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Wisconsin Pioneers Innovative Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship Program

Marathon County kick-off event recognizes first program of its kind in nation

MARATHON – The Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards (BAS) and GrassWorks Inc., a non-profit organization that supports managed grazing in the state's agriculture industry, today formally kicked off the Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship program with an event in Marathon County. The program is the first Dairy Grazier Apprenticeship program in Wisconsin, and the first of its kind nationally to use a new hybrid apprenticeship training model.

"This year marks the Centennial anniversary of apprenticeship in Wisconsin, and today we celebrate one more 'first' for Wisconsin apprenticeship," said Jane Pawasarat, Administrator of DWD's Division of Employment & Training, which includes BAS. "Through the Dairy Grazier Apprenticeship program, Wisconsin continues to pioneer innovative apprenticeship programs for other states to follow."

The Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship is a new 2-year program established through a partnership with GrassWorks Inc., and the BAS. The program is funded in part by a grant from the U.S Department of Labor entitled Sector Alliance for the Green Economy (SAGE) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture. The Dairy Grazing program is the first of five projected apprenticeships to be developed through SAGE grants.

Administrator Pawasarat spoke about the new program during a kick-off celebration today at the farm of Nate Weisenfeld in the Marathon County town of Marathon. Weisenfeld is among the first dairy grazing apprentices in the program.

Managed grazing, according to GrassWorks, is an efficient, sustainable and profitable farming method in which livestock are rotated through paddocks of nutritious grasses and legumes that are allowed to rest and re-grow. Farmers who utilize managed grazing improve animal health, build soil and water resources, create habitat, produce high quality food and contribute to local economies. The typical apprentice works with a master dairy grazier, and takes courses in improving animal health, building soil and water resources, creating habitats and producing high quality food.

GrassWorks is a statewide membership organization directed by and for producers. The organization conducts educational and outreach activities on managed grazing. GrassWorks is the industry sponsor for the new Dairy Grazier Apprenticeship. For more information, visit www.grassworks.org.

With approximately 1,600 employees, DWD works with employers to fill jobs, provides training and employment services to workers, enforces workers' rights, and administers Unemployment Insurance and Worker's Compensation programs.