

WISCONSIN AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT

July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025



September 30, 2025

To: Governor Tony Evers
Members of the Legislature
Secretary Randy Romanski, Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection
Superintendent Jill Underly, Department of Public Instruction
Secretary Karen Hyun, Department of Natural Resources
Deputy Secretary Sam Ridders, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation
President Jay O. Rothman, Universities of Wisconsin
President Layla Merrifield, Wisconsin Technical College System
Chancellor Jennifer L. Mnookin, University of Wisconsin-Madison
Chancellor Tammy Evetovich, University of Wisconsin-Platteville
Interim Chancellor John Chenoweth, University of Wisconsin River Falls
Interim Chancellor Pratima Gandhi, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point
Dean and Director Karl Martin, University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension

The Department of Workforce Development (DWD) is pleased to provide the following report on the goals and activities of the Wisconsin Agricultural Education and Workforce Development Council for state fiscal year 2025. This report also includes reviews of agricultural education programs provided by Wisconsin's educational systems and institutions: the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Wisconsin Technical College System, Universities of Wisconsin, and University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension.

Agriculture is the backbone of Wisconsin's economy, contributing over \$116.3 billion annually to our state's economic strength and accounting for 9.5% of the state's jobs. This sector also drives the nation's economy, and in 2024, Wisconsin's agricultural businesses exported nearly \$4 billion in agricultural and food products to 151 countries around the world.

While agricultural output in Wisconsin remains strong, challenges such as teacher shortages, fluctuating farm numbers, a changing climate, and workforce availability require innovative solutions. The Wisconsin Agricultural Education and Workforce Development Council continues its critical work promoting agricultural education and employment opportunities across the state to ensure future prosperity for all Wisconsinites.

As the agency and its partners strive to support and grow this critical sector of the state's economy, DWD welcomes the recommendations of the Wisconsin Agricultural Education and Workforce Development Council.

Sincerely,



Amy Pechacek, Secretary
Department of Workforce Development



WISCONSIN AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

This annual report provides updates on the goals and activities of the Wisconsin Agricultural Education and Workforce Development Council (WAEWDC) for state fiscal year (SFY) 2025 (July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025), pursuant to Wis. Stats. s. 106.40(5). In addition, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI), the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS), Universities of Wisconsin, and UW-Madison Division of Extension shall prepare an annual review of the agricultural education programs under their purview, per Wis. Stat. s. 106.40.

AGRICULTURE IN WISCONSIN

Wisconsin's agricultural sector is fundamental to sustaining thriving communities, and a robust, well-educated workforce is vital to maintaining the state's agricultural prosperity. While agricultural output in the state remains strong, the industry faces a number of challenges, from a shortage of agriculture education teachers and fluctuating farm numbers to the broad impacts of a changing climate. These challenges will require creative problem-solving, new technologies, and workers with a diverse set of skills and knowledge. As technology continues to advance farming systems and conservation, industry-specific training will be key to sustaining and building the sector's workforce. WAEWDC members are working hard to coordinate the educational systems and support needed to employ the next generation of agricultural, food, and natural resources workforce.

Agriculture contributes \$116.3 billion annually to Wisconsin's economy and accounts for 9.5% of the state's employment. More than 58,000 farms on 13.8 million acres call Wisconsin home.¹ Dairy accounts for nearly half of Wisconsin's total agricultural economic output, the state's overall agricultural sector is highly diverse. Wisconsin leads the nation in the production of cranberries, dry whey for humans, corn for silage, ginseng, milk goats, and snap beans for processing, and produces significant quantities of other goods such as soybeans, potatoes, green peas, cherries, sweet corn, rye, oats, wheat, chicken, beef, and pork.² The state ranks fourth in the nation in potato production, produces more than 60% of the nation's cranberry crop, and ranks first in the export of ginseng and prepared meat.³

Wisconsin is home to nearly 1,200 licensed cheesemakers who produce over 600 varieties of cheese – nearly double the number of any other state. In 2024, the state's cheesemakers produced over 3.5 billion pounds of cheese, accounting for a quarter of the nation's total output, including over 1 billion pounds of specialty cheeses.⁴ Wisconsin is home to the largest number of dairy farms in the country at roughly 5,200, which together produced over 32 billion pounds of milk last year.⁵

Most of this agricultural output is consumed domestically; however, the state's agricultural businesses exported nearly \$4 billion in agricultural and food products in 2024, the second highest total on record and a 2.6% growth year-over-year.⁶ Agricultural exports are supported by Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) and Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP). A key program is the International Market Access Grant program, which provides funding to help businesses expand their international presence.



One of the challenges impacting the agricultural sector is a changing climate. Increased warming in the spring and fall can extend the growing season for summer crops like corn and alfalfa but could push temperatures outside the optimal range for crops like potatoes. Increased winter temperatures impact the chilling temperatures that crops like cranberries need, and new pests appear as winters become less severe. Increased frequency of extreme events like heavy rainfall continue to cause challenges for farmers.⁷ A changing climate also impacts workers, people, and communities associated with agriculture. Farm laborers may experience health and injury risk because of increased exposure to heat, humidity, and populations of disease vectors like mosquitoes and ticks. Migrant workers, who are a significant contributor to this

workforce, could be disproportionately affected by these impacts, further complicating labor challenges.⁸ These changes, which are projected to intensify over the coming years, have myriad consequences for farmers and for the agricultural industry in general and will require a comprehensive coordinated effort to address.

The industry also faces technological changes, with farms increasingly incorporating —advances such as robotic milkers, automated feeders, self-autonomous driving, and drones. this shift is driving demand for a highly educated and trained agricultural workforce. The educational and workforce systems must respond to the changing nature of work to continue to support a thriving Wisconsin economy.

With the development of DPI's Agricultural Career Pathway, secondary students are gaining more exposure to the industry. Career Pathways provide a way for schools to organize instruction and student experiences and can bridge into post-secondary courses, industry-recognized credentials, and associate or baccalaureate degrees. During the 2024-25 school year, over 43,900 Wisconsin students in grades 5 through 12 took at least one agriculture course, and in 2023, the Wisconsin Association of FFA expanded membership enrollment to students in fifth and sixth grades. In 2024-2025, FFA membership rose to 27,500 youth in Wisconsin. Wisconsin's technical colleges and universities have robust programs for educating students in agricultural fields. In 2024, the 16 colleges that make up the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) provided 81 programs in agriculture and natural resources, with 488 students graduating from one of these programs.

Along with high schools and technical colleges, apprenticeship programs can also provide a pathway into the agricultural workforce. Wisconsin's apprenticeship model is a unique "earn as you learn" approach, making apprenticeship more accessible by enabling apprentices to earn income for time spent learning new skills both on the job and in the classroom. In the 2024-25 school year, there were 1,302 youth apprenticeships in Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources, up from 1,145 the prior year. Meanwhile the number of adult registered apprentices also increased. As of 2024, there were 22 registered apprentices in agriculture, up from 16 in 2022. In addition, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) also engaged young people to become more involved in managing Wisconsin's natural resources through programs such as the Youth Conservation Congress and the Summer Tribal Youth program and expose youth to careers in conservation. While these resources proliferate, Wisconsin continues to face teacher shortages, including agricultural education teachers, which may keep these resources from reaching students and preparing the next generation of the state's agricultural workforce.

WAEWDC members continue to work hard to increase the agricultural workforce pipeline and bring younger people into the farming and agricultural industries through the coordination of the educational and workforce systems in partnership with the businesses and communities leading the way.



ABOUT THE WISCONSIN AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

With the support of Governor Tony Evers, the council serves a key role in Wisconsin's economic and workforce development efforts. Under the guidance of DWD leadership, WAEWDC continued to build on its progress throughout SFY2025 and advanced its work to fulfill its purpose and functions, under Wis. Stats. s. 106.40(2), to:

1. Increase the hiring and retention of well-qualified employees in industries related to agriculture, food, and natural resources.
2. Promote the coordination of educational systems to develop, train, and retrain employees for current and future careers related to agriculture, food, and natural resources.
3. Develop support for employment in fields related to agriculture, food, and natural resources.
4. Recommend policies and other changes to improve the efficiency of the development and provision of agricultural education across educational systems.

In addition, the council provides advice and assistance to state agencies, educational institutions, and the Wisconsin Legislature on matters related to agricultural education and workforce development. The council also focuses on the integration of agricultural education and workforce development systems through the coordination of programs, the exchange of information, and the monitoring and evaluation of programs. WAEWDC helps attract, develop, and retain the superior workforce required to grow Wisconsin's production in agriculture, agribusiness, food, and natural resource sectors.



COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

The Wisconsin Agricultural Education and Workforce Development Council is a function of the Department of Workforce Development (DWD) and consists of state agency secretaries (or their designees) from DWD, Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP), Department of Public Instruction (DPI), Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC), and Department of Natural Resources (DNR); as well as the following appointees, pursuant to Wis. Stats. s. 15.227(15):

- President (or their designee) of the Universities of Wisconsin.
- Director (or their designee) of the Wisconsin Technical College System.
- Dean of the UW-Madison Division of Extension.
- A member chosen jointly by the dean of the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences of the University of Wisconsin, the dean of the School of Veterinary Medicine of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the dean of the College of Business, Industry, Life Science, and Agriculture of the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, the dean of the College of Agriculture, Food, and Environmental Sciences of the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, and the dean of the College of Natural Resources of the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point to represent the colleges and school.
- A technical college district director appointed by the director of the technical college system.
- A technical college dean with authority over agricultural programs appointed by the director of the technical college system.
- Members of the legislature: two members of the senate and two members of the assembly representing the standing committees on education and agriculture.
- Public member representatives appointed by the DATCP Secretary to serve three-year terms:
 - ▶ Two representatives:
 - » General agriculture
 - » Agribusiness
 - ▶ One representative:
 - » Wisconsin Association of Agricultural Educators
 - » Environmental stewardship interests
 - » Businesses related to natural resources
 - » Businesses related to plant agriculture
 - » Landscaping, golf course, greenhouse, floral, and related businesses
 - » Food product and food processing businesses
 - » Businesses related to animal agriculture
 - » Businesses related to renewable energy
 - » Agricultural communication interests
 - » Businesses providing engineering, mechanical, electronic, and power services relating to agriculture
 - » Board of agriculture, trade, and consumer protection
- Public member representatives appointed by the DPI State Superintendent to serve three-year terms:
 - ▶ One teacher who teaches classes in science, vocational technology, business, math, or a similar field
 - ▶ One school guidance counselor
 - ▶ One school board member
 - ▶ One school district administrator



WAEWDC MEMBERSHIP FOR STATE FISCAL YEAR 2025 IS:

Chair: **Shelly Mayer**, Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin

Executive Committee:

- **Amy Pechacek**, Secretary, Department of Workforce Development
- **Randy Romanski**, Secretary, Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection
- **Josh Robinson**, Assistant State Superintendent, Department of Public Instruction
- **Gwen Boettcher**, Agricultural Sciences Educator and FFA Advisor, DeForest School District
- **Greg Cisewski**, Dean, School of Agricultural Sciences, Utilities, and Transportation, Northcentral Technical College
- **Erik Huschitt**, CEO and General Manager, Badger State Ethanol
- **Betsy Leonard**, Director, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Wisconsin Technical College System

Members at Large:

- **Andy Bensend**, President, AB Ag Services, Inc.
- **Brad Brusveen**, Sr. Agriculture Account Manager, We Energies
- **Monica Gahan**, Animal Science Teacher, Vincent High School of Agricultural Sciences
- **Glenda Gillaspay**, Dean, College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, University of Wisconsin-Madison
- **Bob Hagenow**, Sales Manager, Vita Plus
- **Ben Huber**, General Manager, Insight FC Cooperative
- **Senator John Jagler**, 13th Senate District, Senate Education Committee Chair
- **Representative Joel Kitchens**, 1st Assembly District, Chair of the Assembly Committee on Education
- **Larry Lee**, Anchor/Reporter, Brownfield Ag News
- **Miranda Leis**, Vice President of Dairy Pool, Organic Valley
- **Scott Loomans**, Policy Initiatives Advisor, Department of Natural Resources
- **Karl Martin**, Dean and Director, University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension
- **Vanessa Miller**, Food and Agriculture Area Manager, Oneida Nation
- **Michael Orth**, Dean of the College of Agriculture, Food, & Environmental Sciences, UW-River Falls
- **Alicia Pavelski**, Project Manager, Heartland Farms, Inc.
- **Kurt Popp**, President, McKay Nursery Company
- **Jen Pino-Gallagher**, Director of Food and Agribusiness Practice, M3 Insurance
- **Sam Rikkers**, Chief Operating Officer, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation
- **Nick Stadnyk**, Director, Rusk County Land Conservation and Development Department
- **Michelle Steen**, Director of Human Resources, Ellsworth Cooperative Creamery
- **Senator Patrick Testin**, 24th Senate District, Chair of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Revenue
- **Representative Travis Tranel**, 49th Assembly District, Chair of the Assembly Committee on Agriculture
- **Jason Wood**, President, Southwest Technical College
- **Jeffrey Wright**, Superintendent, Sauk Prairie School District



SUMMARY OF COUNCIL ACTIVITIES – STATE FISCAL YEAR (SFY) 2025

In SFY2025 (July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025), WAEWDC focused on advancing its purpose to support the agriculture, food, and natural resources industries. In brief, the council:

- Elected new officers to the Executive Committee and each subcommittee.
- Held four hybrid (in-person and virtual) meetings with focused break-out sessions.
- Reviewed the council’s statutory requirements to further develop the council’s first strategic plan.
- Updated council bylaws to reflect legislative action in 2023.
- Identified vacancies in the council membership and appointed new members to fill existing vacancies.

In September 2024, the council met at DATCP headquarters in Madison, Wisconsin. The meeting included a discussion and approval of the 2024 WAEWDC Annual Report, which summarized the previous year’s activity. Additionally, the council reviewed two minor updates to the bylaws, one of which was a result of legislative action in 2023 which updated the membership listing to reflect the change from “Chancellor of the University of Wisconsin-Extension” to the position’s current title as the “Dean of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension.” The council bylaws were updated with these changes, and a typographical correction, and the motion was unanimously approved by the full council. The council amended the goals from the previous year and agreed upon the following for SFY25:

Goal 1:

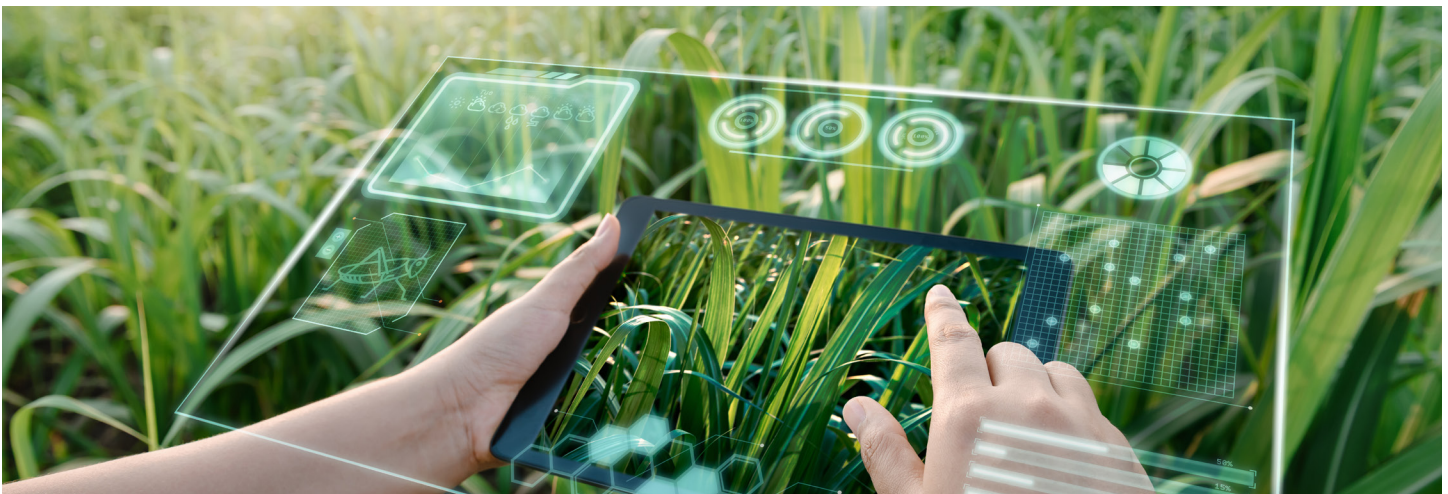
- Embrace the 2 + 2 education model to align agriculture curriculum so students can earn a bachelor’s degree by completing a two-year associate degree at a community college and transferring to a four-year institution for the remaining two years.
- Develop a plan to advocate for the need of additional DPI Education Consultants focused on Agriculture and National Resources/FFA advisers.
- Explore the development of specific agricultural education certifications for teachers.

Goal 2:

- Develop and lead the ‘Agriculture for All’ project to promote agriculture as a viable career pathway for individuals in Wisconsin.

Goal 3:

- Provide an outline for the council to create a strategic plan per the 2024 Annual Report recommendation:
 - ▶ The WAEWDC strategic plan will identify the key priority areas for agricultural education and workforce development and establish specific goals and objectives to advance those priorities.
 - ▶ The strategic plan will include short, medium, and long-term action items that will outline steps the council will take to accomplish each objective and achieve its goals through evidence-based practices and measurable outcomes.



The Council has three subcommittees each assigned to the corresponding goal. The subcommittees nominated and elected new chairs in SFY25. The membership for the three WAEWDC subcommittees is listed below:

Subcommittee One:

Co-Chair: Gwen Boettcher
 Co-Chair: Greg Cisewski
 Josh Robinson
 Betsy Leonard
 Karl Martin
 Glenda Gillaspay
 Rep. Kitchens
 Andy Benseid
 Jeff Wright
 Sen. Jagler
 Jason Wood

Subcommittee Two:

Co-Chair: Ben Huber
 Co-Chair: Michelle Steen
 Sec. Randy Romanski
 Monica Gahan
 Michael Orth
 Kurt Popp
 Alicia Pavelski
 Brad Brusveen
 Rep. Tranel
 Sam Ridders
 Scott Loomans

Subcommittee Three:

Co-Chair: Larry Lee
 Co-Chair: Bob Hagenow
 Shelly Mayer
 Erik Huschitt
 Nick Stadnyk
 Sec. Amy Pechacek
 Miranda Lies
 Sen. Testin
 Jen Pino-Gallagher
 Vanessa Miller

In addition to advancing their work, each subcommittee provided recommendations and input on the development of the council's 2026-2030 strategic plan. The subcommittees held two strategic planning sessions and met outside of the full council meetings. By the end of SFY25, the chairs of the three subcommittees were pleased to report the following workgroup activities:

Subcommittee One: Promoting agricultural education and improving the retention of teachers was a top priority for this subcommittee in SFY2025. A survey sent to agricultural education high school teachers and technical college faculty gathered insight into what age students should be introduced to agricultural education. Survey results highlighted a need to increase exposure to middle school students. The subcommittee supported the efforts of the Wisconsin Association of FFA to expand to middle schools and recommends identifying and promoting high-impact youth activities including broadening career exploration tours beyond farm tours to explore agribusinesses and the technological aspect of farming.

At the high school level, the committee reviewed the list of certifications eligible for Career and Technical Education (CTE) incentive grants. As students earn these certifications, school districts can apply for grants that can be used to buy equipment for classrooms, expanding their CTE offerings. The current certification list is outdated, and the subcommittee recommends expanding the list of eligible certifications to increase opportunities for students to begin an Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resource Career Pathway. The subcommittee also recommends increasing partnership with the Wisconsin Association of Agricultural Educators (WAAE), identifying vacancies, and advocating for additional resources including Education Consultants focused on Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources.

Technical college deans are regularly meeting to make the transfer process between two-year and four-year colleges more efficient by creating consistency in program names and course numbers. This work is strengthening the 2+2 education model and makes post-secondary education more affordable for students. The Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources Career Cluster is divided into seven pathways. Each pathway has an advisory committee of business and industry partners. The subcommittee recommends continuing to monitor enrollment in these programs, increasing awareness of available programs, and supporting the addition of new programs and educational opportunities.

Subcommittee Two: During SFY2025, subcommittee two continued its work to develop and lead the "Agriculture for All" project to promote agriculture as a viable career pathway for individuals in Wisconsin. The purpose of the project is to create short, easy to share videos highlighting the breadth of agricultural careers available in Wisconsin, spotlighting in-demand careers, and representing the diversity of Wisconsin agriculture. The committee is looking to increase engagement and exposure to agriculture, food, and natural resources career pathways. During this reporting period, the subcommittee narrowed the focus of the videos, developed a framework for interview questions, and developed a plan to create an initial video. A video template was recorded and shared at the June 2025 meeting. Council members were able to provide input and feedback on the videos and recommended that the subcommittee continue to advance the project. The subcommittee has identified other job types and potential companies to feature in the series and will work with DWD to identify where the videos will live so that they can be shared publicly with appropriate branding.

During this reporting period, the subcommittee also provided recommendations to the strategic plan on building

partnerships through strategic outreach and promotion. In addition to advancing the “Agriculture for All” project and increasing promotional activities, the subcommittee recommended strengthening partnerships by expanding the reach outside of the industry and exploring best practices from other industries.

Subcommittee Three: Building on the draft outline created in the previous year, this subcommittee led the council’s efforts in the creation of a strategic plan. The subcommittee developed a timeline to complete the strategic plan and gathered feedback from the full council on their outline. The council approved the strategic initiatives at the April 2025 meeting, and the subcommittee led the efforts to identify short-term, medium-term, and long-term action items and outcomes, regularly gathering feedback from council members. By the end of SFY25, the subcommittee developed a draft strategic plan that includes:

- Three strategic initiatives.
- Specific goals, action items, timelines for completion, and deliverables.
- Assigned ownership of activities through subcommittee assignments and supporting agencies.
- A structured process for working toward the action items and providing regular updates to the full council.

Subcommittee three will present the 2026-2030 Strategic Plan to the full council at the 2025 third quarter meeting for discussion and approval. Upon approval of the plan, subcommittees will create detailed workplans to put action toward the plan’s goals.



In addition to the development and work of the three subcommittees, the WAEWDC also used meetings to share updates about programs, initiatives, and opportunities across the state that connect agricultural education and workforce development. This included the following formal presentations and report outs:

- An overview of WiSys’ Forward Agriculture initiative was provided at the Fall 2024 meeting highlighting collaborative work to advance sustainable agriculture in Wisconsin. The coalition is working to make agriculture more resilient by supporting sustainable tech startups and products, providing policy recommendations, and identifying and preparing for future needs of the farming industry, including workforce needs. The Forward Agriculture initiative aligns with the council’s purpose and goals of building a highly skilled agricultural workforce and the council will continue to explore opportunities for collaboration in the future.
- During the December 2024 meeting, Michael Hostad, Chief Revenue Officer at Fork Farms, presented an overview of the company’s innovative work in vertical farming and agricultural education. Fork Farms aims to revolutionize food production to address challenges related to nutrition insecurity, climate change, and sustainable agriculture. The presentation explained how Fork Farms has developed the Flex Farm, a scalable, plug-and-play commercial vertical farm that uses 98% less water and land than traditional agriculture. Hostad added that a Flex Farm Automation Package will launch for high school Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs in Fall 2025. In addition to the hydroponic Flex Farm equipment, the package includes curriculum and training that leads to a Hydroponics Credential. This industry-recognized credential gives high school students the foundational knowledge and hands-on experience to prepare them to enter a career in indoor farming.
- Also at its December 2024 meeting, the council heard from Dr. Steven Deller, Vilas Distinguished Achievement Professor in the University of Wisconsin-Madison Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics. Dr. Deller presented the findings from his recent study *The Contribution of Agriculture to the Wisconsin Economy: An Update for 2022*. This study, completed in collaboration with the University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension, provides an economic accounting of Wisconsin’s agricultural industry. According to the study, the Wisconsin agricultural production and food processing sectors have increased 10.9% between 2017 and 2022 and contributed to a combined \$116.3 billion in economic impact in 2022, 14.3 % of the state’s total economic output. Wisconsin’s dairy farms and processors continue to be an industry leader, contributing \$52.8 billion annually to the state’s economy. The study further states that Wisconsin agriculture also remains a major employer and is responsible for 353,900 jobs across the state, or 9.5% of the state’s workforce.

The Council has put a tremendous amount of work into developing its first strategic plan. In the year ahead, members look forward to continuing to hear from educators and industry experts about the opportunities and needs to prepare the future of Wisconsin’s agricultural workforce through innovative educational and workforce development strategies.

STATE AGENCY HIGHLIGHTS – STATE FISCAL YEAR (SFY) 2025

DEPARTMENT OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

DWD is committed to efficiently delivering effective and inclusive services to meet Wisconsin’s diverse workforce needs and advocates for the protection and economic advancement of all Wisconsin workers, employers, and job seekers. DWD envisions a thriving Wisconsin economy in which:

- All workers are treated fairly, with dignity and respect.
- Employers, government, educational institutions, and workers collaborate to ensure workforce programs meet current and future needs.
- Every job provides the wages and benefits necessary to support workers’ basic needs, invest in their future, and actively engage with their families and communities.

Governor Evers declared 2025 the Year of the Kid and his 2025-27 biennial budget includes strategic investments in workforce development, K-12 education, child care, and career, technical, and college education. The key workforce initiatives included in the budget build on the Department’s primary responsibilities to provide job services, training, and employment assistance to people looking for jobs, while also helping employers find the necessary workers to fill current job openings. They also continue to support the work of this council by supporting the agriculture, food, and natural resource talent pipelines through investing in the education and workforce development systems.

YOUTH APPRENTICESHIPS IN AGRICULTURE

For the fourth year in a row, Wisconsin’s Youth Apprenticeship (YA) program saw record high participation, with 11,344 youth apprentices enrolled during the 2024-2025 school year, accounting for a 14% increase from the prior year. The Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources YA pathway includes 11 programs with five bridging to a Registered Apprenticeship program. This pathway had one of the highest participation rates out of 17 pathways with 1,303 students engaged in programs including Agriculture Mechanic Technician, Animal Fundamentals, the nation’s first Youth Arborist Apprenticeship, and more.

SERVICES FOR FARMERS

DWD’s Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) continues to support eligible farmers who apply for vocational rehabilitation services. The division’s programs offer a wide range of employment services to Wisconsinites with disabilities, including farmers and other business owners seeking to maintain their existing business operations. DVR offers a full spectrum of services including on-site farm assessments, vocational guidance and counseling, self-employment planning, and assistive technology services including assessments, customization, repair, and training. Over the past year, DVR has helped over 50 Wisconsin farmers pursue services.

TEENS GROWING GREENS IN THE CITY

Teens Grow Greens (TGG), a Milwaukee-based nonprofit organization, received part of a \$2 million Worker Advancement Initiative (WAI) grant awarded to and stewarded by Employ Milwaukee. This project was part of the second round of WAI funding announced in June 2025 that granted \$10.3 million to help 1,400 workers across the state. TGG was founded in 2014 by two Milwaukee teachers with the goal of helping teens develop important skills such as leadership and public speaking to prepare them for the workforce. The organization offers four three-month paid internships involving cooking, gardening, exploring Milwaukee, and designing and developing a product. After completing any of the TGG internships, teens can become paid “apprentices” (not affiliated with DWD apprenticeship programs) in horticulture, education, entrepreneurship, or marketing. These career-focused tracks provide professional development and include hands-on capstone projects. TGG partners with a nearby neighborhood center and in 2024 donated over 1,000 pounds of fresh produce to the community.



ADDRESSING TEACHER SHORTAGES

In fall 2024, Governor Tony Evers and DPI State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly announced a teacher apprenticeship pilot program to provide a sustainable talent pipeline to help school districts fill open teacher positions in the future while filling current open paraprofessional jobs. This new program signed eight registered apprentices for the 2024-2025 school year across four school districts, in collaboration with DPI, WTCS, and Lakeland College. In spring 2025, Gov. Tony Evers and DWD announced \$1 million in teacher training and recruitment grants to three nonprofit groups through the Teacher Training and Recruitment grant program, which will support efforts to train and recruit teachers where shortages are most prevalent in Wisconsin. Part of DWD's Expanded Wisconsin Fast Forward (WFF) program, these grants cover two years of program costs to help recruit, train, and license teachers to meet DPI's guidelines for serving qualifying school districts.

MIGRANT AND SEASONAL FARM WORKER PROGRAM (MSFW)

The DWD-administered Migrant and Seasonal Farm Worker (MSFW) program provides information to employers on the H-2A program, which allows agricultural employers who anticipate a shortage of domestic workers to bring nonimmigrant foreign workers to the U.S. to perform agricultural labor or services of a temporary or seasonal nature. In addition, the program conducts outreach to seasonal agricultural workers to provide activities generally found within local job centers. The program delivers all workforce development-related services, benefits and protections, career guidance and counseling, testing, job development, job training, and referral services to migrant workers. The MSFW program works closely with the local grant recipient of the National Farmworker Jobs Program to promote training opportunities for seasonal agricultural workers to stabilize or advance in their agricultural jobs. In 2024, the program inspected and certified 288 migrant labor camps to house migrant workers and revised the health and safety protections for migrant labor camps and housing to include new heat illness protections, updated field sanitation requirements, and reporting requirements for certain diseases and symptoms.

WORKING TO END EXPLOITATION

Combating worker exploitation represents a key focus of DWD. Worker exploitation can take many forms including: failing to provide safe and sanitary working conditions, wage and hour violations, human trafficking, and depriving employees of the benefits they've earned through worker misclassification. In 2024, 29,719 work permits were issued for youth aged 14 and 15. This process supports safe and lawful employment conditions for young workers. In 2024, the Unemployment Insurance (UI) Division's worker classification investigation team identified and referred 20 instances of potential human or labor trafficking to collaborating agencies, a sharp increase from seven in 2023. Due to growth in this area, the Equal Rights Division (ERD) is developing a comprehensive training on labor trafficking that will be released in 2025. This training will be offered free to employers and their employees. DWD also launched the Ending Working Exploitation Initiative in the summer of 2025 to expand coordinated efforts to educate workers on their rights, assist employers and contractors in understanding their legal responsibilities, and learning from participants and other stakeholders.



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, TRADE AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) is committed to its mission to partner with all the citizens of Wisconsin to grow the economy by promoting quality food, healthy plants and animals, sound use of land and water resources, and a fair marketplace. DATCP serves as a resource for farmers, agribusinesses, and consumers.

YEAR OF THE KID

Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers declared 2025 as the [Year of the Kid](#). This designation recognizes the importance of serving the state's young people by providing the care, education, nutrition, and support they need to be successful. DATCP is proud to be part of this important work. The DATCP [Farmer Wellness Program](#) offers access to mental health services for farmers and their families, ensuring that youth have access to comprehensive mental and behavioral healthcare. Through [Farm to School](#), DATCP works to increase student access to local, nutritious foods by supporting partnerships between local farms and their schools. [Alice in Dairyland](#) travels across the state educating students about Wisconsin's agriculture industry, inspiring the next generation of agriculture, food, and natural resource workers.

WISCONSIN AGRICULTURE YOUTH COUNCIL

The [Wisconsin Agriculture Youth Council](#), comprised of high school seniors from across the state, continues to meet virtually each month of the school year. The youth council learns about agricultural-related career opportunities including those in state government, the tools available to support Wisconsin farmers, provides insight on how to effectively engage in state agricultural policy development, and increases networking opportunities for participants across the agricultural industry.

DATCP has announced the sixth Wisconsin Agriculture Youth Council membership. Council members were selected through a competitive review process. DATCP staff look forward to continuing to engage with students through the Wisconsin Agriculture Youth Council by sharing information, building connections, and gaining their insights.

MEAT TALENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

In 2022, Governor Evers invested approximately \$5 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds in the DATCP [Meat Talent Development Program](#), and these dollars continue to make an impact. Strong partnerships between DATCP, UW-Madison, UW-River Falls, UW-Platteville, and the Wisconsin Technical College System make the Meat Talent Development Program successful and important in training the current and future Wisconsin agricultural workforce.

Wisconsin high schools now have access to a meat science curriculum for their classrooms. Wisconsin technical colleges are offering training courses, and graduates are entering the meat processing workforce. UW-River Falls is continuing to offer the Humane Handling Institute for meat processors, and UW-Madison is reimbursing participants for training courses such as Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point, meat processing, harvest, and fabrication.

The meatpathways.wi.gov website works to attract workers to careers in the livestock and meat processing industry by sharing pictures, videos, information, and educational opportunities. DATCP will continue to support the state's thriving meat processing industry as it works to build its workforce.



WISCONSIN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation's (WEDC) mission is to strategically invest in Wisconsin to enhance the economic well-being of people and their businesses and communities. WEDC programs support thriving communities by helping businesses expand to new markets, encouraging creative problem solving through innovative enterprises and transforming the way Wisconsinites live and work through strategic sustainability and new energy sources.

OFFICE OF RURAL PROSPERITY

WEDC's Office of Rural Prosperity (ORP) seeks to foster vibrant, prosperous, and resilient rural communities across Wisconsin. Among ORP's initiatives, the office led multi-agency efforts to help identify and target assistance for the state's most environmentally-vulnerable communities, and link businesses to their customers through strong digital connections. ORP's website, ruralwi.com, features a new online directory of resources, including lists of federal and state government programs and nonprofit providers that support rural initiatives, as well as a range of success stories — illustrating the resilience and creativity of rural residents and communities.

INTERNATIONAL MARKET ACCESS GRANTS (IMAG) AND AGRICULTURE EXPORT COLLABORATIONS

WEDC collaborates with DATCP on export development by partnering to provide International Market Access Grant (IMAG) awards to agricultural businesses. As part of the Wisconsin Initiative for Agriculture Exports, WEDC contracted five agricultural company IMAG awards in SFY25. WEDC's Division of Global Trade and Investment partners with DATCP to market the IMAG program to agricultural companies and groups around the state. In addition, WEDC has successfully applied for and passed through grant funding from the U.S. Small Business Administration's State Trade Expansion Program to DATCP, which allows Wisconsin agricultural companies to attend important trade show events and promote their unique products and services.

WISCONSIN COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT GRANT (WCDG)

The WCDG program was designed to support the success of existing and newly formed cooperatives by covering the professional costs associated with helping applicants explore all facets of their business before making significant investments. In FY25, seven grants totaling more than \$214,000 were awarded. Since the program's inception, more than \$700,000 has helped develop cooperatives and assisted existing co-ops and private businesses interested in converting to the cooperative model. Of these projects, 46% focus on the agriculture and food sectors.

FABRICATION LABORATORY (FAB LABS) GRANT PROGRAM

For the past nine years, this program has supported hands-on science, technology, engineering, arts, and math (STEAM) education by assisting public school districts with equipment purchases used for instructional and educational purposes in school-based fab labs. In fiscal year 2025, WEDC funded 20 grants totaling \$496,761.



DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is dedicated to working with Wisconsinites while preserving and enhancing the natural resources of Wisconsin. The DNR employs a large, diverse workforce throughout the state managing fish, wildlife, forests, parks, air and water resources while promoting a healthy, sustainable environment and a full range of outdoor opportunities.

NEXT GENERATION OF RESOURCE PROFESSIONALS

The most recent class in DNR's leadership development program focused on issues related to developing and recruiting the next generation of natural resources and science professionals. For this installment of the leadership academy, participants researched and recommended best practices and strategies for outreach and engagement to youth and young adults, proactively preparing for workplace staffing shortages, and developing partnerships and relationships that contribute to recruiting talent.

Youth Conservation Congress gives young people under the age of 18 a voice and instills a sense of ownership, civic pride, and advocacy as future stewards of the state's natural resources. DNR supports the Youth Conservation Congress with a half-time staff position and biologists and specialists as needed for projects like fishery survey demonstrations. Activities in this reporting period included the annual ice fishing event held at Castle Rock Lake, volunteering with DNR biologists at a sturgeon spearing registration station and touring the wildlife exhibits at the MacKenzie Center in Poynette.

Other leadership projects focused on DNR's outreach efforts across diverse programs, such as:

- Apprenticeships and collaborative initiatives with partners such as the Boys & Girls Club.
- Analysis of methods to use in outreach to young adults.
- Identifying active recruitment strategies to diverse job seekers.
- Analysis of impact of agency culture on employee retention.
- Recommending the allocation of more funding to support these outreach efforts and activities to hire an outreach coordinator.

NATURAL RESOURCES WORK EXPERIENCES

In 2024, DNR operated a number of programs to help students and recent graduates explore different careers and gain valuable experience. They included the State of Wisconsin Student Diversity Internship Program, limited term employment opportunities, and hosting a career exploration week designed for students entering their junior, senior, or post-high-school path. Students had the opportunity to learn from industry professionals while participating in hands-on activities.

SUMMER TRIBAL YOUTH PROGRAM

Matching funds are available to Wisconsin Tribes for the development of a summer program that provides tribal youth (ages 13-19) with educational opportunities to work on projects related to natural resource conservation. Tribes and bands have flexibility to design projects that suit cultural needs, location, resources, and youth. All projects must promote student knowledge of natural resources careers. The Summer Tribal Youth Program operates on a cost-share basis. Wisconsin statutes require that grant funds provided under this program may not exceed 50% of total eligible project costs. The balance of project costs is the responsibility of the participating Native American Tribe or Band.

DNR EDUCATORS

Wisconsin DNR educators expose students to the sciences, conservation, and to resource professionals. This exposure works to influence careers related to natural resources, agriculture, and the sciences. It also creates awareness and support for wise use of renewable resources. DNR educators offer field trips to school groups, lead nature hikes, and provide programs on topics ranging from ecology, geography, wildlife biology, history, and cultural studies to all areas of outdoor recreation and outdoor skills and safety. Educators have excellent coverage around the state with wildlife educators at the following locations: Sandhill State Wildlife Area, Mead State Wildlife Area, Crex Meadows State Wildlife Area, Horicon Marsh State Wildlife Area, and the Milwaukee Service Centers.



ANNUAL AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION PROGRAM REVIEWS

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION REVIEW

AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION IN WISCONSIN’S PK-12 PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Agricultural education continues to prepare students for careers in the agriculture industry, while developing students’ leadership skills through FFA and their Supervised Agriculture Experience (SAE). Today’s agricultural education departments have developed a comprehensive structure that includes areas such as biotechnology, veterinary science, alternative energy, food science, horticulture, landscaping, and much more. With such variety, students are preparing for diverse careers and opportunities in agriculture.



Program Status

- DPI developed the Agriculture Career Pathway at the state level and made it available for regional adoption in the spring of 2023 as one of ten [Regional Career Pathways](#). This pathway joins the list of other career pathways highlighting high skill, high wage, and in demand occupational areas.
- Over 27,500 agricultural education students are also members of the Wisconsin Association of FFA. The pandemic and disruption of events caused membership to see a slight decrease, but FFA membership has since increased above pre-pandemic levels with the Wisconsin Association of FFA and National FFA Organization’s commitment to in-person activities and events. In addition, an emphasis on engaging students from all backgrounds has allowed for greater engagement across demographics and exposure to a larger number of students to the opportunities FFA and the agriculture sector have to offer.
- The 2023-2024 Wisconsin Association of FFA membership year welcomed the inaugural class of students in grades five and six. With this expansion of membership, agriculture teachers now can involve these students in agricultural classes and FFA activities. A few school districts have expanded their agricultural education programming to grades five and six and several school districts continue to explore this option.
- Over 43,900 students in grades 5 to 12 took at least one agriculture course. The figure to the right demonstrates the unduplicated enrollment breakdown by race.
- DPI continues to implement an agriculture/science equivalent credit process to award science credits for agriculture courses.

YEAR	FFA MEMBERSHIP
2020-21	19,804
2021-22	23,179
2022-23	25,249
2023-24	25,911
2024-25	27,563

RACE	ENROLLMENT
Asian	666
Black-African American	1,454
Hispanic	4,292
American Indian Alaskan Native	518
Native Hawaiian-Pacific Islander	20
White	35,515
Two Or More	1,453
Total	43,918

AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION CHALLENGES - PRE-K THROUGH 12 IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Agricultural education faces a number of challenges in pre-K through grade 12 in Wisconsin’s public schools. These challenges include:

- Shrinking supply of qualified agricultural education teachers.
- Expanding agricultural education programs in Wisconsin, including urban school districts and across all grade levels, with limited teachers.
- Sustaining rural agricultural education programs during periods of declining enrollments and budget constraints.
- Promoting quality curriculum and instructional facilities for an agricultural education program to meet evolving needs.



WISCONSIN TECHNICAL COLLEGE SYSTEM

WISCONSIN TECHNICAL COLLEGE SYSTEM REVIEW

The Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) comprises 16 colleges across the state enrolling more than 287,000 people each year (Figure 1).

The colleges provide 50 campuses and facilities to meet students where they are demographically, serving every community in Wisconsin, large and small, urban and rural. Wisconsin's technical colleges have a long history of offering high quality programs in agriculture and natural resources, with more than 500 associate degrees, technical diplomas, and short-term certificate options (Figure 2).

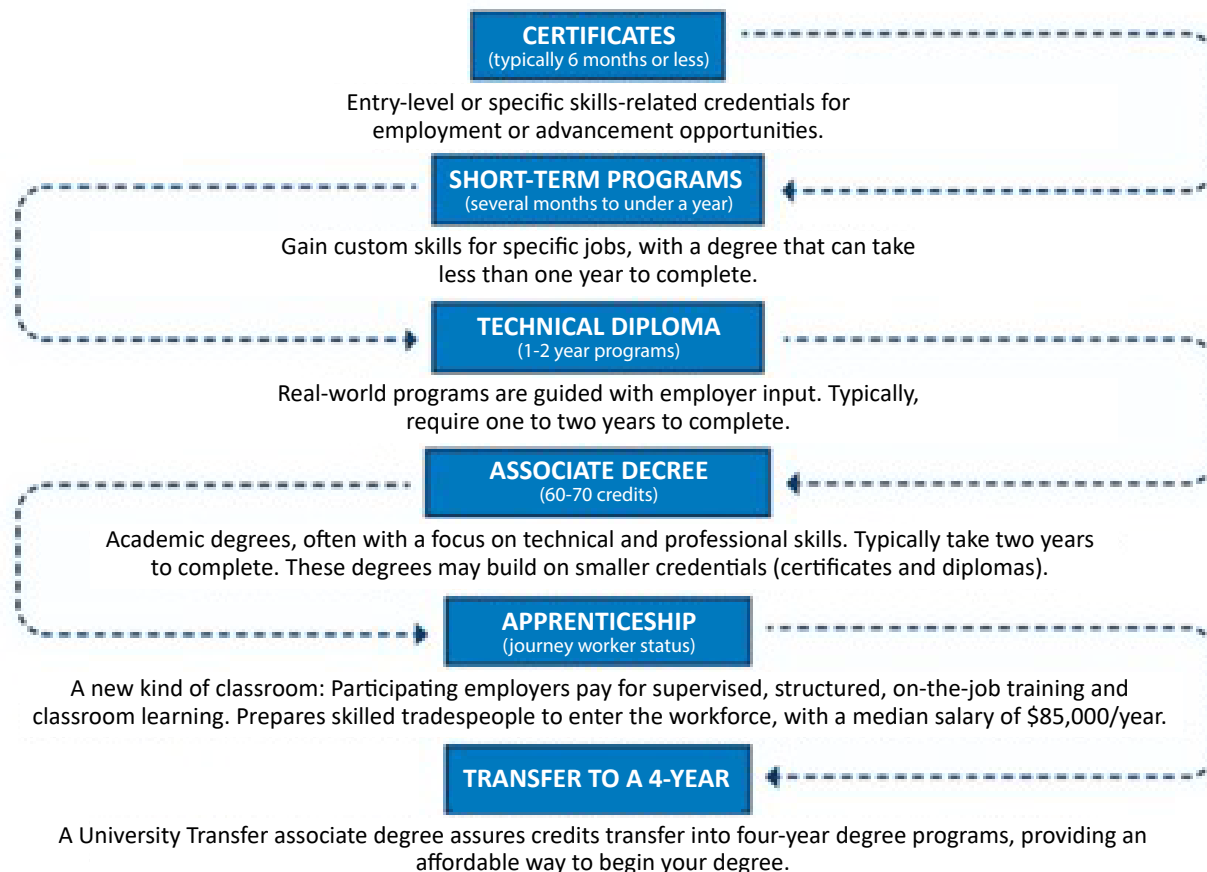


Figure 1. WTCS Locations

Figure 2. Wisconsin Technical College System Offerings

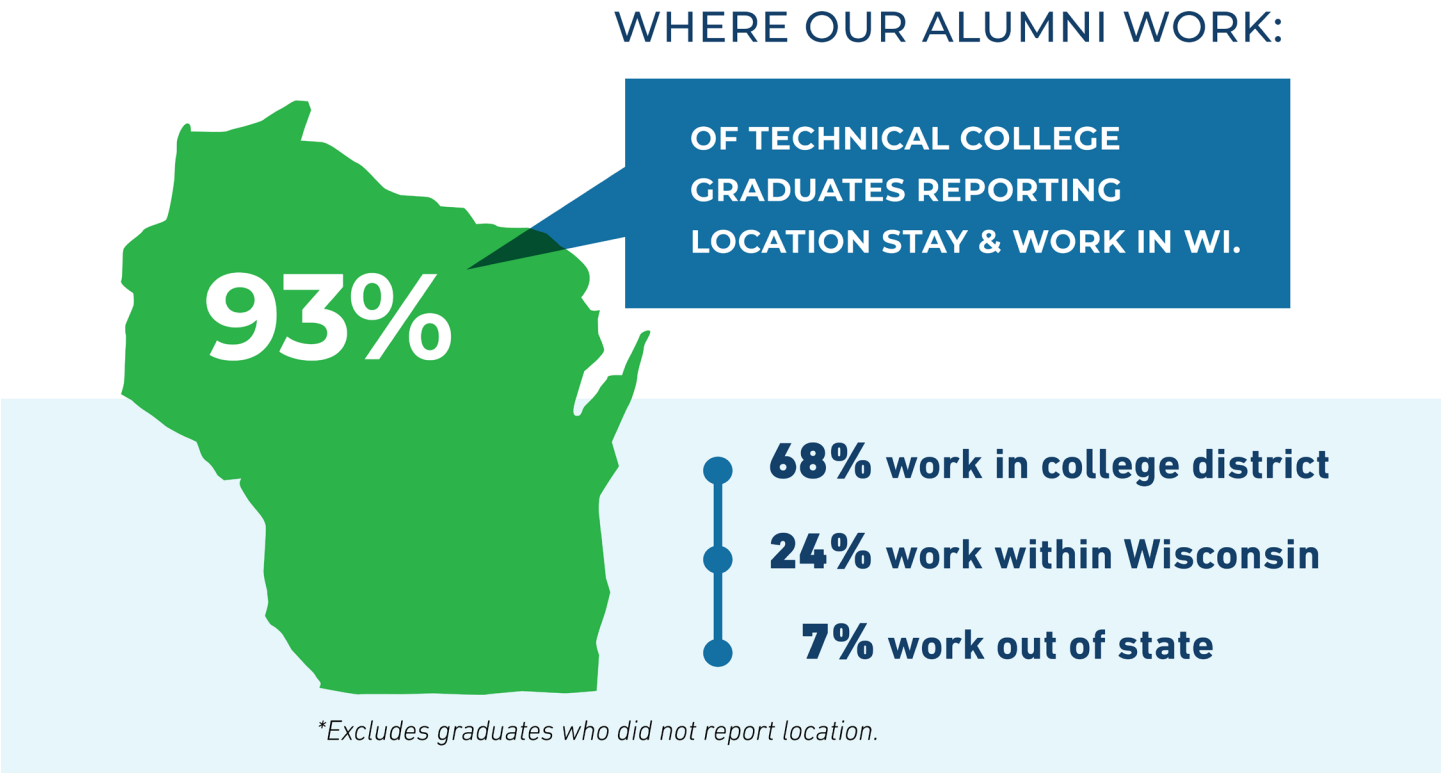
DEGREES FOR EVERY NEED

Career pathways allow you to dream big while starting small; your technical college offers tons of flexible options. You can start with a shorter program or certification and add on skills and credentials. Or you may already have a bachelor's degree and want to add specific skills. There are many ways to build on your skills and marketability to reach the next level of your career.



In addition, 92% of 2024 graduates in the labor force were employed within six months of graduation, with 93% of alumni staying and working in Wisconsin (Figure 3).

Figure 3. 2024 WTCS Graduate Data



The mission of the WTCS is to deliver skills training that recognizes the rapidly changing educational needs of residents to keep current with the demands of the workplace. This is accomplished through the creation of guided career pathways, dual credit opportunities for students in high school to receive college credit, workforce development, and using disaggregated student success data to allow leadership & faculty to create opportunities for business and industry.

WTCS students come from diverse backgrounds, including recent high school graduates and adults who never attended college or are looking for second careers or a fresh start from the justice system. They differ in age, gender, race, and socio-economic status, and may have different goals. Students may seek to work while attending classes in an apprenticeship program, improve their skills for their current job, graduate from a program of study and go right out into the workforce, or transfer to a four-year college for additional education.

In 2024, WTCS provided 81 programs in the Agriculture and Natural Resources Career Cluster, teaching the production, processing, marketing, distribution, financing, management, and development of agricultural commodities and resources including food, fiber, wood products, natural resources, renewable energy, and other plant and animal products/resources.

In the 2024 school year, 488 students graduated from programs within the Agriculture and Natural Resources Cluster with a median salary of \$45,756. (Figure 4)

Figure 4. Graduate Salary
MEDIAN SALARIES BY CAREER CLUSTER
FOR 2024 GRADUATES



In high schools throughout the state, students may take advantage of dual credit opportunities. Dual credit is earned for a selection of high school courses that allow students to simultaneously earn both high school and college credit. Over the last five years, there has been striking growth in the number of students earning WTCS dual credit and the number of credits earned. Researchers have identified numerous advantages in earning dual credit, including cost savings, early entry to career pathways, decreased college remediation, reduced time to degree completion, and stronger postsecondary outcomes. Students can get a jump-start on their post-secondary education by taking courses such as

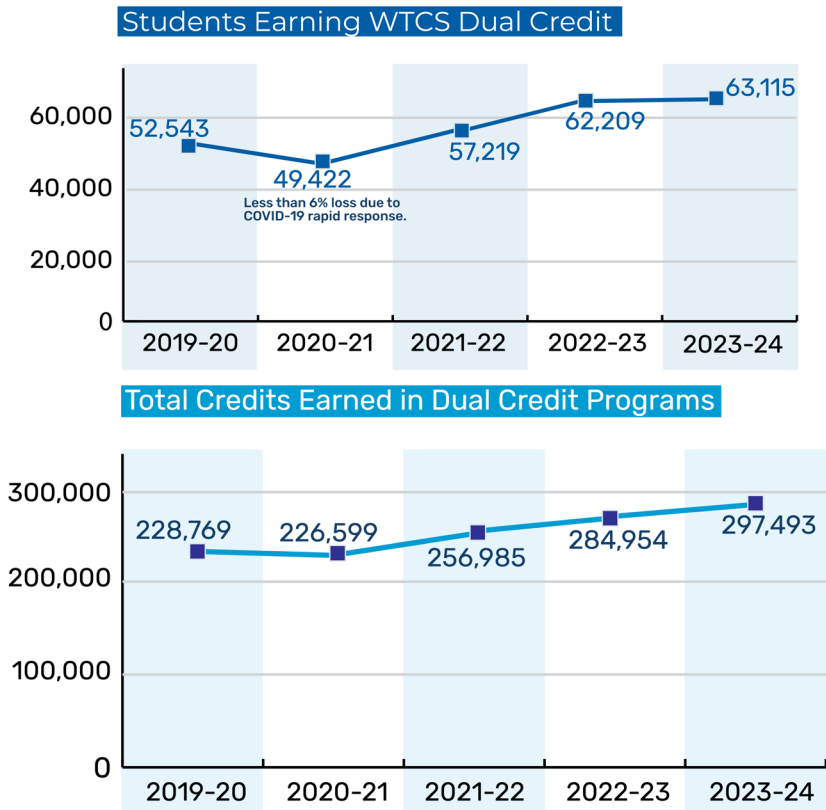
Animal Science, Greenhouse Management and Plant Science. Dual credit opportunities include contracted services, Start College Now, Youth Apprenticeship and transcribed, or technical college credit. **(Figures 5 & 6.)** During the 2023-2024 school year, 297,493 college credits were earned by high school students.

As part of the Wisconsin Agriculture Education and Workforce Development Council’s bold mission to, “support agricultural education instructors and find effective ways to reach every student to highlight opportunities available in agriculture in a positive, purposeful way,” a powerful collaboration was born. Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) Director of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Betsy Leonard, along with deans and several faculty members from the agriculture and natural resources cluster across Wisconsin’s technical colleges united to form the WTCS Wisconsin Association of Agricultural Educators (WAAE) Postsecondary Task Force. The goal of this group was to ignite interest in agricultural careers among high school students by cultivating relationships with high school faculty, providing mentorship, and showcasing the innovation shaping modern agriculture.

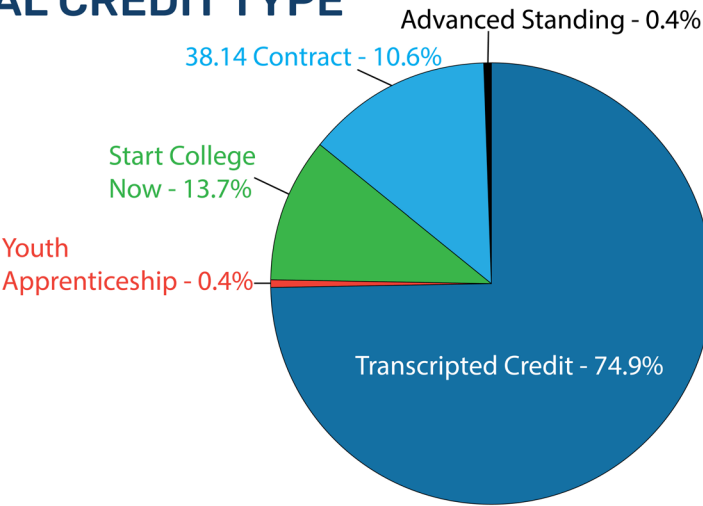
Connecting classrooms to careers, this dedicated task force rallied faculty statewide to craft high-impact professional development sessions for high school agriculture educators, delivered at the WAAE conference. The full-day event offered hands-on strategies, fresh insights, and innovative teaching practices to help instructors inspire their students and prepare them for success beyond graduation.

This initiative creates the future of agricultural education by building bridges between high schools and Wisconsin’s technical colleges. Presenting real opportunities for high school students, high school faculty now have access to college-level resources and credit-earning opportunities, giving their students a jumpstart on meaningful careers in agriculture and natural resources.

Figure 5 & 6. WTCS Dual Credit Opportunities



2023-24 CREDITS EARNED BY DUAL CREDIT TYPE



Building bridges between high schools and Wisconsin’s technical colleges to advance agricultural education.

High School

Technical College



UNIVERSITIES OF WISCONSIN REVIEW

AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION IN WISCONSIN’S PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

The Universities of Wisconsin (UWs), the Department of Public Instruction, the Wisconsin Technical College System, and UW–Madison’s Division of Extension are educational institutions with a mission to train the next generation to meet the many agriculture-related challenges and create a thriving agricultural industry in Wisconsin and beyond. The UWs bring new, innovative, and world-class research to the table along with degree programs and service opportunities for four-year undergraduates and graduate students.



Baccalaureate programs that prepare students for professional careers in agriculture and natural resources are offered by UW-Madison College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALS); UW-Platteville School of Agriculture (SOA); UW-River Falls College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences (CAFES); and UW-Stevens Point College of Natural Resources (CNR). In addition, CAFES provides the Farm and Industry Short Course for those with an interest in the dairy industry. Credit from the courses completed can be used for students who decide to pursue a Bachelor of Science degree in the future.

Career pathway opportunities include Agribusiness Systems, Agricultural Education and Agricultural Studies, Animal Systems, Environmental Services, Food Products and Processing, Natural Resources, Plant Systems, and Power, Structural and Technical Systems. Recruiting and educating students for these professions is critical to the growth and vitality of the Wisconsin economy.

New degree programs (see chart below) are continuously created to meet the new challenges and needs in the industry. Undergraduate programs equip graduates with interdisciplinary skills and knowledge to create innovative solutions. Graduate programs, including professional master’s programs, provide specialized education for the next generation of leaders in the field. Enrollment in undergraduate programs in the agriculture, food and natural resources career cluster increased in 2024.

INSTITUTION	NEW PROGRAMS		
	PROGRAM NAME	DEGREE	TERM LAUNCHED
UW-Madison	Agroecology	Bachelor's	Fall 2024
UW-Madison	Animal and Dairy Sciences	Master's	Fall 2025
UW-Madison	Animal and Dairy Sciences	Ph.D.	Fall 2025
UW-Stout	Biology	Bachelor's	Fall 2024
UW-Stevens Point	Conservation and Leadership	Master's	Fall 2024
UW-Madison	Dairy and Food Animal Management	Bachelor's	Fall 2024
UW-Madison	Ecology and Evolutionary Biology	Ph.D.	Fall 2025
UW-Stevens Point	Environmental Science and Management	Bachelor's	Fall 2024
UW-La Crosse	Food and Nutrition Sciences	Bachelor's	Fall 2024
UW-Madison	Plant Science and Technology	Bachelor's	Fall 2025
UW Madison	Plant Science and Technology	Master's	Fall 2025
UW-Madison	Plant Science and Technology	Ph.D.	Fall 2025

The Universities of Wisconsin strategic plan for 2023-2028,⁹ approved by the Board of Regents in December 2022, includes strategy number eight to, “provide support for the universities to drive enrollment to meet the needs of the state and the knowledge economy.” A key component of this strategy is to grow the number of graduates from the UWs

to 41,000 each year by 2028 – a 10% increase over current numbers. To grow the talent pipeline, the university’s goal is to increase participation rates of high school graduates, increase the number of transfer students from outside the UWs, and improve overall graduation rates. In addition, strategy number nine aims to, “engage thoughtfully with the employer community to identify and address employer talent, support, and research needs.” A key success measure is to engage 500,000 residents per year in workforce, career education, professional development, and community engagement. The UWs aim to increase the percentage of new graduates who remain in Wisconsin three years after graduation from 72% to 80%. The below chart indicates the number of upper-class undergraduates enrolled in relevant majors and the percentage change from the 2023 fall enrollment to 2024 fall enrollment.

		UPPER-CLASS UNDERGRADUATE FALL ENROLLMENT		
MAJOR NAME	UW INSTITUTION	2023	2024	% CHANGE
Career Cluster: AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND NATURAL RESOURCES				
AGRIBUSINESS SYSTEMS				
Agriculture and Applied Economics	UW-Madison	28	31	11%
Agribusiness Management	UW-Madison	33	35	6%
Agricultural Business	UW-Platteville	71	62	-13%
Agricultural Business	UW-River Falls	53	46	-13%
Agricultural Business Management	UW Madison	35	33	-6%
Agribusiness Systems Totals		187	172	-8%
AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION & AGRICULTURAL STUDIES				
Agriculture Education	UW-Platteville	26	32	23%
Agriculture Education	UW-River Falls	27	39	44%
Agriculture Studies	UW-River Falls	5	6	20%
Agricultural Education & Agricultural Studies Totals		58	77	33%
ANIMAL SYSTEMS				
Animal and Veterinary Biosciences	UW-Madison	30	112	273%
Animal Sciences	UW-Madison	53	17	-68%
Animal Science	UW-Platteville	64	81	27%
Animal Science	UW-River Falls	292	280	-4%
Dairy Science	UW-Madison	24	19	-21%
Dairy Science	UW-Platteville	13	9	-31%
Dairy Science	UW-River Falls	29	23	-21%
Entomology	UW-Madison	15	17	13%
Animal Systems Totals		520	558	7%
ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICE SYSTEMS				
Agroecology*	UW-Madison		3	
Community and Environmental Sociology	UW-Madison	29	32	10%
Community Sustainability	UW-Stevens Point	6	5	-17%
Conservation	UW-River Falls	43	46	7%
Conservation and Environmental Science	UW-Milwaukee	121	110	-9%
Environmental Policy & Planning	UW-Green Bay	27	21	-22%
Environmental Science	UW-River Falls	12	13	8%
Environmental Science	UW-Stout	31	37	19%
Environmental Science	UW-Superior	32	33	3%
Environmental Science	UW-Whitewater	51	54	6%

		UPPER-CLASS UNDERGRADUATE FALL ENROLLMENT		
MAJOR NAME	UW INSTITUTION	2023	2024	% CHANGE
ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICE SYSTEMS (CONT'D)				
Environmental Science & Conservation	UW-Platteville	36	41	14%
Environmental Science*	UW-La Crosse		5	
Environmental Sciences	UW-Green Bay	49	54	10%
Environmental Sciences	UW-Madison	162	174	7%
Environmental Studies	UW-Madison	183	200	9%
Environmental Studies	UW-Oshkosh	41	40	-2%
Environmental Studies	UW-Parkside	32	25	-22%
Life Sciences Communication	UW-Madison	123	104	-15%
Sustainable Management-Collaborative	UW-Parkside	19	16	-16%
Sustainable Management-Collaborative	UW-River Falls	15	16	7%
Sustainable Management-Collaborative	UW-Superior	26	21	-19%
Environmental Service Systems Totals		1,038	1,050	1%
FOOD PRODUCTS & PROCESSING SYSTEMS				
Food Science	UW-Madison	35	45	25%
Food Science & Technology	UW-River Falls	11	6	-45%
Food Science & Technology	UW-Stout	35	35	0%
FOOD PRODUCTS & PROCESSING SYSTEMS TOTALS		82	86	5%
NATURAL RESOURCE SYSTEMS				
Conservation & Community Planning*	UW-Stevens Point		15	
Conservation Law Enforcement	UW-Stevens Point	54	64	19%
Ecological Restoration & Resource Management	UW-Platteville	12	2	-83%
Environmental Science & Management*	UW-Stevens Point		84	
Fisheries & Water Resources	UW-Stevens Point	108	106	-2%
Forest Science	UW-Madison	13	22	69%
Forestry	UW-Stevens Point	168	174	4%
Freshwater Sciences	UW-Milwaukee	23	22	-4%
Resource Management	UW-Stevens Point	90		-100%
Wildlife Ecology	UW-Madison	72	87	21%
Wildlife Ecology & Management	UW-Stevens Point	206	190	-8%
Natural Resource Systems Totals		746	766	3%
PLANT SYSTEMS				
Agronomy	UW-Madison	14	20	43%
Botany	UW-Madison	36	37	3%
Crop & Soil Science	UW-River Falls	22	16	-27%
Environmental Horticulture	UW-Platteville	8	11	38%
Horticulture	UW-Madison	34	22	-35%
Horticulture	UW-River Falls	35	20	-20%
Plant Pathology	UW-Madison	8	9	13%
Soil & Crop Science	UW-Platteville	21	26	24%
Soil & Waste Resources	UW-Stevens Point	48	56	17%
Soil Science	UW-Madison	7	10	43%
Plant Systems Totals		223	227	2%

		UPPER-CLASS UNDERGRADUATE FALL ENROLLMENT		
MAJOR NAME	UW INSTITUTION	2023	2024	% CHANGE
POWER, STRUCTURES AND TECHNICAL SYSTEMS				
Agricultural Engineering	UW-River Falls	4	8	100%
Biological Systems Engineering	UW-Madison	96	103	7%
Environmental Engineering	UW-Madison	64	95	48%
Environmental Engineering	UW-Platteville	42	37	-12%
Environmental Engineering	UW-River Falls	8	14	75%
Environmental Engineering	UW-River Falls	8	14	75%
Paper Science & Engineering	UW-Stevens Point	33	40	21%
Sustainability & Renewable Energy Systems	UW-Platteville	29	20	-31%
POWER, STRUCTURES & TECHNICAL SYSTEMS TOTALS		297	343	15%

Career Cluster: **BIOLOGY AND LIFE SCIENCES**

Applied Biochemistry & Molecular Biology	UW-Stout	13	14	8%
Biochemistry	UW-La Crosse	77	85	10%
Biochemistry	UW-Madison	443	483	9%
Biochemistry	UW-Milwaukee	60	61	2%
Biochemistry	UW-Stevens Point	64	57	-11%
Biochemistry/Molecular Biology	UW-Eau Claire	50	61	22%
Biological Sciences	UW-Milwaukee	222	206	-7%
Biological Sciences	UW-Parkside	87	71	-18%
Biology	UW-Eau Claire	227	217	-4%
Biology	UW-Green Bay	110	94	-15%
Biology	UW-La Crosse	506	491	-3%
Biology	UW-Madison	923	946	2%
Biology	UW-Oshkosh	156	147	-6%
Biology	UW-Platteville	140	167	19%
Biology	UW-River Falls	46	58	26%
Biology	UW-Stevens Point	138	132	-4%
Biology	UW-Superior	73	60	-18%
Biology	UW-Whitewater	139	135	-3%
Biology*	UW-Stout		15	
Conservation Biology	UW-Madison	152	128	-16%
Genetics and Genomics	UW-Madison	262	268	2%
Global Health	UW-Madison	278	343	23%
Microbiology	UW-La Crosse	48	37	-23%
Microbiology	UW-Madison	142	137	-4%
Microbiology	UW-Milwaukee	18	13	-28%
Microbiology	UW-Oshkosh	16	7	-56%
Molecular and Cell Biology	UW-Madison	104	129	24%
Molecular Biology and Bioinformatics	UW-Parkside	6	6	0%
Nutritional Sciences	UW-Madison	144	156	8%

MAJOR NAME	UW INSTITUTION	UPPER-CLASS UNDERGRADUATE FALL ENROLLMENT		
		2023	2024	% CHANGE
Nutritional Sciences	UW-Milwaukee	30	30	0%
Sustainable Food & Nutrition	UW-Stevens Point	2	9	350%
Zoology	UW-Madison	92	92	0%
Biology & Life Sciences Total		4,768	4,855	2%

VETERINARY MEDICINE (PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE)			
FALL ENROLLMENT	2023	2024	% CHNG
UW-Madison	376	382	-2%



UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON DIVISION OF EXTENSION

The following are impacts and outcomes from the [University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension's Agriculture Institute](#).



Extension

DAIRY WORKFORCE TRAINING PROGRAMS

In response to persistent labor challenges on Wisconsin dairy farms, the Extension Dairy Program launched a series of targeted educational initiatives. These efforts aimed to enhance employee performance, satisfaction, and dairy productivity.

The program delivered bilingual, hands-on workshops on vaccination, medication administration, and calving care, reaching over 80 dairy employees. A complementary Spanish-language webinar series, supported by multiple universities, covered topics such as nutrition management and heat stress prevention. In addition, educational videos on calving practices were released online, garnering over 500 views within three months. To further expand reach, bilingual online train-the-trainer modules are in development, focusing on udder health and milk quality with in-person certification workshops planned. Evaluation data from 2024 workshops showed that 86% of participants found the training useful, and over 91% intended to apply the practices learned. Similarly, 87% of webinar attendees reported they were very likely to use the information to improve farm management. These programs were especially impactful for Spanish-speaking employees, offering accessible, culturally-relevant training through oral instruction, social media, and the messaging communications platform WhatsApp. Overall, these initiatives have strengthened workforce skills, improved animal care, and contributed to the economic sustainability of Wisconsin dairies.

ADDRESSING AGRICULTURAL WATER QUALITY

Wisconsin's agricultural watersheds face persistent water quality challenges, particularly from phosphorus runoff. While conservation practices like no-till and cover crops have shown promise, a deeper understanding of phosphorus and nitrogen movement is essential. Extension's Agriculture Water Quality Program (AWQP) addresses this need by delivering research-based education to farmers, crop advisors, and conservation professionals. In 2024, AWQP supported data collection at 10 monitoring sites through its Discovery Farms program, contributing to a robust database spanning over 30 farms. This data informed a webinar series averaging 120 participants per session and covered nutrient movement and seasonal phosphorus loss. AWQP also co-hosted the Wisconsin Water and Soil Health Conference (WWASH), drawing over 375 attendees and supported by more than 30 partners. The conference addressed practical topics such as cover crop management, conservation tillage, and ecosystem services. Evaluation results showed that over 85% of webinar participants reported increased understanding of key water quality topics, while 94% of WWASH attendees reported improved knowledge of nutrient application strategies. Furthermore, 92% of attendees felt more confident in implementing or advising on conservation practices like no-till and nitrogen management.

TOOLS FOR BUSINESS AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

Wisconsin farmers face increasing complexity in managing capital-intensive operations, volatile markets, and tight margins. To support farm profitability and sustainability, especially for beginning, minority, and successor farmers, the Extension Farm Management Program delivered a suite of educational initiatives in 2024, focused on strategic planning, communication, and business decision-making. The program hosted in-person and virtual events reaching over 800 participants, and its online resources were accessed more than 58,000 times. Key offerings included the "Getting Started with Your Food and Farm Business" video series, solar lease seminars, and regional workshops on succession planning. Online courses like "Navigating Your Ag Business," and "Cultivating Your Farm's Future" helped farmers and advisors across multiple states develop strategic plans and initiate succession conversations. A certification program trained 53 professionals to guide farm succession planning. Outcomes indicated that 85% of solar seminar attendees felt more prepared to negotiate leases, 88% of succession workshop participants reported improved communication skills, and 73% of course participants achieved key business milestones.

DIVERSIFICATION AND PERENNIALIZATION OF CROPS AND SOILS

Wisconsin agriculture's reliance on a few major commodities has increased vulnerability to market disruptions and environmental challenges. To build resilience, the Extension Crops and Soils Program promotes crop diversification and perennial systems such as managed grazing and perennial forages, which offer economic and ecological benefits. In 2024, Extension delivered a wide range of educational efforts to support these goals. Two formal training programs and

numerous field days reached 150 farmers and technical service providers, while the GrassWorks grazing conference drew 500 attendees. Alfalfa production improvements were shared with over 1,200 participants, and a new web tool launched in August attracted nearly 300 users. Extension also advanced research and outreach on emerging crops like hazelnuts, hops, hemp, kernza, and winter barley through events such as Hazelnut Week, the Wisconsin Hop Conference, and the Emerging Crops Showcase. Outcomes include increased grower knowledge and confidence in adopting perennial and alternative crops. For example, 90% of hop conference attendees reported improved understanding of pest management and production costs, while conservation professionals at hemp events reported a 40% knowledge gain. Ongoing research trials on grazing, hazelnuts, barley, and camelina are generating critical data to support adoption and market development.



COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2026-2030 STRATEGIC PLAN

The activities and results of the WAEWDC continue to strengthen the commitment to fulfill the purpose and the duties of the council. All the functions, as originally identified, remain and are still necessary for Wisconsin's agriculture, food, and natural resource sectors to succeed. The council has made great strides over the past year to identify industry strengths as well as opportunities as they developed a four-year strategic plan. This plan will ensure the council delivers on its functions and purpose.

The council is fortunate that its membership consists of experienced, hard-working individuals who are passionate about Wisconsin's agricultural community. They are dedicated to enhancing Wisconsin's already strong agricultural education and workforce, so that it may bring an even more positive impact to the state's economy, tradition, and future.

The WAEWDC strategic plan identifies three strategic initiatives for agricultural education and workforce development in Wisconsin and establishes specific goals and objectives to advance those priorities. The strategic plan includes short-, medium-, and long-term actions the council will take to accomplish each objective and achieve its goals through evidence-based practices and measurable outcomes. The council's three current subcommittees will begin work on each initiative and look forward to reporting on their progress made.

Strategic initiative one: Strengthen agriculture, food, and natural resources education to increase workforce pipeline of students interested in these fields. Drive the innovation and priorities of agricultural education initiatives.

Strategic initiative two: Build partnerships through strategic outreach and promotion to amplify and expand public/private partnerships in agriculture, food, and natural resources.

Strategic initiative three: Retain and grow agriculture, food, and natural resources workforce. Drive the innovation and priorities of workforce development initiatives.

As the council continues this work, the following vision remains the same:

1. Council member engagement is crucial for the successful implementation of the priorities contained within the strategic plan.
2. While membership may change over time, the strategic plan reflects the priorities of the council in its entirety.
3. Evidence-based practices should be prioritized, using metrics (what the council will measure), analytical values (what the metric will tell), and data sources (where the data will come from).
4. Throughout the implementation of the plan the council will intentionally engage shared owners and stakeholders, gathering input and feedback to work through challenges and highlighting success throughout.

COUNCIL MEMBER APPROVAL OF ACTIVITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Wisconsin Agricultural Education and Workforce Development Council SFY2025 Annual Report was distributed electronically to all council members. Each council member was asked to review the report, provide input, and to provide their approval or dissent of the Annual Report at the council's September 22, 2025, meeting. No dissent or minority opinions were received. The Annual Report was approved unanimously.

NOTES

¹ [DATCP Home Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics](#)

² <https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Publications/WIAgStatistics.aspx>, https://www.nass.usda.gov/Quick_Stats/Ag_Overview/stateOverview.php?state=WISCONSIN

³ [DATCP Home Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics](#)

⁴ [DATCP Home Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics](#)

⁵ [DATCP Home Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics](#)

⁶ <https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/AgDevelopment/ExportStatistics.aspx>

⁷ [Improving climate change mitigation and resiliency across Wisconsin's agriculture industry](#)

⁸ [Agriculture Working Group | Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts \(WICCI\)](#)

⁹ <https://www.wisconsin.edu/president/download/StrategicPlan2023-28.pdf>

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