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Secretary Gassman Announces \$53,105 Industry Partnership Grant to Support Training for Food Resource, Agribusiness in Western Wisconsin

Matching funds boost total to \$106,374 to help meet region's skilled workforce needs

MADISON – Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary Roberta Gassman today announced a Wisconsin Industry Partnership training grant of \$53,105 to help meet the skilled workforce needs of an expanding food resource and agribusiness sector in western Wisconsin.

DWD's regional partner, the Western Wisconsin Workforce Development Board, and 20 employers in the Food Resource and Agribusiness Network (FRAN) will provide \$53,269 in matching funds for a project total of \$106,374.

"These resources demonstrate how by working together, we can meet the needs of employers and prepare workers for jobs of tomorrow, resulting in a stronger Wisconsin economy," DWD Secretary Roberta Gassman said. "One of the region's main economic strengths is its agriculture and food processing industry. It is one reason why Wisconsin is a leading state in organic farming. The grant will help the food and agribusiness sector grow and create more jobs."

One FRAN employer includes Organic Valley of La Farge, the largest organic farm cooperative in the country. For over two decades, the Midwest Organic & Sustainable Education Service has held its annual convention in La Crosse. Sales of organic products total nearly \$133 million annually in Wisconsin.

Another FRAN partner is Kwik Trip, which is doubling the size of its bakery, a \$30 million project expected to add more than 100 jobs. Last year, the western Wisconsin region's food resource and agribusiness sector had 3,374 jobs, and it is projected to add jobs in coming years.

The grant will be administered by Workforce Connections Inc., the fiscal agent for the Western Wisconsin Workforce Development Board. At least 20 workers will receive training in supervision, coaching and mentoring at Western Technical College or FRAN partner sites to maximize workplace productivity. The one-year project will also include training in computer-assisted manufacturing, hydraulics, machine maintenance and safety.

The grant is part of the Wisconsin Industry Partnership program, a \$3 million, two-year program administered by DWD to focus on regional workforce needs of emerging and high-growth industry sectors. Industry Partnerships represent the innovative approach to training that is employer driven and regional in both its focus and use of training resources. Key partners are the sector employers, labor unions, economic development agencies, workforce development agencies, K-12 schools, technical colleges and University of Wisconsin institutions.

The program is funded through a training package of almost \$6 million that Governor Doyle announced last year. From that package and other training grants provided by Governor Doyle, over \$541,000 has been awarded to the La Crosse area by DWD in the last two years.