



**Wisconsin Agricultural Education and Workforce Development Council  
Full Council Meeting  
Hybrid Meeting  
Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection  
2811 Agriculture Drive, Madison, WI 53708  
Sept. 16, 2024  
1 – 5 p.m.**

***MEETING MINUTES – APPROVED***

**Members Present:** Shelly Mayer, Sally Ladsten, Sec. Amy Pechacek, Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly, Jeff Wright, Gary Besaw, Gwen Boettcher, Michael Orth, Ben Huber, Sec. Romanski, Monica Gahan, Scott Loomans, Corey Kuchta, Larry Lee, Greg Cisewski, Bob Hagenow, Betsy Leonard, Larry Lee, Michelle Steen, Jeff Edgar

**Other Attendees:** Ashley Andre, TJ Jerke, Danielle Williams, Patrick Lonergan, David Specht-Boardman (for Sen. Joan Ballweg), and Kietra Olson (for Sam Rikkers), and a representative on behalf of Glenda Gillaspay.

**I. Call to Order & Opening Remarks**

Council Chair Shelly Mayer introduced herself, thanked everyone for attending and highlighted the meeting agenda, specifically the subcommittee work that will take place later in the meeting. She asked for members to consider seeking the subcommittee chair and vice chair roles.

**II. Introductions & Roll Call**

All members introduced themselves, their organizations, and what they see as a successful outcome for today's meeting.

**III. Approval of the May 13, 2024 WAEWDC Full Council Meeting Minutes**

Jeff Wright moved to approve the May 13, 2024 full council meeting minutes. The motion was seconded by Sec. Amy Pechacek. The May 13, 2024, meeting minutes were unanimously approved without correction.

**IV. Review Meeting Agenda**

Bob Hagenow moved to approve the meeting agenda. The motion was seconded by Gwen Boettcher. The agenda was unanimously approved.

**V. Agency Updates**

**a. Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection Secretary Randy Romanski.**

Sec. Romanski said his agency submitted their 2025-2027 budget proposal, which will look like the current agency budget. He highlighted Avian Influenza in dairy cows, which continues to be an issue to be aware of. The World Dairy Expo is coming up and will be another opportunity to highlight the dairy industry in Wisconsin. Many different state

agriculture agencies will be attending this year's expo, along with representatives from at least 12 different countries. DATCP will be hosting a delegation from Indonesia. He noted the DATCP Board will be meeting on Thursday where DWD and the WAEWDC chair will be presenting on career pathways. DATCP has fielded questions about the future of the Meat Talent Development program. An extension has been approved and the department must spend the funding by December 31, 2025 with performance outcomes by June 30, 2026. Sec. Romanski noted his excitement for the Ag for All Subcommittee discussion later in the meeting and some opportunities to partner with the Future Farmers of America (FFA).

b. **Department of Public Instruction Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly**

Dr. Underly highlighted some of the events the department has been involved in as the new school year kicked off. She noted at the end of August they visited schools with bi-lingual programs in rural areas with a large agricultural workforce and a visit last week to a school in Eau Claire with an outdoor classroom that teaches how to harvest vegetables and other ag-based education. Dr. Underly said her department submitted the first part of their budget proposal which will include new positions and increased funding in some areas. A second part of the agency's budget will be submitted in November. FFA State President Marie Shriver will be representing the state at a national FFA convention in October.

c. **Department of Workforce Development Secretary Amy Pechacek**

Sec. Pechacek shared the state broke the record for the third month in a row for having record-high employment statistics. She highlighted the Governor's announcement of four additional career pathways for youth apprenticeships. With recently released national data, she said state economists are predicting a soft landing for the economy. She highlighted the council's prior quarterly meeting at Vincent High School and the grant they received to support the school's culinary programs and invest in its meat science laboratory. She noted the AI Task force and its meeting that featured council member Greg Cisewski.

Jeff Wright thanked Sec. Pechacek for helping secure grant funding for agricultural education. Bob Hagenow thanked the secretaries for their updates and asked about the shortage of teachers and staff. Dr. Underly said this year has been the best year since COVID in making sure positions are filled. The department is hearing we have shortages. Schools are managing; however, it is a priority to make sure every school is fully staffed. Sec. Pechacek noted that DWD has launched a teacher apprenticeship program.

VI. **Review and Approval of the 2024 WAEWDC Annual Report**

Council staff provided an overview of the annual report. Sally Ladsten shared information from DPI. Chair Mayer asked if the discussion around agriculture focus on too narrow of a definition for workforce development; and if the definition and overall approach towards supporting the industry should emphasize more roles and opportunities that help support the agricultural industry.

Dr. Jill Underly moved to approve the 2024 WAEWDC annual report. Gary Besaw seconded the motion. The annual report was unanimously approved by the full council.

VII. **Presentation: Advancing Sustainable Agriculture in Wisconsin**

Council staff TJ Jerke presented information about WiSys and the work they are leading to advance sustainable agriculture in Wisconsin and pursue a \$160 million grant from the National Science Foundation. Mr. Jerke acknowledged the overlap of the council

and the work through the sustainable agriculture engine and highlighted collaborative opportunities in the future.

VIII. **Subcommittee Breakout Sessions**

Council members split up into their respective subcommittees to discuss and advance the priorities established by each subcommittee.

IX. **Reconvene and Subcommittee Report Out**

The council reconvened and shared brief reports on the work of the subcommittees during the breakout session.

X. **Review and Approval of Bylaw Changes**

Council Staff TJ Jerke presented two minor bylaw changes, one of which was a result of legislative action in 2023.

Larry Lee moved to approve the bylaw changes that were presented. The motion was seconded by Dr. Greg Cisewski. The motion was unanimously approved by the full council.

XI. **Other Business.**

a. **Public Comment**

No comments were offered by members of the public.

XII. **Closing Remarks**

Michael Orth raised a concern about recent demographic changes in students graduating from high school and pursuing a 4-year degree in an agricultural-related field. Chair Shelly Mayer asked what trade schools have been doing to push more students into trade programs? Larry Lee noted the paid training opportunities are becoming more appealing to high school and college students. Sec. Amy Pechacek highlighted the state's apprenticeship program. Greg Cisewski said dual credit opportunities are also allowing students to begin pursuing other interests while in high school. Mr. Orth said students recognizing they can learn a career without going into debt is a huge draw.

Chair Mayer ended the conversation by thanking everyone for their time and attending today's meeting and is looking forward to seeing the results from the three subcommittees.

Jeff Wright moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Greg Cisewski. The meeting concluded at 4:45 p.m.