Anniversary Convention in
Denver in March 2022 and the
recent Wisconsin Farmers Union
Convention in Wisconsin Dells.*



Beyond the Ballot



Julie Keown-Bomar
Executive Director

I grew up surrounded by people from rural Utah, Colorado, and Wyoming. My people are miners, ranch hands and small time ranchers, teachers, and caregivers. My parents were some of the first in their families to graduate high school and college, yet they were reminded by their elders not to get too big for their britches. I noticed from an early age that hard work and grit won more respect than titles or salaries from those around me.

My understanding of what others thought of rural people started in college when I came to know more people from the cities of the Midwest and Coasts. My family tales of rodeos, cow punching, mining and livestock accidents, big gardens, deer hunts, and battles with nature fascinated urban people, but they didn't empathize with the rapid decline of rural communities or understand why rural people seemed prone to resentment. Back home, the small towns continued to shut down.

You can always read the symbols of the rural apocalypse: hyphenated and consolidated school names, the appearance of dollar stores, worsening medical care, dying downtown businesses, the telltale lilac bushes and apple trees on abandoned homesteads, and rising anti-government sentiment.

At Wisconsin Farmers Union, we are tied to these struggles and to the solutions. While the foundation to our mission is education, we know that no education program is going to change the world for working people without some major systemic change. No amount of learning is going to bring back the county hospital or local schools, save family farms, or bring back a way of life where one good job could support a family. The only thing that can change these trends is to build power and change the systems that cause the injustices. Americans love to play the pull-yourself-up-by-the-bootstrap game, but if hard work, risk taking, and determination were all it took, farmers, ranchers and fishers would already be price makers and not price takers.

Rural America can be a sacrifice zone. My family knows this first-hand. At least three miners in the family were so poisoned by uranium dust that they received government compensation some thirty years after the Cold War petered out. As a girl, my mother shook yellow dust off clothes when pulling them from the line so they didn't iron the yellow soot from the local uranium mill into their dresses, shirts and pants.

I am also very aware that my family had it relatively good—the poorest people in the U.S. are Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) living in rural places. According to the USDA's Economic Research Service, "Rural Black or African American residents had the highest incidence of poverty in 2019 at 30.7 percent, compared with 20.4 percent for that demographic group in urban areas. Rural American Indians or Alaska Natives had the second highest rate at 29.6 percent, compared with 19.4 percent in urban areas. The poverty rate for White residents was about half the rate for either Blacks or American Indians at 13.3 percent in rural areas and 9.7 percent in urban settings." Health disparities are also worse for rural BIPOC residents. There are over 500 abandoned mines on the Navajo nation, just south of where my mother grew. **See page 7 ► BEYOND**



Nevertheless, We Persist

Following is Darin Von Ruden's President's Address shared at the 92nd annual WFU State Convention in December.

As I thought about what to share about our past year, the word that kept rising top of mind was *persistence*.

One day while watching the news, I stumbled across the story of three second-grade students from Massachusetts who, back in 2005, began digging up what they thought was a small rock on the playground during recess.

Little did they know, that small rock would turn out to be a boulder. They spent every recess digging with sticks and with plastic spoons from the cafeteria. They dug down – through second grade, third grade, fourth grade and fifth grade – until finally, just before moving on to middle school, they finished.

Today that rock sits on the playground, a beacon of hope for students in need of a friend. Students say it has magical powers. If they are in need of a friend, they go sit on the rock and by the end of recess, someone will sit with them.

I'll leave it to you to figure out whether that boulder does indeed hold magic. But for me, I was struck by the persistence of the kids who devoted recess after recess to their cause, year after year. They didn't know when they started that it was more than a small stone, but nevertheless they persisted, and now others reap the reward of their work.

That sounds a lot to me like Farmers Union, although I suspect our founders back in Point, Texas in 1902 did know they were wrestling with a boulder – and that it would be an uphill battle.

But through their persistence, and that of members over



The now famous Kittredge Elementary playground boulder. (CBS photo)

the past century, we have forward momentum.

Many of you in the room have been part of a decades-long push within Farmers Union to try to create a system of agricultural production that would help more people versus the greed-based system we are struggling against. Our vision is a strong, stable food supply and fair prices for family farmers.

We are seeing progress in ways I have not witnessed before in my time with Farmers Union.

We are experiencing a rebuilding and re-envisioning of the American food system. Farmers Union has been on the frontlines of those conversations. We are leading the charge on issues like dairy policy, meat processing, and competitive markets.

As USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack told us in his comments at the Fall Fly-In, "In many respects, National Farmers Union has been the architect and the designer in terms of the work we are doing in this administration in rural America and farm country."

There is an appetite at the federal level to take on some of the injustices being faced by farmers and all Americans. NFU's push for Fairness for Farmers is taking hold. Nationally but in a lot of states, too, our attorney generals are taking more seriously what consolidation and monopoly issues are doing to the countryside and to all of society. They're stepping up to the plate to address those issues.



Photo by National Farmers Union

Farmers Union is positioned to make a real difference and bring power back to family farmers and small businesses. Our sights are set on seeing some systemic changes implemented in the 2023 Farm Bill. That is going to require a lot of persistence from our members over the next year. We must persevere, though, because we know the system that we're currently in is not structured to help the small and medium sized farmer.

Farmers Union is dedicated to ensuring that farmers re-

ceive a fair share of the food dollar, which we certainly are not seeing today. According to the October 2022 "Farmers Share" released by National Farmers Union, farmers and ranchers are capturing only 14.3 cents of every food dollar. Back when I graduated high school in 1986, farmers received 45 cents out of the food dollar.

It's time we change that. To do so, we need to build power, which is why WFU has placed so much emphasis on reviving our organizing roots.

We need champions on both sides of the aisle in this state who are tuned in to rural Wisconsin. Right now we have a legislature that gavels in and gavels out without accomplishing much, all while charging taxpayers for their time and travel to get there. We need to make sure we are electing the right folks to represent our values. It's time to break the political divisiveness we're seeing. We can't be afraid to have the hard conversations with neighbors or friends. It's time to exit the echo chambers we've found ourselves in. We're going to be a better world when we're talking to each other and reaching out to folks of different stripes, which is why Farmers Union has been striving to be a place where farmers of all background and beliefs can come together -- and why we're working hard to build strong rural coalitions who can get things done here in Wisconsin.

Our entire team is doing great work to strengthen WFU. I'd like to take a moment to especially recognize the persistence of our membership team and chapter leaders. As membership associations emerged from the pandemic in late 2021, nearly half reported declines in total membership and declining member renewals. But, bit by bit, and through the hard work of chapter leaders and our wonderful crew of membership folks, we're seeing chapter connections rekindle. Our chapters are the lifeblood of WFU, and I want you all to know that your efforts are seen and appreciated.

In 2022, chapters hosted 90 events – or every 4 days, on average. That's incredible.

We recognize that persistence and grit can only go



Photo by
Danielle Endvick

Jess Ryba and her family at the Cadott Farmers Market.

so far, though, and ultimately you need a plan. Which is why WFU engaged members, chapter leaders, the board of directors, and staff in strategic planning. As we head into 2023, we've set three initiatives, with underlying goals, that will help guide our work. Those include:

- 1) Empower Farmers & Advance Rural Communities
- 2) Engage and Grow WFU membership
- 3) Strengthen the WFU organization

I hope to stand here at the podium next year, telling you all of the progress we've made on those goals. And I'm confident we will have progress to report, because of the strong leaders we have in this membership.

We can see persistence shining through in the efforts of our members all around the state.

I'd like to lift up a gal who couldn't join us for convention, but who has been a real inspiration to me and many others this year. Many of you may know Jessica Ryba, our administrative assistant, who works out of the WFU headquarters in Chippewa Falls.

Jess battled breast cancer a few years ago, and we all hoped she had won that battle. Unfortunately, some symptoms showed up this past winter, indicating it had returned, and Jess was faced with the news that her cancer had spread and is terminal. When Jess got this news, she was in the planning stages of launching a farmers market in her community of Cadott. Many people in her shoes would have hung up such notions, when life dealt them such a blow.

But Jess has been passionate about connecting local farmers with eaters, and she moved forward with her plans, volunteering countless hours and pushing on, even on days when she wasn't feeling well. The Cadott Farmers Market ended up being a wonderful success, sparked by Jess' involvement in Farmers Union, but carried on through her persistence.

Seeing someone go through such a battle shifts one's perspective. I've watched a few too many folks face such battles recently, having also watched my daughter-in-law's father battle – and unfortunately lose the fight – with pancreatic cancer this year. Life is often more fleeting than any of us expect. It reaffirms that I want to leave the world a better place for those who follow, like my grandchildren.

See page 6 ► PERSIST



The WFU-sponsored Farm & Fiber Tour. (Submitted photo)





Polk-Burnett Farmers Union members have been heavily involved in the establishment of the St. Croix Valley Food Alliance. (Submitted photo)

From page 5 ► PERSIST So many Farmers Union members are doing just that.

Take, for example, the members who have been involved with launching the St. Croix Valley Local Food Alliance. A number of Polk-Burnett Farmers Union members are a part of this effort to strengthen and promote a thriving, resilient, and equitable local food economy.

South Central Wisconsin Farmers Union members have revived our cooperative roots, forming creative co-ops to address community needs. These entrepreneurial folks have launched the South Central Hemp Cooperative, the Community Kitchen Co-op, and the Southern Wisconsin Meat Cooperative over the last couple of years.



MeatSmith Co-op

We have a lot of other good folks throughout the state who are doing good in their communities. Let's hear it for all who find ways to be persistent for rural Wisconsin.

Thanks to active Farmers Union members who are stepping up to take charge and share their stories, we've made powerful progress in 2022:

We released a member-driven Meat Processing Report, which helped us successfully advocate for DATCP investments into meat processing infrastructure, workforce training, and new meat career educational programs at Wisconsin high schools and universities.

We have made incredible strides with Dairy Together, with a series of educational meetings held around the state, outreach happening nationwide, and a fly-in held in July to advocate for the Dairy Revitalization Plan. We also hosted officials from USDA and DATCP on member farms to elevate our issues. Achieving meaningful dairy policy reform feels like it is within reach – with some more persistence.

Through our collaborative project, Wisconsin Women in Conservation, over 40 field days, webinars, and networking events were organized, with nearly 1,500 women engaging in that program. Thanks to Kriss Marion and the whole WiWiC team for all of the hard work that has gone into this program.

Tara Daun has done a tremendous job of organizing field days and educating farmers about conservation ef-

forts with our farmer-led watershed programming. Over four hundred attendees took part in field days, educational events, and council meetings. Not to mention, 30 pairs of underwear were planted for the sake of science in the 'Soil Your Undies' health competition.

Our organizing team had 410 conversations with potential members at farmers markets, made 400 mobilization and recruitment calls, and helped train 62 members in storytelling and advocacy.

Through this ongoing work, we will continue to have meaningful conversations and empower ordinary people to stand in solidarity.

In the Special Projects realm, we have partnered with DATCP, Marbleseed, and the Wisconsin Food Hub Cooperative on a USDA Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement to bring together producers, distributors, community organizations, food security partners, and tribal governments to strengthen local food systems.

We've elevated antitrust issues, lifting up NFU's Fairness for Farmers campaign and showing our own "Get Loud" short film featuring WFU member stories at the National Farmers Union Convention in March in Denver.

None of this would be possible without members sharing their stories, engaging on the issues they care about, and leading at the local level. We are stronger together. It was true at WFU's founding in 1930, and it remains true today.



Fall Fly-In

As always, we're striving to be the "big tent" that represents and serves as a reasoned voice for all of Wisconsin agriculture.

It's easy for those of us who work in agriculture to get jaded over time I encourage you to not lose hope, to keep working, and to lean on Farmers Union. Whether you're trying to get language passed on the policy floor or advocating for major changes at the Capitol, don't get frustrated when you're told no or when an idea doesn't make it through.

As we saw in the story of the playground boulder, and as I've learned many times over in Farmers Union, creat-

ing lasting change often takes years of work.

A neighboring farmer and good friend of mine, Jack Herricks, is a strong Farm Bureau member, but he joined WFU on a Dairy Together Fly-In this summer -- yet another sign of our forward progress in coalition building.

I've enjoyed getting to know Jack more and think it's fitting to close with some wisdom he shared as we wrapped up that fly-in:

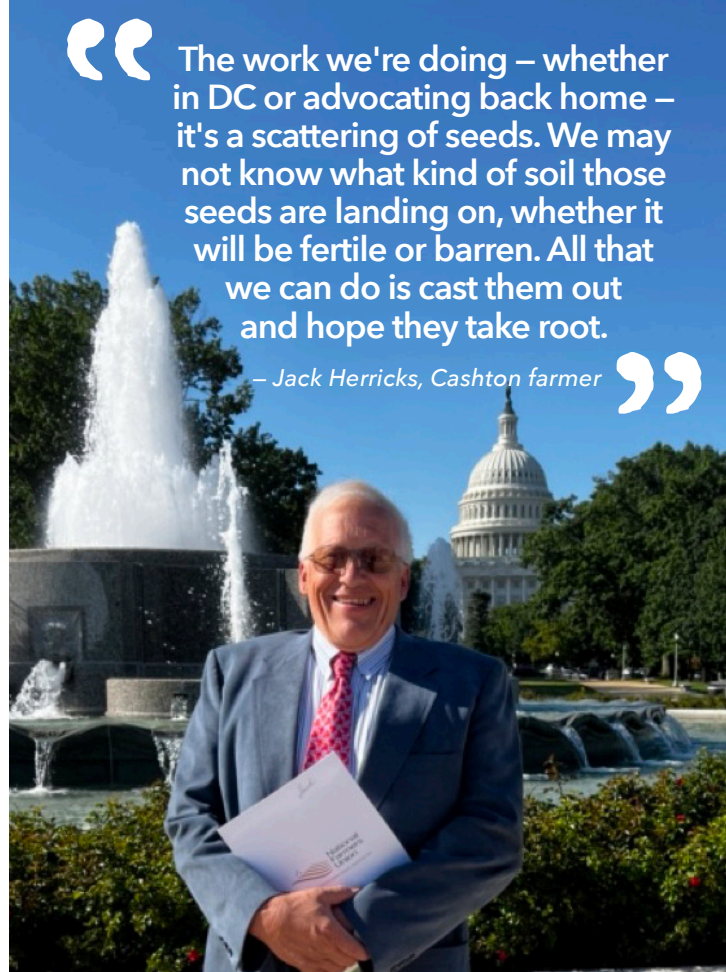
In Jack's words, *"The work we're doing – whether in DC or advocating back home – it's a scattering of seeds. We may not know what kind of soil those seeds are landing on, whether it will be fertile or barren. All we can do is cast them out there and hope they take root. Maybe not all of them will in my lifetime, but my hope is that they take hold for future generations."*

Folks, we've scattered a lot of good seeds this year.

So let's continue being persistent. A great chance to do so will be at our Farm & Rural Lobby Day January 18th in Madison. RSVP to attend at wisconsinfarmersunion.com/events.

I'm proud of all that we accomplished in 2022, and I hope, as we reconnect this convention weekend, that you feel that sense of pride, too. Thank you, and continue the good work.

Von Ruden is president of Wisconsin Farmers Union. He and his family dairy farm near Westby.



“ The work we're doing – whether in DC or advocating back home – it's a scattering of seeds. We may not know what kind of soil those seeds are landing on, whether it will be fertile or barren. All that we can do is cast them out and hope they take root.

– Jack Herricks, Cashton farmer ”

From page 3 ► BEYOND up. Mining companies blasted 4 million tons of uranium out of Navajo land between 1944 and 1986.

A fellow anthropologist, Mark Edelman, looks to broader trends in our economic and political landscape to reveal the complexity of what has happened in rural places. In a 2021 paper entitled *"Hollowed out Heartland, USA"* he writes "Rural decline is not simply the result of deindustrialization spurred by free trade, the farm crisis, or automation and robotization. Since the 1980s, financial capital has developed imaginative new ways to strip and seize the assets present in rural zones, whether these be mutually-owned banks, industries, cooperatively-owned grain elevators, local newspapers, hospitals, people's homes, or stores located in towns and malls." In the wake of the fiscal austerity agenda enacted by financial and political elites in the late 20th century, the vast majority of the wealth created in America's countryside "has accrued to shareholders in corporations and financial institutions headquartered in a handful of distant, economically dynamic urban centers."

We all know that the decline of rural America happened under multiple Democratic and Republican ad-

ministrations. NAFTA did as much to hurt working people as Reagan's trickle down economics. The 1996 Farm Bill ended most supply management and crop price floors that undermined independent farmers and helped institute a new food system marked by overproduction and handouts to agricultural giants like Cargill and ADM. See Alan Guebert's article on page 11 for more about how the fallout from neoliberalism hit rural America. For nearly 20

years under multiple administrations, Big Ag and their farm front associations have had their lawyers and lobbyists directing regulatory control and destroying local control. Just like my mother's family, rural people in Iowa and Missouri suffer through living in a sacrifice zone.

So in the days and weeks after the election, I am hoping that our newly elected or reelected politicians don't forget that rural

people and places matter beyond the election cycle. The damage done over decades will not be reversed easily or without sustained focus. No matter what political stripe they wear, those in power must begin to make the economy and the government work for ordinary people. That has and will continue to be the focus of WFU and our solidarity is more important now than ever.

“ ***In the days and weeks after the election, I am hoping that our newly elected or reelected politicians don't forget that rural people and places matter beyond the election cycle. The damage that has been done over decades will not be reversed easily or without sustained focus.*** ”



Speak Up at Farm & Rural Lobby Day on January 18th

Danielle Endvick
Communications Director

MADISON - Registration is open for Wisconsin Farmers Union's Farm and Rural Lobby Day January 18th in Madison.

WFU Executive Director Julie Keown-Bomar urged farmers and rural advocates to attend, noting, "This is our day in Madison as regular citizen lobbyists. We are exercising our right to petition the government, while at the same time walking the talk as a union of farmers and farmer advocates. For me, it's a powerful feeling to be an engaged citizen in solidarity with others."

Members will advocate for budget issues and on WFU's Special Orders of Business, touching on topics like concentration in agriculture, preserving small and mid-sized farms, and how family farmers are shaping climate change and water quality policy.

"Legislators are eager to hear directly from constituents about the issues of the day," said WFU Government Relations Director Rick Adamski. "Even in this world of modern communication,

there's no better path for finding common ground than sitting down together and having a conversation face to face."

Farm and Rural Lobby Day will begin at 10am with issues briefings at Bethel Lutheran Church, 312 Wisconsin Ave., near the capitol square. Speakers will provide background information on pending legislation that is of interest to farmers and rural residents to help participants prepare for their meetings with legislators. Following lunch, the group will head to the Capitol to meet with their senators and representatives, with the day's activities wrapping up around 4pm.

There is no cost to participate. Please pre-register as soon as possible so legislative visits can be planned accordingly.

Registration is open online at wisconsinfarmersunion.com/events.

Have a question? Contact the WFU policy team: Michelle Ramirez-White at 715-450-9507 or mramirezwhite@wisconsinfarmersunion.com or Rick Adamski at 715-450-4322 or radamski@wisconsinfarmersunion.com.



**Wisconsin
Farmers
Union**

FARM & RURAL LOBBY DAY

January 18th, 2023
10AM - 4PM | Madison, WI



Our voices are stronger together.

Do you care about the issues affecting our farms and rural towns? Join us in advocating at the Capitol on Farm & Rural Lobby Day.

Free for members - RSVP by January 10th!
wisconsinfarmersunion.com/events



Project to create WI Local Foods Directory

Lauren Langworthy

Special Projects Director

Wisconsin Farmers Union is proud to partner with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) on a recently-announced Wisconsin Local Food Purchase Assistance Program (WI-LFPA) grant. Other partners in the project include Marbleseed and the Wisconsin Food Hub Cooperative. Through this collaboration, we are excited to announce that we're working with partners across the state to develop a WI Local Foods Directory that will allow farmers to promote their products to buyers of all kinds – including institutions, hunger relief organizations, restaurants, groceries, and direct consumers. The directory is still being developed, but we hope that members will be able to take advantage of this opportunity to promote their products and strengthen the local food system long into the future.



About the Project

DATCP has a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service to create this program. WI-LFPA aims to strengthen local food systems, support Wisconsin Farmers, and distribute fresh nutritious foods to under-served communities.

DATCP is working collaboratively with producers, distributors, food security organizations, and tribal partners to provide program development, coordinate transportation and logistics, and procure food from local producers. Project partners each bring unique attributes that support specific program areas in this collaboration:

Wisconsin Farmers Union is working to further develop local food networks by organizing online resources and mapping producers of Wisconsin and regional tribal territories in the Wisconsin Local Food Directory. As the project moves forward, we will compile resource lists for project stakeholders and set up the Directory (which will be free for all WFU members who choose to opt in). You can learn more about the directory and by visiting wilocalfood.org

Marbleseed is providing producer education and granting \$1.5 million to farmers to grow food for under-served markets. They will distribute grants ranging from \$5,000-15,000 to farmers via pre-season contracts based on farmer-driven prices with a specific focus on marginalized farmers (including BIPOC, beginning, and veteran farmers). For details, reach out to Marbleseed's WI-LFPA Specialists or visit: wilocalfood.org/wi-lfpa-application

The Wisconsin Food Hub Cooperative is handling the movement of food, ensuring products get to communities in need.

To learn more, join one of the WI-LFPA Virtual Office Hours. Partners will be available to answer questions, hold networking discussions, and provide technical assistance. Virtual office hours are available 12-1 p.m. (Central Time) on the following Thursdays: January 12 and 26, February 9 and 16. Find more information about these sessions, including the meeting link, at wilocalfood.org/resources

FUE Leadership Program Apply by January 15th

Each year Farmers Union Enterprises sponsors a program that is committed to developing and empowering future Farmers Union leaders in the FUE region of Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin.

Participant experiences include:

- Visits and activities that enhance their knowledge of cooperatives and the role that Farmers Union plays
- Training and hands-on experiences enabling effective leadership
- Know-how to manage, coordinate and orchestrate meetings
- A fly-in to Washington, D.C. to take part in the legislative process
- Relationship-building and networking with other local, state, and national Farmers Union leaders through the National Farmers Union Convention and a State Convention

Nomination/Application Process:

To nominate an individual or couple from your chapter or to submit your own application, please call WFU at 715-723-5561 or email Jessica Ryba at jryba@wisconsinfarmersunion.com

Applicants must submit a 1-2 page essay by January 15th, 2023 including:

- Description of their farming enterprise
- A brief resume of each candidate
- Explanation of why you would like to be considered for the program





Rick Adamski
Government Relations Director

We all have heard stories about an event that appears to be absolutely positive, yet turns into a disaster, or about negative events that eventually result in wonderful outcomes. In the movie "Charlie Wilson's War," I vividly remember the character played by Phillip Seymour Hoffman telling Tom Hank's character a parable and powerfully delivering the oft-repeated line – "We'll See."

Likewise, we are on the cusp of potential outcomes in the political season nationally and in Wisconsin. With the November elections completed, committees are being reorganized, parties are planning their strategies, and citizens are watching. The Wisconsin Farmers Union Government Relations Department is also studying, learning, meeting, and planning for this future.

By the time this is published, WFU will have held its annual convention *in-person*! The results of the policy deliberations will guide our work for the coming year.

The shifting of convention to December means we'll be better prepared as the Wisconsin Legislative Session begins in early January. Even though the composition of the Democratic Governor and the Republican legislature are similar to the last session, there are some important differences to keep an eye on.

One change is the record budget surplus going into this session. The Republicans want to permanently reform the tax code. The Governor wants to focus on needs that have been neglected.

Another difference is that at the end of this 2-year budget cycle, the Governor will not be up for reelection, as he serves a 4-year term. There was speculation that in the last budget cycle, the Republicans did not want to give any successes

that would have aided his reelection chances. They may be more cooperative this time around.

However, gerrymandered Senate Districts have enabled the Republicans to secure a super majority. This empowers them to successfully impeach administration officials on party line votes. Publicly they have said that they do not want to use this power excessively.

The 118th Session of Congress for the United States will see the Republican majority leading the House of Representatives and the Democrats leading the majority in the Senate, with Democratic President Biden balancing this split party leadership. For agriculture this will impact the proceedings of the next Farm Bill, which expires in September. The planning process has started with hearings in both chambers.

Historically, the Farm Bill has exhibited less of a partisan divide than most other legislation. It will be interesting to see if this is true in this session. WFU and National Farmers Union members will be actively engaged in the deliberations as we try to get adoption of the principles of the Dairy Revitalization Plan in this Farm Bill. The next step is for an interested Representative or Senator to ask the Congressional Budget Office for a score of the proposal, the outcome of which could persuade undecided members to support it.

WFU members will gather in Madison for our annual Farm and Rural Lobby Day on January 18, 2023. RSVP at wisconsinfarmersunion.com/events. This will provide us with the opportunity to reconnect with our elected officials, or to meet newly elected ones. I believe that it is essential for all citizens to develop a relationship with their elected officials. We never know what difference our conversations could make for future generations.

"We'll see."

Adamski can be reached at 715-450-4322 or radamski@wisconsinfarmersunion.com.

You're a Neoliberal, I'm a Neoliberal, We're All Neoliberals – for Now



Alan Guebert
Correspondent

For almost 50 years, the world has gotten faster, richer, and—yes—fatter. The power behind much of that (ahem) growth has been neoliberalism.

It's not a political label or a personal slander. Instead, as author Rana Foroohar explains in her new book, *Homecoming*, neoliberalism is "an economic and political philosophy that capital, people, and goods should be able to cross borders freely in search of the most productive and profitable returns."

In short, it was the energy behind Ronald Reagan's "trickle down" economics, the muscle that pushed Bill Clinton's free trade dealmaking, and the theory that powered the Bush and Obama Administrations' embrace of China's labor might and its mighty ag imports.

"Politics," writes Foroohar, both an assistant editor of the *Financial Times* and a contributor to CNN, "takes place at the level of the nation-state. But economics has, for the last forty years, been an increasingly global affair..."

And, she quickly adds, more and more of this global game plays by "rules... [that] have been dictated by a global technocratic class whose members have more in common with one another than the majority of the people in their own country."

That's especially so in the fields and pastures of farmers and ranchers who run into powerful neoliberal forces – mostly global business cartels – in nearly every aspect of their livelihood: seed, fuel, fertilizer, machinery, meatpacking, transportation, exporting.

That's because, Foroohar explains, the more success neoliberalism has in business, the more disconnected it becomes from peoples' daily lives. "Too many people crafting and/or benefiting from the system mistook free trade for foreign policy and believed that unified global markets would always beget global politics."

It hasn't. What once was promoted as a "safe markets-safe world" idea to counter the last century's dance with fascism, socialism, and war has now grown into populism, a "natural result of this disconnection between the global economy and national politics."

As the last decade in rural America has made plain, that disconnect between economics and politics is almost complete.

Foroohar knows this; large portions of her book outline how the built-in resiliency that once was characteris-

tic of the nation's farm and ranch communities has been replaced by highly specialized, inherently fragile industrial farms and livestock operations where efficiency and growth are paramount to community and resilience.

Chapters include "The Problem with Big Food," "Move Fast and Grow Things," and "Two Americas." All point to how the world's adoption of neoliberal economics has left it and most citizens vulnerable to increasingly brittle "global supply chains" and rising fascism (witness today's Hungary, Poland, Sweden, and Italy) while strengthening one-time—and likely future—foes like China.

But, as the book's title suggests, "the paradigm of globalization is now changing" from a "system of concentrated power and oligopoly" to a world where "regionalization and localization are the future."

One example of this sea change, she cites, is how "the Biden Administration's trade representative, Katherine Tai, has outlined a new direction for U.S.-China trade, one that puts labor and national interests ahead of consumer prices and individual corporate interests."

That Americans-first approach with our biggest foreign trader is "a key stake in the heart of the usual neoliberal corporate interests," she opines, and don't think for a minute that the rest of the world hasn't noticed.

Another example is the federal government's mid-2022 approval of \$52 billion "in grants and incentives for domestic semiconductor manufacturing." That critical need was magnified during the Covid pandemic when breakdowns in the international supply chain left U.S. security agencies empty-handed and the nation vulnerable.

In one way, Foroohar's vision of "homecoming" is already in place in North American agriculture: integration. It's a "way of increasing productivity, resilience, and sustainability," she explains, all critical elements in tomorrow's farms and ranches.

Integrators, however, will need to focus more on "regional markets" and less on "global markets." Today's market-grabbing oligopolists can expect much more government regulation—and even more government-supported competition—than before, too.

In *Homecoming*, Foroohar builds a strong case for neoliberalism's continued weakening. The world—and especially farmers and ranchers—should hope she's right.

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92ND ANNUAL CONVENTION

To all who joined us in Wisconsin Dells, thank you for making our return to in-person conventions so memorable!

Throughout the three days of our 92nd annual Wisconsin Farmers Union State Convention, we dug deep on climate smart agriculture at Groundswell, enjoyed insightful workshops, heard a refreshing keynote from Farm Service Agency Administrator Zach Ducheneaux, recognized some great awardees, wore our finest ugly sweaters, ate a ton of good food, and reconnected as a Farmers Union community.

Save the date for next year!

93rd Annual
WFU State Convention
December 8-10, 2023

Chula Vista Resort, Wisconsin Dells



GRASSROOTS DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

WFU Grassroots Membership Sets 2023 Policy Priorities



Photos by Danielle Endvick

Delegates deliberated over the policy that will guide Wisconsin Farmers Union's work in 2023 during the organization's 92nd annual State Convention.

WISCONSIN DELLS - Delegates at the 92nd annual Wisconsin Farmers Union State Convention Dec. 9-11th in Wisconsin Dells adopted the policy that will guide the family farm organization's work at the Capitol, in Congress, and across the countryside in 2023. Wisconsin delegates will have the opportunity to bring the stances to the National Farmers Union Convention in San Francisco March 5-7.

"The policy discussion at the annual State Convention is the democratic process in its purest form," said WFU President Darin Von Ruden. "Farmers from a variety of backgrounds come together to respectfully discuss and come to a consensus on the issues impacting their farms and rural Wisconsin."

The following Special Orders of Business will be WFU's 2023 policy priorities:

PRESERVING SMALL & MID-SIZED FARMS

WFU, with various allied organizations, will intensely explore the problem of on-going farm loss, develop and lead systemic and realistic solutions to sustain small- and mid-size farms to continue their operation. The systemic approach will address the interrelationship between issues related to government assistance and regulation, demographics, business, economics, legacy and succession, market concentration, trade structures, development of marketing, politics and farm input, competitiveness, amongst others.

CONCENTRATION IN THE AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY

WFU strongly demands that the Wisconsin Department of Justice (WI DOJ) and the United States Department of Justice (US DOJ), as well as other regulatory agencies, aggressively investigate concentration in agriculture and initiate action to level the playing field for family farmers and return meaningful competition to the marketplace. WFU also urges the Wisconsin Attorney General's office to vigorously enforce the law limiting ownership by foreign entities to 640 acres of land in Wisconsin.

FAMILY FARMERS SHAPING CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY

WFU urges the State Legislature and Congress to expand existing programs or develop new legislation to address climate change by appointing a Climate Change Rural Task Force to inform and articulate an agricultural and rural plan in the emerging climate legislative platform. We also call for **See page 14 ► POLICY**



Dane County Farmers Union member Kevin Shelley awaits his turn at the mic.



Wood-Portage-Waupaca delegates, from left, Chris Holman, Tommy Enright, and Rachel Bouressa, have some fun on the policy floor.



St. Croix County delegates, from right, Virginia Drath, Jill Barthen Berke, and Joe Koch – all set to dig in on policy.



From page 13 ► POLICY expanding and supporting appropriations for existing USDA programs and for development of a labeling system that informs consumers of food and other consumer goods that are carbon intensive in their production and manufacturing process. WFU calls for the enactment of legislation that would facilitate family farmer participation in carbon credit markets, such as the Growing Climate Solutions Act and the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act. WFU supports shifting fossil fuel subsidies towards regenerative and conservation farming practices; local initiatives to build resilience in food, fiber, and energy systems; investment in energy efficiency; efforts to revitalize communities with agricultural businesses that utilize new technologies and market creation for diversified and specialty crops; education programs to help farmers improve strategies, as well as for consumers on the role farmers and food play in climate mitigation and to help them find food produced with climate friendly practices.

FAMILY FARMERS SHAPING WATER QUALITY POLICY

WFU strongly supports the enactment of recommendations prepared by the 2019 Speaker's Task Force on Water Quality during the 2023 Wisconsin legislative session. These include, identifying best practices for testing and data collection, measuring water quality in different parts of the state, and types of soil, determining the sources and causes of contaminants impacting water quality, consulting with stakeholders to assess current practices to manage runoff as well as suggestions to improve these efforts, investigating remedies that will protect a healthy and stable supply of water for residents and industry, septic systems to safeguard a healthy water supply, and studying best practices for designing and constructing wells. WFU supports legislation that requires the Legislature to find a permanent funding source for the goals the Task Force has set forth. We also support legislation for remediating drinking water contaminated with PFAs and restrictions to prevent future PFAs contamination.

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDED SUPPORT FOR:

- Increasing the capacity of and starting new state and USDA-inspected meat processors throughout the state, with increased support from County and Regional Economic Development agencies, streamlined regulation, and industry workforce development.
- Establishment of a mandatory program for managed growth based on market demand and price stability in the 2023 Farm Bill.
- Full funding of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program for practices including but not limited to planting cover crops, nutrient management planning, stream bank fencing, barnyard runoff control, regenerative agricultural practices, prairie STRIPS, beetle banks, perennial buffers adjacent to waterways, native plantings, and no-till planting methods.

- A state law that milk pickup cannot be restricted by county, town, city, or village ordinance.
- Simplification of the process to license on-farm milk processing, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, and clarification by DATCP of rules for on-farm processors.
- An increase in the allowable THC content of hemp, as tested in the farmer's field, from 0.3% to 1.0%. WFU also calls upon the FDA to create a safe and regulated pathway for CBD to be utilized in food and beverage for human consumption, and pet and livestock products.
- Protecting our native pollinator population, with encouragement for the use of Xerces guidelines to ensure the health of pollinators and add native plant diversity in agricultural landscapes.
- Targeting crop insurance programs to support beginning farmers and reduce insurance premium costs for farmers implementing soil health and conservation practices.
- Incentivizing climate-resilient practices through crop insurance programs.
- The addition of 4 commissioners to the Public Service Commission (PSC). Their decisions, with an outsized impact on rural communities, are far too important to be left to 3 political appointees.
- Preference for distributed solar generation and avoidance of installations that take productive farmland out of production.
- Finalization of Farmer Fair Practice Rules within GIPSA, which would bolster protections for family farms.
- Increased funding and support for farmers' markets, including programs that enable customers to purchase produce from local farmers.
- Protection of critical investments in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) at a time of rising food prices and insecurity.
- Providing nutritious meals, sourced from local farms, to all Wisconsin students.
- Adequate funding and the use of online training and in-person testing for the Youth Tractor and Machinery Safety Certification Program to address the shortage of funding and teachers.
- Programs that encourage and incentivize transitions to young/beginning/BIPOC farmers.
- A Beginning Farmer Tax Credit (BFTC) providing the seller a tax credit for the sale of livestock, land, or machinery to beginning farmers.
- Expansion of the Homestead Tax law to target property tax relief to more people.
- Comprehensive revision of eminent domain statutes.
- Efforts within the 2023 Farm Bill to protect family farmers and incentivize more crop diversity.

Detailed election results were sent to delegates via email. Members will carry policy priorities forward at Farm & Rural Lobby Day Jan. 18th in Madison. RSVP at www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com/events.

Von Ruden re-elected WFU President, Directors Retain Seats

Danielle Endvick
Communications Director

WISCONSIN DELLS – Westby dairy farmer Darin Von Ruden was re-elected president of the Wisconsin Farmers Union this weekend at the organization's 92nd annual State Convention.

Von Ruden is a lifelong Farmers Union member. He returned to the Farmer Union presidency this summer, after a brief term by Rick Adamski of Full Circle Farm in Seymour. Adamski shifted to the role of WFU's Government Relations Director in July.

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

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

WFU board members & delegates

Paul Adams of Eleva and Dylan Bruce of Ferryville were elected to serve as delegates to the National Farmers Union Convention March 5-7, 2023 in San Francisco.

Four district director seats were up for election this year, with all four incumbents retaining their seats. District 1 Director and board Secretary Linda Ceylor, who dairy farms near Catawba, was re-elected in District 1, which comprises Ashland, Barron, Bayfield, Burnett, Douglas, Iron, Lincoln, Oneida, Polk, Price, Rusk, Sawyer, Taylor, Vilas and Washburn counties. Jen Schmitz of



Photos by Danielle Endvick

The 2022 Wisconsin Farmers Union Board of Directors includes, from left, (front row) Linda Ceylor, Catawba; Sarah Lloyd, Wisconsin Dells; Darin Von Ruden, Westby; Rachel Bouressa, New London; (back row) Michael Slattery, Maribel; Tina Hinchley, Cambridge; Dave Rosen, Glenwood City; Jen Schmitz, Cashton; and Ed Gorell, Eleva.

Cashton will continue to represent Buffalo, Jackson, La Crosse, Monroe and Trempealeau counties in District 4. Maribel grain farmer Michael Slattery, who was appointed by the board to fill Adamski's vacated seat this fall, will serve District 8, covering Brown, Calumet, Dodge, Door, Fond du Lac, Forest, Florence, Kewaunee, Langlade, Marinette, Manitowoc, Menominee, Milwaukee, Oconto, Outagamie, Ozaukee, Shawano, Sheboygan, Washington, Waukesha, and Winnebago Counties. New London beef farmer Rachel Bouressa retains the at-large seat.

Other board members include Ed Gorell, Eleva (Treasurer); Tina Hinchley, Cambridge (Vice President); Sarah Lloyd, Wisconsin Dells; and Dave Rosen, Glenwood City.



Funds raised for Kamp kitchen updates

Thanks to the generosity of members, the convention silent auction raised nearly \$5,000 for kitchen updates at Wisconsin Farmers Union's Kamp Kenwood, our youth camp facility in Chippewa Falls. We are looking forward to making updates that will improve functionality and food safety in the camp kitchen. Thank you to all of our bidders and to those who donated chapter baskets or made individual item donations.

If you weren't able to attend and want to donate towards these efforts, donations can be made at wisconsinfarmersunion.com/donate. Not able to give monetarily? We can always use helpers in-person at the Kamp Kenwood Volunteer Day in the spring. Watch for details! Left: South Central Farmers Union member Pat Skogen checks out the silent auction.



WFU RECOGNIZES MEMBERS, RURAL ALLIES

By Danielle Endvick

Communications Director

WISCONSIN DELLS - Wisconsin Farmers Union (WFU) honored several individuals for their dedication to family farmers at the 92nd annual Wisconsin Farmers Union State Convention Dec. 9-11th. The event drew more than 200 farmers to Wisconsin Dells for a weekend of networking, educational workshops and grassroots policymaking.

Friend of the Family Farmer

WFU recognized two Friends of the Family Farmer, Joy Kirkpatrick and Mandela Barnes. First given in 2013, the award recognizes those who have gone above and beyond in efforts on behalf of family farmers and rural communities.

Kirkpatrick has worked in the University of Wisconsin since 1993. She began her university career as a county-based Dairy & Livestock Extension Agent. In 2004 she became the Outreach Specialist for the Center for Dairy Profitability, earning distinguished status in 2019. She has facilitated hundreds of farm succession discussions with farm families, organizing programs like "Returning to the Farm" and "Shifting Gears for Your Later Farming Years." She also helps farmers address stress and access mental health care through Wisconsin's Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network. Joy grew up on a hog farm in Southern Illinois.

"The work Joy has done around farmer mental health through the years has undoubtedly saved lives," said WFU President Darin Von Ruden. "Her ongoing work to support family farm transitions helps ensure the future of Wisconsin agriculture."

Von Ruden noted the WFU Board of Directors' decision to honor Lt. Gov. Barnes was not taken lightly, given the organization's nonpartisan nature.

"After watching Mandela reach out to family farmers and rural Wisconsinites this year during his 'Barnes to Barns' tour, we wanted to recognize his efforts," Von Ruden said. "Mandela was the first candidate in a long while who truly seemed to tune into the issues that mattered on our farms and in our communities."

Barnes, the son of a school teacher and a United Auto Workers member, became Wisconsin's first African American Lieutenant Governor in 2019. Born and raised in Milwaukee, he attended Milwaukee Public Schools and Alabama A&M University and has become a recognized leader on issues of economic justice, racial equity, and sustainability. At age 25, Mandela was elected to the State Assembly, serving two terms.

Barnes oversaw the Governor's Task Force on Climate Change, giving farmers a seat at the table. This past summer and fall, during his run for Senate, Mandela visited WFU member farms and attended WFU's candidate roundtables that focused on small businesses and family farm issues -- even after other candidates opted to no-show.

"Mandela truly showed up, and we look forward to seeing how he continues to show up for Wisconsin," Von Ruden said. "We wish him all the best in his next chapter and look forward to seeing how he continues to be a Friend of the Family Farmer."



Builders Awards

Jane Hansen of Ogema received the Builders Award, which recognizes outstanding commitment to building Farmers Union through county involvement, leadership development and member recruitment.

Hansen is an officer of the Taylor-Price Farmers Union and shepherdess of Autumn Larch Farm, located near Ogema. She has opened up her farm to educate others about regenerative agriculture and to share the techniques she has learned in the pursuit of healthy sheep, high quality wool, environmental stewardship, and a commitment to the regional economy. This fall Hansen, who is also an active member of Three Rivers Fibershed, pulled together collaborative partners, including WFU, for the inaugural Farm and Fiber Tour. The event included tour stops on farms throughout western Wisconsin and educated community members about farming practices.

“Jane has strengthened WFU’s visibility in her region and beyond,” Von Ruden said. “She is also active in policy discussions, educating other farmers about the value of farmed fiber for textiles. Farmers Union is stronger due to her leadership and collaborative spirit.”

Emerging Leader

This is the third year that WFU presented a special Emerging Leader award to an individual who has ignited energy and engagement in WFU. This year’s Emerging Leader is Paul Adams.

Until 2020, Adams and his wife, Joann, and daughter, Becky, operated a 900-cow organic dairy farm in Elewa. Adams Dairy had been in his family for nearly 150 years before a crash in the organic dairy market forced the family to make the difficult decision to sell the herd. Adams went into dairy farming after graduating from high school in 1970, starting out with 30 cows and attending the UW Short Course.

Adams has been heavily involved with WFU’s Dairy Together efforts, attending two fly-ins with WFU in 2022 to promote the Dairy Revitalization Plan.

“Despite his family’s loss, Paul continues to have a passion for Wisconsin agriculture,” Von Ruden said. “While many people in his situation could have turned completely away from agriculture, Paul has taken the challenges life has thrown at him and has let the adversity mold him into a strong advocate for his fellow farmers.”

Bruce Miller Award

WFU also announced that Cathy Statz was chosen to receive the 2023 Bruce Miller award, which will be presented at the National Farmers Union Convention in San Francisco in March. The award is named in honor of the late Bruce Miller, who was a WFU member and served on the staff of Minnesota Farmers Union. It recognizes individuals within Farmers Union who display a true passion for rural America and promote the work of Farmers Union.

Statz wrapped up her career with WFU in 2022, after 30 years staffing and 41 summers participating in the camp program. She spent her childhood on a 50-cow dairy farm near Sauk City and grew up attending Farmers Union meetings. Prior to joining WFU full-time, Statz spent four summers working on the WFU and NFU camp staff. She dedicated her career to cooperative education and advancing the quality of life for farm families, rural communities, and all people.

“Cathy’s reach in Farmers Union went far beyond the education department,” Von Ruden said. “She was often the first face of Farmers Union for new members, as they dropped campers off at Kamp Kenwood, or out and about at the countless dairy breakfasts, college career fairs, and cooperative events that she attended. Cathy instilled institutional knowledge and a cooperative spirit in those around her, and left an undeniable mark on this organization.”

Statz moved to Poland with her husband, Tom, this fall. He teaches at an international school; she works remotely on cooperative education projects.





Field Day at Brattset Family Farm 8-11-22



Field Day at Sweet Springs Farm 5-15-22



Enjoying pie at Bouressa Family Farm 9-8-22

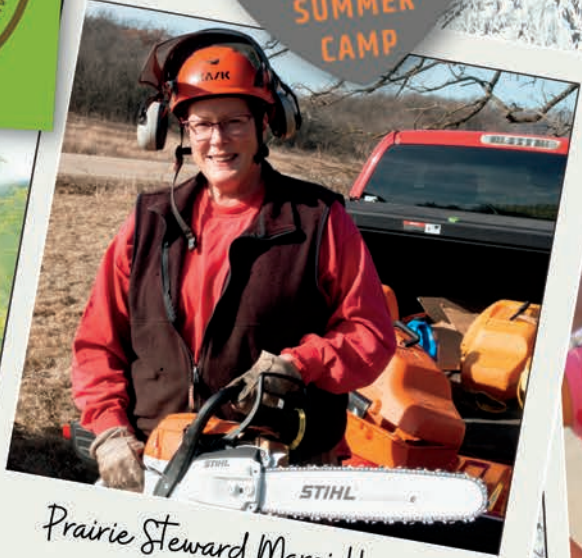
The Year In Review



Soil Health is always on the agenda for WiWiC



August Ball kicks off Queen Bee Sessions Podcast 3-17-22



Prairie Steward Marci Hess presents Summer Camp Zoom



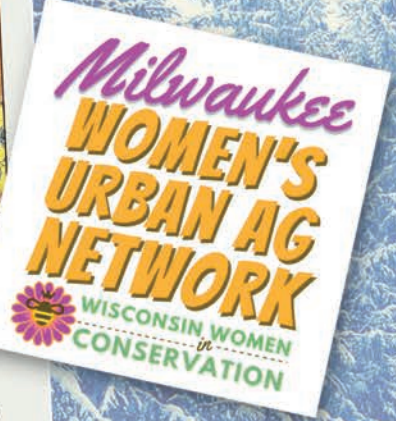
Educator Network Happy Hour at Brix Cider 5-20-22



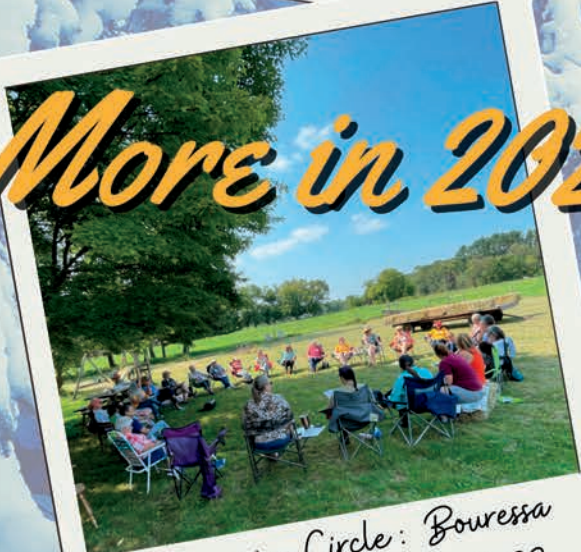
Digging into soil health
Blackbrook Farm 9-10-22



MKE Women's Urban Ag
Network Gathering 11-4-22



More in 2023!



Learning Circle: Bouressa
Field Day 9-8-22



Hay Wagon Tour
8-11-22

WiWiC

org



It's chilly now, but this look back at a few of the fun 2022 Wisconsin Women in Conservation events across the state has us dreaming of 2023 events already! Winter is a great time to plan for conservation efforts in the growing season, and a great time to make connections and get guidance from your local conservation agencies and professionals.

If you're a women farmer, urban grower or landowner, reach out to WiWiC now and they'll set you up with a local Conservation Coach. You can also subscribe to "The Buzz" monthly newsletter, listen to the "Queen Bee Sessions" podcasts, and watch re-plays of interactive Zoom education events on their Blog. All at WiWiC.org.

Coming up in 2023: Winter Camp Zoom Lunches, Educator Network Spring Conference in Stevens Point on April 28, 6 spring Learning Circles, 6 Summer field days, 6 Fall learning circles, 4 regional summits, more Milwaukee Women's Urban Ag Gatherings and 4 episodes of the popular topical Summer Camp Lunch Zooms. Don't forget to get all the latest news on [@WiWomenConservation](https://www.tiktok.com/@WiWomenConservation) TikTok, Instagram, Pinterest and Facebook!

Unable to Deliver

Health Care Shortage Hitting Rural America with Limited Birthing Options



By Brittany Olson
Rural Voices Correspondent

When my husband and I became parents on Mother's Day, it wasn't exactly the way we had envisioned. My birth plan was 'gimme the drugs and get the baby out safely' with no minutiae to gum up what should have been a delivery as boring and uneventful as the pregnancy leading up to it.

As dairy farmers, birthing wasn't new to us. However, this particular bull calf had other plans; his sire not being a calving ease bull, his dam being narrow between the pins, and his own heart rate taking a nosedive resulted in a perfect storm of obstetrical mayhem. Titus Knute Olson was born via emergency C-section, requiring resuscitation, and was whisked off in a helicopter for a 50-mile trek to Eau Claire. Since I was put under for surgery, I joke that it was the most unforgettable moment of my life that I'll never remember.

Little did we know at the time that Titus would be the last baby born on Mother's Day in Barron. In September, Mayo Clinic Health System announced they were closing both OB units at Barron and Menomonie. Both locations continue to see mothers-to-be for prenatal care, but those babies will now be delivered in Eau Claire.

We were devastated to learn of the Barron closure not just for any future children we might have, but for the providers and nurses who loved us and cared for us through a spectacularly difficult time in our lives, for the community at large, and for mamas and babies whose care could very well be compromised as a result of having to travel further for labor and delivery. Both units had recently been remodeled, as well. I also thought of the care load at other hospitals in the region growing to accommodate more families.

Unfortunately, this is not a problem unique to western Wisconsin. In 2017, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists reported that half of U.S. counties had not one single OB-GYN and estimated 8,000 fewer OB-GYNs in practice by 2020. When over half of rural women live 30 minutes or greater from a hospital with an OB department, those 30 minutes could mean the difference between life and death in an emergency situation.

Additionally, the closest hospital with an OB department may not be an option depending on factors like insurance coverage, patient-provider relationships, and high-risk pregnancies requiring a hospital with more advanced capabilities.

All of these factors and more, nuanced as they are, form outcomes that are less stellar for rural women than their urban counterparts. Lack of prenatal care for rural women renders them three to four times more likely to die a pregnancy-related death alongside a higher likelihood of infant mortality. They also might not reach the hospital in time, which can be traumatic for all parties involved if a curbside delivery or homebirth was not part of the plan.



A two-day-old Titus Olson yawns in his bassinet at Mayo Clinic Health System in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. (Photo by Brittany Olson.)

— “ —

Outcomes are far less stellar for rural women than their urban counterparts. Lack of prenatal care for rural women renders them three to four times more likely to die a pregnancy-related death alongside a higher likelihood of infant mortality.

— ” —

For women traveling particularly great distances for care, they may opt for induction or an elective C-section (both of which have added risk for complications) for added peace of mind knowing they would deliver their babies in the hospital.

Of course, one does not need to be an OB-GYN to deliver a baby; certified nurse-midwives, family medicine MDs, and nurse practitioners are all fine options for prenatal care and labor and delivery.

However, for a hospital to keep an OB unit open, at least three providers (OBs, CNMs, family medicine, and/or NPs) and an anesthesiologist need to be on call at all times along with the ability to perform a C-section in 30 minutes or less. Only MDs can perform C-sections; while all OB-GYNs are trained in such procedures, just 10 percent of family medicine MDs as of 2010 offered obstetrical care (and only a handful of family medicine residencies in the U.S. offer C-section training besides).

Compounding the shortage are high burnout rates, unpredictable hours, malpractice insurance (OB-GYNs pay more than any other specialty), and the expense of keeping an OB unit open in a hospital that may already be financially squeezed.

Complicating the financial side of the equation is that rural women are far more likely to be on Medicaid, and provider reimbursement from Medicaid (accounting for half of all rural births) is frequently lower than that of private insurance companies.

Medicine aside, fewer doctors are opting to practice in rural communities after completing their education, and that scenario is far from new. Hospitals in suburban and urban areas offer not only higher pay but more lifestyle amenities that are attractive to recently minted doctors with lots of debt and roots to put down.

Now, allow me to illustrate with some humor: at my 32-week appointment, my Certified Nurse-Midwife (CNM) had a UW medical student with her who was starting his residency in Milwaukee this fall. Being a farm girl, our midwife laughed at fresh cow anecdotes from the 'calvalanche' we had earlier that month. The med student didn't find the same level of humor in our stories.

Now that we've established that there is, in fact, a problem and that this particular stork has come home to our backyard to roost - what are some potential solutions? Of course, there are no easy answers, silver bullets, golden geese, or bronzed baby shoes to fix such a multifaceted issue.

Encouraging medical students on the OB track to practice in rural hospitals is one possibility. The UW School of Medicine and Public Health established a rural OB residency program in 2017 with communities of less than 20,000 in mind. Residents would complete 20 percent of their training at hospitals in Baldwin, Marshfield, and Monroe. The University of Iowa recently started a similar residency program, and hopefully more medical schools in flyover country take note and follow suit.

Expanding the OB workforce is also an option so NPs, CNMs, and family medicine MDs can fill OB-shaped gaps. A 2019 article by healthcare think tank The Commonwealth Fund mentioned a tiered workforce allowing midwives and nurse-practitioners to handle low-risk pregnancies and births, while assigning MDs to births potentially requiring interventions.

For low-risk pregnancies, delivering at home or in a non-hospital birth center attended by CNMs and certified practical midwives may also be an option. In such a scenario, however, hopefully a hospital is close by in the event of an emergency because waiting for an ambulance may not always be the safest route.

On the legislative side, changes to national health policy such as expanding Medicaid and improving provider reimbursement may have a palpable effect in keeping providers practicing in rural America. Additionally, we can advocate for expanded funding and support for federal programs such as the Health Resources and Services Administration's National Health Service Corps, which helps place future physicians of all stripes in high-need areas.

For comparison purposes, the National Health Service Corps operates similarly to job placement and student loan forgiveness initiatives for veterinarians in high-need areas under the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture's Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program.

If we want people to move here and stay here, they're going to need to go to the doctor here, start families here, and safely deliver their babies here. While the neighborhood midwife and town doctor have often been lost to the forces of time, we've got work to do to hold on to the providers we have left.

Telling fewer fresh cow jokes to tease townie med students may or may not make a difference, but knowing the issues at hand for the sake of grassroots advocacy does. Our next generation depends on it.

Olson is a dairy farmer, writer, and photographer from Chetek, WI.



The Many Benefits of Wisconsin Farmers Union Membership



Kirsten Slaughter
Membership Engagement Director

When I am explaining Wisconsin Farmers Union to someone new, often one of the first questions people ask is “What are the benefits of joining WFU?” The good news is, there are a lot of benefits of joining!

Our benefits fit into two main categories: The Farmers Union Experience and Consumer Benefits.

Consumer benefits include discount codes or things that you receive outside of the main Farmers Union activities and involvement. A number of these are listed below, including an explanation on the newer partnership with American Income.

The Farmers Union Experience benefits are the things you receive as soon as you join, and even more so when you start getting involved. I have broken them down further into a couple of categories.

THE FARMERS UNION EXPERIENCE

Community: Farmers Union brings together community, especially at the chapter level. Sharing experiences, struggles, and accomplishments with a group of other people who share the same values as you is really special, and chapter gatherings do just that. Or join other members at our biggest gathering each year at the WFU Annual State Convention where you can meet and network with members across the state. Plus all members receive our WFU Newsletter 6 times a year which allows you to connect with the work that staff and members are doing across the state.

Policy: As an individual person it is hard to raise your voice enough to be heard on the issues that matter to you, but by joining WFU our collective voice is so much louder. The policy that is set by members is talked about year round by staff, so even when you can't get to the Capitol, you can know that our policy team is looking out for you. Each member also has a vote to take part in our democratic process to set the WFU policy and then join others at the annual WFU Farm and Rural Lobby Day or apply for a scholarship to attend the NFU Fly-In in Washington DC.

Education: Members set the educational initiatives of the organization and then are able to attend workshops and webinars on those very topics or put on your own event through your chapter with the Local Initiative Grant. Members can send their children to

our amazing summer camp at Kamp Kenwood with cooperative education, leadership development, and a lot of fun. Education is something that touches all aspects of our organization so there is sure to be a program or scholarship opportunity for you.

CONSUMER TYPE BENEFITS

Some of the following benefits are offered through WFU and a majority come through National Farmers Union (NFU). As a member of WFU you automatically have access to all NFU benefits. I have highlighted a few of these benefits here:

Hastings Mutual: WFU members receive a 9% discount on farm insurance policies through Hastings Mutual Insurance Company, which has a range of innovative insurance products.

American Income Life: This is a new benefit for WFU members from American Income Life. All active Family and Student membership levels will have immediate access to a \$2,000 Accidental Death and Dismemberment benefit. Members received two cards earlier this year. Mailing it back it allows you to:

- Designate a beneficiary for your AD&D plan
- Take advantage of the AIL Plus program which includes discounts for retail pharmacy, vision, dental, telemedicine, chiropractic care, medical equipment, MRI and CT scans, diabetic supplies, hearing aids, and lab testing.
- Receive a Child Safe Kit for your children or grandchildren.
- Discuss voluntary supplemental insurance benefits

Food Finance Institute (FFI): FFI's mission is to make sophisticated financial technical assistance available to every growing food and farm business and through our new partnership WFU members have greater access including \$100 off discounted FFI Unlimited Learner Pass, \$100 off Immersion Training Programs, and FFI resources. Use discount code wfu100off.

Farm Supplies, Hotel, Rental Car, Office Products, Additional Discounts, and More!

Check the NFU website, www.nfu.org, for discounts on a number of services, including Farm Commons, CSAware, Range Meat Academy, Drone Launch Academy, Gempler's, Johnny's Selected Seeds, Wyndham Hotels, and many more. For the discount codes that are not listed on the website you can contact Kirsten at kslaughter@wisconsinfarmersunion.com or 608-514-2031.



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



Food Finance Institute FARM FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT BOOT CAMP

Transform your business in just four days.

JANUARY 24 & 25

- OPTIMIZE YOUR BUSINESS MODEL
- FIX YOUR FINANCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE
- PLUS, 1 HOUR COACHING SESSION

FEBRUARY 14 & 15

- DEVELOP YOUR FINANCIAL PLAN
- GET READY TO RAISE MONEY
- PLUS, 1 HOUR COACHING SESSION

VIRTUAL | 9AM - NOON CT



Since taking Boot Camp I have already met with my accountant to help me tweak my workflows for bookkeeping. I feel like the next phase of growth for the business is so much more tangible after Boot Camp because now I have a plan!

- Amy Wallner, Amy's Acre

Register at edible-alpha.org/training

Use coupon code *wfu100off* to receive \$100 off the cost!

FREE GRANT ADVISING for WFU members

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

[michaelfields.org/
grant-advising-resources](http://michaelfields.org/grant-advising-resources)

Sign up for the grants email list:
grants@michaelfields.org



Make Your Farm More Resilient with Food Finance Institute



Sarah Larson
Food Finance Institute Acting Director

The Food Finance Institute is thrilled to partner with Wisconsin Farmers Union. We share a mission of supporting agricultural entrepreneurs and nurturing an ecosystem of mission-aligned partners to ensure long-term viability and resiliency of farms, families, and rural communities. Both WFU and FFI know that when farmers can build successful, profitable, and sustainable enterprises, the benefits ripple outward and multiply.

Who We Are

As part of the University of Wisconsin System's Institute for Business & Entrepreneurship, FFI works closely with farmers and other agricultural entrepreneurs to help them craft resilient business models, strategize growth, and access the capital they need to excel. We provide a range of farm-specific resources, including trained consultants, technical assistance, and immersive training programs. Our Edible-Alpha® Learning Center is a rich source of insights, a recurring podcast featuring food and farm entrepreneurs, and a full suite of on-demand education.

Our farm-focused programming and consulting is spearheaded by Farm Outreach Coordinator Andy Larson. Andy has a background as both an agriculture lender and an extension educator. In addition, he is a value-added farmer, raising over 600 hens and selling his eggs to local restaurants, retailers, and other markets. Through his breadth of experience, humor, and approachable personality, Andy makes farm finance both accessible and as fun as farm finance and business development can be.

Farm-Focused Outreach

The cornerstone of FFI's training program is our Financial Management Boot Camps. We offer sessions solely dedicated to diversified farm businesses. These multiday virtual seminars whisk agricultural entrepreneurs away from their day-to-day operations in order to facilitate focused, strategic business development. Through a blend of learning, networking, focused work time, individual consulting, and business pitches, our Boot Camps provide tools to build resilient operations.

Other FFI immersion trainings include Raising Equity, which focuses on crafting investible business models, preparing investor-ready financial packages, and devising successful strategies for raising debt or equity. Our Managing Uncertainty: Scenario Planning course helps entrepreneurs develop plans to navigate potential scenarios and remain nimble and viable despite ever-changing business landscapes.

How Our Partnership Benefits You

Because of the many synergies between WFU and FFI, we are excited to invite the WFU community to take advantage of our resources. Our new partnership offers numerous benefits for members, including:

- \$100 off an Unlimited Learner Pass (\$300 value) for our Edible-Alpha® Learning Center, granting unlimited access to our library of on-demand training courses (including Financing Your Value-Added Farm: Getting Capital Ready) and other resources for one full year
- \$100 off any live, virtual FFI Immersion Training, including Farm Financial Management Boot Camp, Raising Equity and Managing Uncertainty: Scenario Planning; includes Unlimited Learners Pass for one year
- Need-based scholarships to cover program costs

We look forward to meeting you and helping you achieve your goals for a profitable farm business and prospering rural communities. Want more information? Contact us at info@foodfinanceinstitute.org.

Food Finance Institute
Helping farmers raise the money they need to grow their businesses

SCHEDULE A FREE CONSULTATION
Receive a financial review and insights to help you find financing

foodfinanceinstitute.org/contact-us

Wisconsin Agricultural Tourism Association Marks 30 Years

Birthday Extravaganza, Networking and Educational Summits Planned for 2023

Sheila Everhart and Sylvia Burgos Toftness

Wisconsin Agricultural Tourism Association

"Agricultural tourism is a growing economic engine in Wisconsin and all across the country because it meets both consumer and farmer demands," said Sheila Everhart, executive director of the Wisconsin Agricultural Tourism Association. "For three decades, we've worked to help consumers and farmers find one another in agricultural settings that are fun, educational, relaxing and delicious. And we're positioned to help our members meet opportunities and challenges going forward."

Established in 1993, the Wisconsin Agricultural Tourism Association (WATA) was created in response to growing consumer curiosity about the operations and people behind their food, fuel, and fiber.

"Today's consumers are often five generations removed from farming," said Sylvia Burgos Toftness, WATA board member and Polk-Burnett Farmers Union member.

Surveys show consumers want to visit farms and shake the hand that feeds them. More and more growers across the state are tapping into this demand by developing creative ways to educate consumers while providing engaging and memorable experiences. This has fostered an additional income revenue stream at fruit and vegetable farms, you-pick operations, vineyards, tree farms, livestock farms, and more. And it helps fuel future generations on the farm.

WATA offers practical information, peer-to-peer connections, and policy advocacy that help growers of all kinds build their success as agricultural tourism destinations.

"When I think about Wisconsin's agricultural tourism activity of 30 years ago, most people had never heard the term," said Everhart, who is also a South Central Wisconsin Farmers Union member. "Although much has changed, the one constant has been the dedication of WATA – its board of directors and community partners. It is that dedication that will ensure we are able to continue to provide services that strengthen agricultural tourism for visitors and farmers alike, and boost Wisconsin as America's Agricultural Tourism Destination."

If you are a farmer, and are thinking about inviting guests onto your farm, consider joining WATA for the networking, educational events, and advocacy. We will host a webinar series in February and March, the WATA Annual Meeting on March 8th, and a birthday recognition event and Lunch & Learn at Justin Trails Resort in Sparta on July 26th to celebrate the 30-year milestone. Learn more at wiagtourism.com.



Local Initiative Grants Due February 15th

Farmers Union chapters that are planning events for 2023 are encouraged to submit Local Initiative Grant proposals by Feb. 15th. to meet the quarterly deadline. Supported by the WFU Foundation, these grants aim to increase Farmers Union visibility, provide education on farm/rural issues, and develop partnerships with other organizations. Learn more at by calling WFU at 715-723-5561 or viewing the application at wisconsinfarmersunion.com/chapters.

See you at Marbleseed

Wisconsin Farmers Union is sponsoring the Marbleseed (formerly MOSES) Organic Farming Conference Feb. 23-25, 2023 in La Crosse. Now in its 34th year, the MOSES Conference draws a diverse audience of farmers and food system professionals for educational programming on a wide range of food and farming topics. The event also includes a large exhibit hall – come see us at the Wisconsin Farmers Union booth! Learn more and register online at mosesorganic.org/conference.

Event Welcomes Emerging Leaders

WFU invites aspiring leaders within the membership to attend the upcoming Farmers Union Emerging Leaders Retreat. This event is a great way to connect with other WFU members and take your leadership skills to the next level. Accommodations and meals will be provided.

Network with other WFU Emerging Leaders while developing the skills to help move our organization forward!

For more details, contact Tommy at tenright@wisconsinfarmersunion.com.



Long-term Test Plot Shows Tillage and Covers Effects on Profits, Yields, & Soils



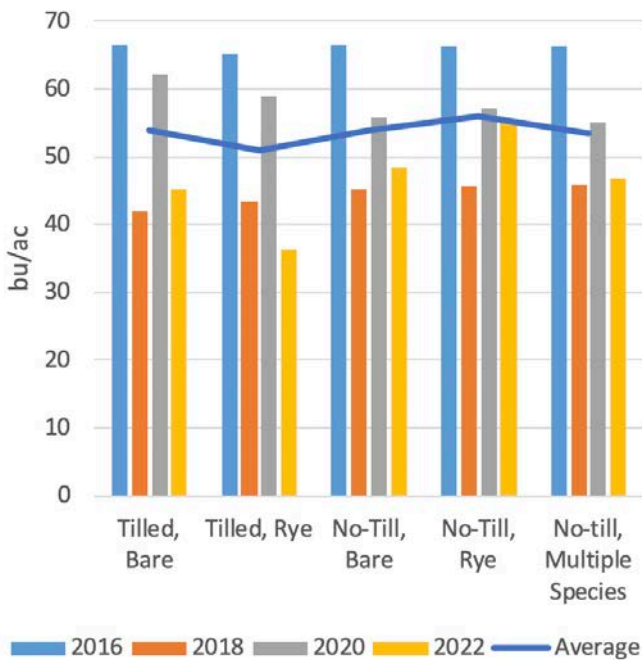
Tara Daun
Watershed Coordinator

The Horse Creek Farmer-Led Watershed Council, with the help of Carlson Family Farms & Timm Johnson, maintains a test plot north of New Richmond to compare yield data between five trials replicated 3 times over 15 plots: 1. No-till with rye cover crops, 2. No-till with multi-species cover crops, 3. No-till with no covers (bare), 4. Tilled with rye covers, and 5. Tilled with no covers (bare).

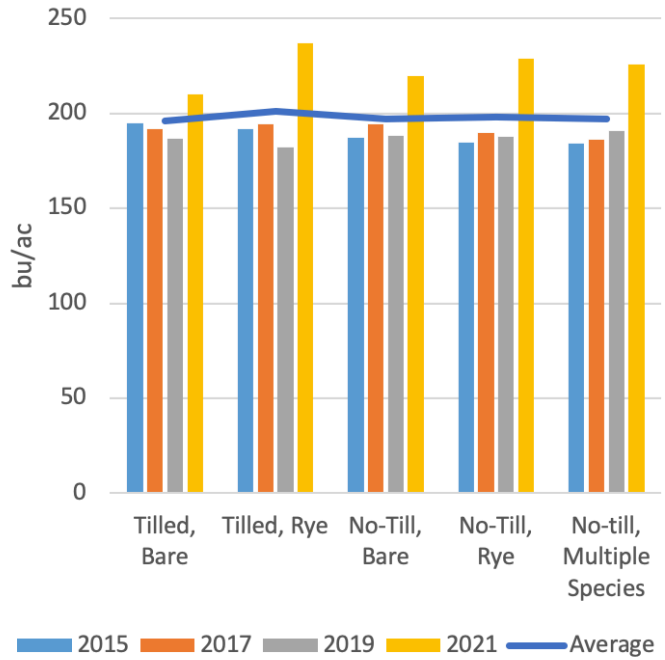
Yield Results since 2015

Since 2015, the farmers, with help from Polk County Land & Water Resources Department staff, have measured yield, test weights, and residue cover on each of the plots. Analysis of yield has shown that each trial has had the most and almost the least yield of all other trials and in at least one year since 2015. While this does not paint the simple picture some conservationists might hope (that cover crops and no-till consistently out-perform tillage and bare soil) it does show that intentional conservation practices don't affect the yield nearly as much as conditions of the season. We see much more consistency between plots in the same year than we see between plots of the same trial in yield. This is not surprising since Mother Nature's seasonal variation plays a bigger role than we do.

Soybean Test Plot Yields



Corn Test Plot Yields



2022 was a particularly challenging year on the test plot due to poor population. Late spring showed poor emergence on the trial which was attributed to soil crusting and a cold spring rain after planting which especially impacted the tilled plots. In fact, these conditions led to the greatest variation between trials we've seen within one year.

Calculating Profits per Trial

Knowing this information about yield over the last 8 years, our next question was to look at profit and management costs. If the yield is on par with less intentional management but costs more in terms of labor and input costs then we need to know that, especially in a year of higher input prices. While it is always difficult to break down every cost of planting, maintenance, and harvest in a year, landowner Timm Johnson has attempted to do that for 2021 and 2022.

All plots were treated the same in terms of custom planting, herbicide, rolling (on soybean ground), fertilizer, and land rent. The differences between plots were calculated to \$18/acre for tillage (which is conservative considering the cost of diesel), \$25/acre for rye cover crops and \$40/acre for multi-species cover crops. In 2021 the corn was sold for \$6.80/bu and in 2022 the food-grade soybeans were sold for \$15.00/bu.

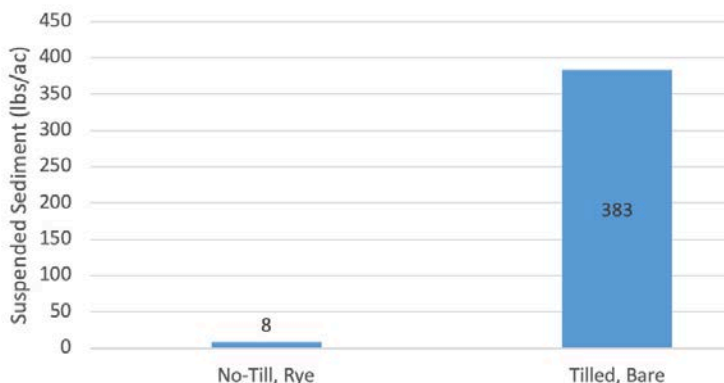
	Bu/ac	Price	gross/ac	Cost/ac	Profit/ac
Corn 2021					
Tilled, Bare	209.8	6.8	1426.64	551	875.64
Tilled, Rye	236.8	6.8	1610.24	576	1034.24
No-Till, Bare	219.6	6.8	1493.28	533	960.28
No-Till, Rye	229	6.8	1557.2	558	999.2
No-till, Multiple Species	225.9	6.8	1536.12	573	963.12
Soybeans 2022					
Tilled, Bare	45.3	15	679.5	408	271.5
Tilled, Rye	36.21	15	543.15	433	110.15
No-Till, Bare	48.39	15	725.85	390	335.85
No-Till, Rye	54.98	15	824.7	415	409.7
No-till, Multiple Species	46.79	15	701.85	430	271.85

Field Erosion

Method of tillage and cover crop usage represent more than just different field management methods. How farmers use these practices has a big impact on erosion of soil from fields, infiltration of rainwater, and thus fertility needs of crops grown on the fields. This potential fertility difference is hard for us to truly analyze with the test plot as we don't want to change other variables such as fertility or herbicide programs. Early analysis shows that the plots with soil health practices (cover crops and reduced tillage) have 10 times as many worms per square foot than the tilled plots with no cover crops. A rainwater infiltration study of the Horse Creek plot in 2022 also showed that the relatively flat tilled plots lost 47 times more soil during a spring rain event than the no-tilled plots with rye covers.

The Horse Creek watershed was modeled to calculate just how much these practices impact erosion and nutrient loss from fields. Reducing tillage to standard no-till

Soil Erosion from Simulated Rainfall
Horse Creek Test Plot Spring 2022



practices across the average field in the watershed (many of which have significantly more slope than our test plot) stops erosion of 680 pounds of sediment per acre and 3.18 pounds of nitrogen and 1.78 pounds of phosphorous per acre.

Similarly, models predict that planting cover crops reduces nitrogen loss off of fields by 1.88 pounds per acre. Cover crops also keep 100 extra pounds of sediment from running off of every acre and .53 pounds of phosphorous.

A transect survey in Polk county estimates that the average field in the county loses 4,200 pounds of soil per acre every year. While that soil is being lost (roughly a millimeter every 3 years), a generous estimate is that it takes about 20 years to create a millimeter of soil across an acre through natural geological processes.

At those rates, we're looking at a practical loss of resource, which you can see on any older fence line on a field. It is common to see a field sitting significantly lower than the soil around fence posts that have been undisturbed since originally put in by our fore-farmers less than a hundred years ago. The loss of that topsoil means a loss of fertility for crops and eventually a loss of a medium to grow crops at all. But beyond the basic arithmetic of gain verses loss of topsoil as a concern for farmers, that sediment ends up in ditches and surface waters.



Two Neighboring fields in the Horse Creek Watershed show the intensively tilled field (right) sits lower than its neighbor which has been minimally tilled for 40 years.

The Horse Creek Farmer-Led Watershed Council is a group of farmers working together to improve soil and water conservation within the Horse Creek watershed. Established in 2013, their mission is to help producers to adopt best management practices dedicated to protecting water quality and improving soil health.

Farmers interested in enhancing soil health and nutrient efficiency practices can connect with their local farmer-led watershed council. Wisconsin Farmers Union supports 4 councils in northwestern Wisconsin through our Watershed Coordinator, Tara Daun, who can be reached at 715-492-0329 or tdaun@wisconsinfarmersunion.com.

More information on the Horse Creek Farmer-Led Council, including the full 2021 report on our test plot can be found at our website: farmerledwatershed.org

NATIONAL FARMERS UNION WOMEN'S CONFERENCE



Exploring the Country Music Hall of Fame



*With Love,
From Nashville*



Wisconsin Farmers Union was represented well at the National Farmers Union Women's Conference in November in Nashville.

WFU Regional Membership Coordinator Alicia Razvi spoke on a panel, sharing her experiences with balancing family and farming. Danielle Endvick and Kriss Marion from the communications team empowered attendees to share their stories and "get loud!"

Each year, WFU offers scholarships for members to attend. Our 2022 group included (photo at left, from L to R) Alicia Razvi, Madison; Jessica Ryba, Cadott; Allison Hellenbrand, Madison; Danielle Endvick, Holcombe; Kriss Marion, Blanchardville; and Pa Thao, Eau Claire.

In addition to hearing inspiring presentations, our crew had the chance to explore Nashville. NFU has announced next year's Women's Conference will be in Albuquerque, New Mexico!

Visit www.nfu.org to learn more about the Women's Conference.



Ag Outlook Forum is January 24th

The 2023 Wisconsin Agricultural Outlook Forum will be held from 9:30am to 4pm at Union South on the UW-Madison campus on Tues., January 24, 2023. The forum will also be live streamed through YouTube.


The morning session will include the traditional outlook for Wisconsin agricultural industries and the afternoon will feature a session on "Climate Smart Dairy in Wisconsin". Learn more and register at <https://renk.aae.wisc.edu/2023-agricultural-outlook-forum/>

NFU Convention set for San Francisco

Registration is open for National Farmers Union's 121st Anniversary Convention March 5-7th at Hyatt Regency in San Francisco, California.

Hear from policy makers and educators on topics ranging from fair and competitive markets, to cooperatives, engaging the next generation, biofuels, and more! You will have the opportunity to network with fellow Farmers Union members from across the country and Farmers Union leadership. There will also be debate and adoption of our 2023 grassroots policy.

Delegates will vote on the organization's policy positions that will guide NFU's work in Washington, D.C. Register today at www.nfu.org/convention/





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PHOTO TAKEN AT JAHNKE FAMILY FARM IN LANCASTER, WISCONSIN

COZY UP WITH A GOOD BOOK



WFU staff and members offer up some of their favorite books for the quiet season. Make some time to slow down – and add these to your 2023 reading list!

Lucia Possehl, Rural Organizer

***Emergent Strategy* by Adrienne Marie Brown**

Emergent Strategy is filled with important questions for our time about resiliency building within ourselves and our communities. Adrienne Marie Brown invites us to lean into and learn from change. Let's shape the futures that we want to live!

Rick Adamski, Government Relations Director

***Milked: How an American Crisis Brought Together Midwestern Dairy Farmers & Mexican Workers* by Ruth Conniff**

Ruth and her family moved from Madison to Mexico to discover that people in Mexico had family members in Wisconsin working on dairy farms. The book tells the story of some of those families.

Danielle Endvick, Communications Director

***Fifty Acres and a Poodle: A Story of Love, Livestock and Finding Myself on a Farm* by Jeanne Marie Laskas**

Stumbled into on a thrift store shelf, this one had been collecting dust on my "someday-I'll-have-time-to-read" pile for quite a while. When I finally picked it up, I was transported into Jeanne's chronicles of the heartwarming and heartbreaking stories of her move from an urban life into country living at Sweetwater Farm.

Tommy Enright, Comms & Special Projects Coordinator

***Why We Sleep: Unlocking the Power of Sleep and Dreams* by Matthew Walker, PhD**

Sleep is one of the most important but least understood aspects of our life, wellness, and longevity. An explosion of scientific discoveries in the last 20 years has shed new light on this fundamental aspect of our lives. Now, neuroscientist and sleep expert Matthew Walker gives us a new understanding of the vital importance of sleep and dreaming.

Kriss Marion, Wisconsin Women in Conservation Communications Specialist

***Making a Difference: My Fight for Native Rights and Social Justice* by Ada Deer**

Ada was the first woman to serve as head of the Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs. She's from Wisconsin's Menominee tribe and still working hard in her 80s to advocate and organize for justice. She also ran for Congress, though unsuccessfully, and of course I appreciate that. This book offers a look into the issues that have impacted and are impacting our Native American neighbors, and also shows how one person can change the course of history.

Shelly Longdo, Administrative Assistant

***On a Wisconsin Family Farm, Historic Tales of Character, Community and Culture* by Corey Geiger**

This book flings the barn doors wide open to a cast of characters that built America's Dairyland. Corey Geiger, international agricultural journalist, pairs his rural roots and lively storytelling talents to capture six generations of local tales.

Camryn Billen, Rural Organizer

***Brood* by Jackie Polzin**

This insightful novel about a nameless narrator's attempts to keep her chicken flock alive through the seasons both life and Minnesota bring. Intimate and startlingly original, this slender novel is filled with wisdom, sorrow and joy.

Alicia Razvi, Regional Membership Coordinator

***Atomic Habits* by James Clear**

Packed with evidence-based strategies, *Atomic Habits* will teach you how to make small changes that will transform your habits and deliver amazing results. I love learning about better methods of productivity and ways

to get as much as I can out of this one amazing life. This book helps me accomplish that goal in a thousand tiny ways.

Julie Keown-Bomar, Executive Director
Yellow Bird: Oil, Murder and a Woman's Search for Justice in Indian Country by Sierra Crane Murdoch

I was compelled to read *Yellow Bird* after hearing an interview with the author. It follows the story of an unforgettable woman from Ft. Berthold, a member of the "Three Affiliated Tribes" of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara located in North Dakota. The book focuses on Lissa Yellow Bird's quest to find a missing oil worker. It is a true crime story, but what stood out to me were the unrelenting and distinctive tactics of investigation used by Yellow Bird. I think Farmers Union people will appreciate Murdoch's attentiveness to the underlying structural problems which allow violence, disregard and injustice to occur in tribal nations.

Mary Kluz, Rural Organizer
House of Rust by Khadija Abdalla Bajaber

When Aisha's father, an adventurous fisherman, goes missing, she steps out of her prescribed roles to find him on a magical boat. Guidance comes from many talking animals and a challenge comes from three sea monsters. I won't spoil the story to tell how the confrontation with Baba wa Papa, the father of all sharks, turns out. I love stories of strong girls who find their place in the world. I got pulled in by the way the author let me get to know the characters, and when I met the very astute talking cat, I was hooked.



Photos by Danielle Endvick
Speaking of good books, Wisconsin Farmers Union was pleased to host agricultural and antitrust policy expert Austin Frerick for a writing residency in November. Frerick spent some time at our state headquarters in Chippewa Falls, working on his forthcoming book, tentatively titled *Barons*. The book will profile a series of powerful magnates to illustrate the concentration of power in the American food system. Frerick is a Fellow of the Thurman Arnold Project at Yale University, an initiative that brings together faculty, students, and scholars to collaborate on research related to competition policy and antitrust enforcement. He is a Senior Fellow at Data for Progress and serves on the Board of Directors for the Socially Responsible Agriculture Project and Common Good Iowa.



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Calling for a Cleanup

State Program Distributes First Grants to Provide Clean Drinking Water in Rural Communities



Julian Emerson
Communications Specialist

CAMBRIDGE - For years Duane and Tina Hinchley lived with a slightly elevated level of a substance that could impair their health in the water they drank at their farm east of Madison.

But when testing revealed that the amount of nitrate – a contaminant commonly known to impair the body’s ability to transmit oxygen and especially dangerous to babies – rose significantly, to 30 parts per million (ppm), or three times the limit that health officials believe is safe, they knew they had to take action.

“When tests showed that nitrate figure had gone up so much, we were like ‘wow.’ It was a real concern,” Duane Hinchley said, noting that previous tests revealed the nitrate level was 13 ppm. “We knew we couldn’t keep drinking our water at that level.”

The Hinchleys hired the drilling of a new well at their farm in 2018. To serve the farm’s increasing water needs and to try to protect against future nitrate pollution, the well was drilled 200 feet below ground, into bedrock. The cost: \$35,000.



Tina Hinchley, right, speaks a visitors to her farm. She had a new well dug in 2018 after tests showed significantly elevated nitrate levels. (Photo by Julian Emerson)



After nitrate levels in their drinking water increased substantially above recommended safety levels, Tina and Duane Hinchley paid \$35,000 to have this new well dug at their farm. A state program to address contaminated wells in Wisconsin recently issued its first grants to five owners of such wells. (Photo courtesy of Tina Hinchley)

“It was a lot of money,” Duane Hinchley said of the cost for a new well. “We were able to absorb it, but there are people out there who can’t afford that.”

The Hinchleys are among a growing number of Wisconsin residents whose drinking water has been contaminated with unsafe levels of nitrate or other contaminants. Nitrate is a form of nitrogen, and health officials say most nitrate contamination in Wisconsin is because of overuse of nitrogen as fertilizer in farming.

Wisconsin Groundwater Coordinating Council figures from 2021 show nitrate is the most widespread groundwater contaminant in the state, with about 10% of private wells and more than 200 public water systems registering nitrate levels above the 10 ppm standard. Additionally, about 17% of private wells tested in Wisconsin were positive for coliform bacteria, and 3% showed the presence of E. coli, an indicator of pathogens that can cause serious health problems.

Tests also showed high arsenic levels in groundwater, especially in northeast and southeast Wisconsin. Exposure

to arsenic can prompt skin damage, nervous system issues, and increased cancer risks, among other problems.

"We've heard time and time again, rural folks know that nitrates are the number one contaminant in their drinking water ... It really creates water concerns for young families with babies," outgoing Department of Natural Resources Secretary Preston Cole said, referencing "blue baby syndrome," a common name for infant methemoglobinemia, a condition in which babies who ingest too much nitrate have skin that turns blue due to lack of oxygen.

To address growing nitrate pollution of wells across rural Wisconsin, Gov. Tony Evers' administration announced in August a \$10 million grant program overseen by the DNR to support the replacement, reconstruction, treatment or abandonment of contaminated private wells. The program is funded by American Rescue Plan Act money the state received from the federal government to help during the coronavirus pandemic.

On Nov. 1 Evers announced the first five recipients of those dollars. The owners of contaminated wells in Marathon, Portage and Winnebago counties received a combined \$34,935. The grants must be applied for, and maximum single disbursements are \$16,000. More information about how to apply and other specifics is available here: <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/aid/Grants.html>

The program is based on the state's Well Compensation Grant Program, but expands that measure's eligibility rules to allow more people access to address their polluted wells. It increases the annual household income eligibility from \$65,000 to \$100,000 and makes grants available to churches, daycare centers and other small businesses.

Cole said the contaminated well remediation program is a continuation of Evers' commitment to protecting water resources. Few people previously qualified for the program, he said, noting the new effort is expected to address an additional 1,036 tainted wells.

Wisconsin is home to an estimated 800,000 privately owned wells, Cole said, "and many of them are crumbling." Owners of many of those wells don't have the financial resources to address nitrate contamination, he said.

In Portage County one of every four private wells is contaminated, yet nobody she knows of prior to the new grants had qualified for one, said state Rep. Katrina Shankland, a Democrat who lives in the county. A longtime water advocate, Shankland said she has introduced eight bills to address polluted wells, but none of them were adopted by the Republican-led Legislature.

Evers also tried to address private well contamination

Left: State Rep. Katrina Shankland (D-Stevens Point) credits the contaminated well remediation program with helping residents address unsafe drinking water issues. Below: Gov. Tony Evers directed \$10 million of American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) funds to assist in well remediation.

(Photos by Julian Emerson)



as part of his proposed state budget and when those efforts weren't included by Republicans, he said he decided to use ARPA funds to expand on the existing Well Compensation Grant Program. In addition to relaxing grant income rules last updated in 1995, a

previous rule requiring a tie to livestock was done away with. Additionally, the nitrate threshold to qualify for funding was lowered from 40 ppm to 10 ppm and an arsenic level was reduced from 50 ppm to 10 ppm.

"It's very important that those requirement standards have been reduced," Shankland said.

As the lawmaker has held a series of town hall meetings advertising the new well remediation program, rural residents tell her about their concerns about contaminated wells, Shankland said. Some are forced to drink bottled water, and many say they simply can't afford to have new wells dug on their properties given other expenses they face.

"Many people simply can't afford that, especially with a difficult economy," she said. "We know this will make a huge difference for people, knowing they can drink safe water from their taps."

Addressing the state's contaminated wells will require additional future funding, Shankland said, and she will push state lawmakers to provide long term money to address the issue.

"This is an issue we need to put more resources toward. We need to treat it as an ongoing problem," she said.

Duane Hinchley said the well remediation effort fills a need in rural Wisconsin. More farmers and other people living in rural areas are concerned about their water quality, he said, and farmers struggling financially may need help paying to ensure clean water.

"There are people out there who need this help," he said. "This is a way to make sure people have safe water, and another way to keep the family farmers going."

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WFU Kamp Kenwood has been home to summer adventures for generations.

In the 1940s, Wisconsin Farmers Union members and their co-ops donated funds and labor to build WFU Kamp Kenwood. The 23-acre camp features a sandy beach, rustic cabins, and the historic lodge built all those years ago.

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August 6-9
August 13-16

JUNIOR/JUNIOR HIGH CAMP

Ages 8-14
July 16-20

JUNIOR HIGH CAMP

Ages 12-14
July 30-August 3

SENIOR CAMP

Ages 14-17
July 23-27



Torchbearers recognized at WFU Convention

Four Farmers Union members received the Torchbearer Award Dec. 10th at the 92nd annual Wisconsin Farmers Union State Convention in Wisconsin Dells. Recognition as a Torchbearer is the highest honor bestowed upon Farmers Union youth, marking completion of five years of community and organizational service, and education in the topics of cooperation, leadership and civic engagement. Since 1936, over 1,600 WFU youth have been named Torchbearers.

"Farmers Union youth build leadership skills and cooperative awareness through participation in our youth program," said WFU Education Director Grace Clardy. "Most began participating as elementary students and have developed a strong sense of the importance of the role of family farming."

Torchbearers may attend the National Farmers Union All-States Leadership Camp in summer 2023.

Rent Cabin on Lake Wissota

The cozy 'Cabin on Lake Wissota' at Wisconsin Farmers Union's Kamp Kenwood is available to rent mid-October through April. The cabin offers convenient access to hiking and cross-country trails in Lake Wissota State Park.

A great location for family gatherings, business retreats, or winter fun, this comfortable cabin is located near Chippewa Falls. Learn more at wisconsinfarmerunion.com or contact Facilities Manager Brad Henderson at 715-214-7244.

NFU offers scholarships

National Farmers Union is offering scholarships to youth, including:

- One \$2,000 Hubert K. and JoAnn Seymour scholarship
- Three \$1,500 Stanley Moore scholarships
- Two \$1,500 Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences (MANRRS) scholarships

Learn more at nfu.org/education/scholarships/



Photo by Danielle Endvick
WFU Education Director Grace Clardy (far left) is pictured with the Torchbearers who were recognized at the WFU State Convention, including, from left, Kaden Mitchell (Buffalo), Sean Stone (Dane), Olivia Roth (South Central), and Brooke Wegerer (Taylor-Price). Not pictured are Willow Ulrich (Barron), Anya Apfelbeck (Taylor-Price), Larissa Klapatauskas (Taylor-Price), Emma Wegerer (Taylor-Price).

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On this month's cover: Snowy horse scene by Chippewa County Farmers Union member Michelle Longdo