

WISCONSIN AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT

July 1, 2025-June 30, 2026



September 30, 2026

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
Secretary John Miller, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation
Interim President Renée Wachter, Universities of Wisconsin
President Layla Merrifield, Wisconsin Technical College System
Interim Chancellor Eric Wilcots, University of Wisconsin-Madison
Chancellor Tammy Evetovich, University of Wisconsin-Platteville
Interim Chancellor John Chenoweth, University of Wisconsin-River Falls
Chancellor Robert Brinkmann, 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 present this report on the goals and activities of the Wisconsin Agricultural Education and Workforce Development Council for state fiscal year 2026. The report also includes reviews of agricultural education programs from Wisconsin's education systems and institutions: the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI), Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS), Universities of Wisconsin (UW), and University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension.

Agriculture contributes \$116.3 billion annually to Wisconsin's economy and provides 353,900 jobs, or 9.5% of the state's employment.¹ The state is home to 58,000 farms on 13.7 million acres, including about 5,000 dairy farms and 1.27 million cows. Wisconsin cheesemakers produce 25% of the nation's cheese, making more than 3.64 billion pounds in 2025.² In addition, the food and beverage industry supports more than 146,000 jobs, the energy and power industry supports more than 122,000 jobs, and the forest products industry account for more than 50,000 jobs. Wisconsin also ranks No. 1 in papermaking.³

As technology advances and workforce needs evolve, strong collaboration across education and workforce systems will be essential to ensuring these industries have the skilled workers they need to thrive. DWD welcomes the council's recommendations and looks forward to continuing to implement its strategic plan.

Sincerely,



Amy Pechacek, Secretary
Department of Workforce Development



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CONTENTS

THE WISCONSIN AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL	2
COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP	3
SUMMARY OF COUNCIL ACTIVITIES	4
Strategic Initiative 1	4
Strategic Initiative 2	8
Strategic Initiative 3	10
COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS	12
CONTACT WAEWDC	12

THE WISCONSIN AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

The Wisconsin Agricultural Education and Workforce Development Council (WAEWDC) plays a key role in Wisconsin's economic and workforce development efforts. Under Wis. Stats. § 106.40(2), the council was established to:

1. Increase hiring and retention of well-qualified employees in industries related to agriculture, food, and natural resources.
2. Promote coordination of education 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 education systems.

To accomplish these goals, the council advises state agencies on matters related to agricultural education and workforce development, including coordinating programs, exchanging information about education and workforce development needs, and monitoring and evaluating programs. The Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) administers the council. DWD program and policy staff advise council members and partners on policy and support strategic planning efforts to carry out the council's mandated responsibilities.

This annual report provides updates on the council's goals and activities for state fiscal year 2026 (SFY 2026). In addition, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI), the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS), Universities of Wisconsin (UW), and UW-Madison Division of Extension prepared annual reviews of the agricultural education programs under their purview, as required by Wis. Stat. § 106.40.



COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

Led by industry representatives from across the state, the council includes leaders from state agencies responsible for K-12 and postsecondary education, workforce and economic development, agriculture, and natural resources.

- **Randy Romanski**, Secretary, Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection
- **Josh Robinson**, Assistant State Superintendent, Department of Public Instruction *On behalf of Jill Underly, State Superintendent*
- **Amy Pechacek**, Secretary, Department of Workforce Development
- **Sam Ridders**, Chief Operating Officer, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation *On behalf of John Miller, Secretary and Chief Executive Officer*
- **Scott Loomans**, Policy Initiatives Advisor, Department of Natural Resources *On behalf of Karen Hyun, Secretary*
- **Michael Orth**, Dean, College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Science, University of Wisconsin-River Falls *On behalf of Renée Wachter, Interim President*
- **Betsy Leonard**, Director, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Wisconsin Technical College System *On behalf of Layla Merrifield, President*
- **Heidi Johnson**, Agriculture Institute Director, UW-Madison Division of Extension *On behalf of Karl Martin, Dean & Director*
- **Glenda Gillaspay**, Dean, College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, UW-Madison
- **Greg Cisewski**, Dean, School of Agricultural Sciences, Utilities, and Transportation, Northcentral Technical College
- **John Jagler**, Senator, Wisconsin 13th Senate District, Chair, Senate Committee on Education
- **Joel Kitchens**, Representative, Wisconsin 1st Assembly District, Chair, Assembly Committee on Education
- **Patrick Testin**, Senator, Wisconsin 24th Senate District, Chair, Senate Committee on Agriculture and Revenue
- **Travis Tranel**, Representative, Wisconsin 49th Assembly District, Chair, Assembly Committee on Agriculture
- **Vacant** - Technical college district director

The following members represent a variety of industries and education subject-matter areas and are appointed by either DATCP secretary or the DPI superintendent. Members serve three-year terms.

- **Gwen Boettcher**, Agricultural Sciences Educator and FFA Advisor, DeForest School District, *Representative of the Wisconsin Association of Agricultural Educators*
- **Alicia Pavelski**, Project Manager, Heartland Farms, Inc., *Representative of general agriculture*
- **Jen Pino-Gallagher**, Director of Food and Agribusiness Practice, M3 Insurance, *Representative of general agriculture*
- **Bob Hagenow**, Sales Manager, Vita Plus, *Representative of agribusiness*
- **Ben Huber**, General Manager, Insight FC Cooperative, *Representative of agribusiness*
- **Melissa Schlupp**, Deputy Director, Sauk County Land Resources & Environment, *Representative of environmental stewardship interests*
- **Vanessa Miller**, Food and Agriculture Area Manager, Oneida Nation, *Representative of businesses related to natural resources*
- **Andy Benseid**, President, AB Ag Services, Inc., *Representative of businesses related to plant agriculture*
- **Kurt Popp**, President, McKay Nursery Company, *Representative of landscaping, golf course, greenhouse, floral, and related businesses*
- **Stephanie Brueggen**, Owner, Falls Meat Service, *Representative of food product and food processing businesses*
- **Amy Penterman**, Owner and Manager, Dutch Dairy, *Representative of businesses related to animal agriculture*
- **Konnor Johnson**, Commodities Manager, United Wisconsin Grain Producers, LLC, *Representative of businesses related to renewable energy*
- **Millaine Wells**, Co-host of Local 5 Live, Host of Midwest Farm, WFRV-TV, *Representative of agricultural communication interests*
- **Brad Brusveen**, Sr. Agriculture Account Manager, We Energies, *Representative of businesses providing engineering, mechanical, electronic, and power services relating to agriculture*
- **Miranda Leis**, Vice President of Dairy Pool, Organic Valley, *Representative of the board of agriculture, trade and consumer protection*
- **Vacant** - Teacher who teaches classes in science, vocational technology, business, math, or a similar field
- **Cindi Syverson**, AVID Teacher, Eau Claire Area School District, *School guidance counselor*
- **Bob Hermanson**, School Board Member, Darlington Community School Board, *School board member*
- **Jeff Wright**, Superintendent, Sauk Prairie School District, *School district administrator*

SUMMARY OF COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

In SFY 2026 (July 1, 2025-June 30, 2026), WAEWDC advanced its goals and positioned the council for future success by developing and approving a four-year strategic plan. This report summarizes the council's activities as well as related activities of its strategic partners.

The council held three hybrid (in-person and virtual) full-council meetings, with each subcommittee meeting between full-council sessions. In September 2025, the council met at the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP) headquarters in Madison. Members discussed and approved the 2025 annual report, which summarized the previous year's activity, and approved a four-year strategic plan. The plan clarifies council goals and establishes measurable action items to track progress and impact.

In December 2025, the council began implementing its strategic plan by establishing roles and responsibilities. Members reviewed council membership and upcoming term expirations, and agencies were notified of vacancies they were responsible for filling. The council also established the structure and function of its subcommittees and clarified member's roles. The WAEWDC Executive Committee assigned one strategic initiative to each of the three standing subcommittees, enabling a targeted approach to achieving the strategic plan's goals.

In June 2026, the council elected new officers. Greg Cisewski was elected as chair and Amy Penterman vice chair. Eight new members were appointed to replace members whose terms had ended. The new members received orientation and were assigned to subcommittees.

The next section highlights the WAEWDC subcommittees and their priorities during the past year. This report is not intended to be all-inclusive but instead highlights innovative efforts and strong partnerships that are advancing Wisconsin's agriculture, food, and natural resource industries and preparing the next generation of workers.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 1

STRENGTHEN AGRICULTURE, FOOD, AND NATURAL RESOURCES EDUCATION TO INCREASE THE WORKFORCE PIPELINE OF STUDENTS INTERESTED IN THESE FIELDS. DRIVE THE INNOVATION AND PRIORITIES OF AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION INITIATIVES.

Subcommittee Co-Chairs: **Gwen Boettcher** and **Greg Cisewski**

A well-educated workforce is vital to maintaining the prosperity of Wisconsin's agricultural, food, and natural resources industries. Wisconsin's agriculture industry contributes \$116.3 billion annually to the state's economy. Wisconsin's 58,000 farms support a robust workforce, providing 143,690 on-farm jobs and 298,400 farm processing jobs. Known as America's Dairyland, Wisconsin ranks first in the nation for producing and processing cheese, cranberries, ginseng, mink pelts, dry whey for humans, milk goats, snap beans for processing, and corn for silage.⁴ Beyond traditional farming, Wisconsin stands at the forefront of the global energy and controls ecosystem by combining market-leading industrial capabilities with advanced academic research — a feat exemplified by hosting the nation's largest corporate geothermal building campus at Epic Systems.⁵ The state's forest products companies also export \$1.2 billion worth of commodities annually while leading the way in environmental stewardship through reforestation and sustainable harvesting.⁶

Advanced technology requires workers with diverse skills and knowledge. Providing current workers with relevant professional development opportunities and exposing young adults to the industry will help ensure Wisconsin has a strong workforce for years to come.



YOUTH EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT

DPI's Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources (AFNR) educational program prepares students for careers through interactive classroom and laboratory instruction, service and work-based learning through supervised agricultural experiences, and personal growth through engagement in student organizations like the Wisconsin Association of FFA. Wisconsin offers many opportunities for youth to get involved in AFNR industries. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) provides matching funds to Wisconsin tribes to develop summer programs that provide tribal youth ages 13 to 19 with an opportunity to work on conservation projects. Tribes and bands have flexibility to design projects that suit cultural needs, location, resources, and youth. The Summer Tribal Youth Program increases students' awareness of natural resource careers. In the summer of 2025, 39 youth from seven tribes participated in DNR's Tribal Youth Program.

Another opportunity connecting young people with educators, trained safety instructors and other mentors is the Midwest Outdoor Heritage Education Expo (MOHEE), an annual field trip for students in grades 4-7 that connects students with Wisconsin's natural resources and outdoor heritage. Students participate in mentored activities that help them develop outdoor skills, many of which align with state academic standards. DNR hosts events at MacKenzie Center in Columbia County and Havenwoods State Forest in Milwaukee. In May 2026, MOHEE drew more than 5,000 students, teachers, and chaperones.

In addition to summer activities, Wisconsin youth can develop leadership skills and advise on critical environmental and agricultural issues. First, the Natural Resources Board and Wisconsin Conservation Congress established the Youth Conservation Congress to give people under the age of 18 a voice in stewardship, civic pride, and natural resource advocacy. The DNR supports this initiative with dedicated staff, biologists, and specialists for field demonstrations. Similarly, DATCP runs the Wisconsin Agriculture Youth Council. Now in its sixth year, the council is composed of 15 high school seniors serving one-year terms. This competitive council meets monthly for presentations and panel discussions highlighting education and career pathways in agriculture. The seventh Wisconsin Agriculture Youth Council was announced in May 2026. DATCP will engage the new members in the coming year to share resources that support Wisconsin farmers, provide insight into agricultural policy development, and promote agricultural career opportunities.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

WTCS includes 16 colleges with 50 campuses and facilities across the state and enrolls more than 287,000 people each year. Since 2013, WTCS has tied a portion of its state funding to 10 statutorily identified criteria. One of those criteria is the number of degrees and certificates awarded in high-demand fields, including the graduation rate in Wisconsin's top 50 high-demand occupations. To ensure programs match workforce needs, WTCS utilizes employer-led advisory committees to validate curriculum and technical skill standards. This alignment delivers proven results: a survey of 2025 graduates revealed that 92% secured employment within six months after graduation, with 81% working directly in their field of training.⁷

In 2025, WTCS offered 53 programs in the AFNR career cluster covering the production processing, marketing, distribution, financing and management of agricultural commodities and resources, including food, fiber, wood products, natural resources, renewable energy, and other plant and animal products. In the 2024-25 school year, 499 students graduated from AFNR career cluster programs, with a median salary of \$49,999.⁸

In addition to traditional technical diplomas, high schools throughout the state partner with local technical colleges to offer dual-credit opportunities. Dual credit allows students to earn high school and college credit simultaneously. Over the last five years, the number of students earning WTCS dual credit and the number of credits earned have grown 37%. Benefits can include cost savings, early entry into career pathways, reduced need for college remediation, shorter time to degree completion, and stronger postsecondary outcomes. During the 2024-25 school year, high school students earned 328,883 college credits through their local technical college.⁹

Universities of Wisconsin (UW) also provides high school students with opportunities to earn college credit through dual enrollment, with nearly 1,500 programs offered across its 13 universities. During the 2024-25 school year, 15,433 students enrolled in courses through these programs.¹⁰

UW also brings innovative, world-class research to the state while offering degree programs and service opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students. Baccalaureate programs that prepare students for professional careers in agriculture and natural resources are offered by the UW-Madison College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALS); UW-Platteville School of Agriculture (SOA); UW-River Falls College of Agriculture, Food, and Environment 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. Credits earned through the courses may apply towards a bachelor’s degree for students who later continue their education.

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. New degree programs are developed to respond to emerging industry needs and challenges. 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 AFNR career cluster increased in the 2025-26 school year.

	2024 ENROLLMENT	2025 ENROLLMENT	% CHANGE
Agricultural/Animal/Plant/Veterinary Science and Related Fields	1,678	1,795	7%
Natural Resources and Conservation	1,959	2,002	2%
Biological and Biomedical Sciences	6,731	7,155	6%

In addition to formal post-secondary education, the state is investing in quality work-based learning opportunities. In SFY 2022, DWD awarded over \$1 million to the UW to increase opportunities and access to internships for students in high-demand fields. Many of these projects continued into 2025, including a UW-River Falls project that created agriculture-related internship experiences for students. The project surpassed its initial goal of 20 placements, completing 41 internships. A UW-Milwaukee project focused on internship opportunities in the renewable energy and clean water industries. As of June 2026, 45 interns had successfully completed internships.¹¹

In January 2022, Governor Tony Evers directed American Rescue Plan Act funding to the [Meat Talent Development program](#) to strengthen the state’s meat processing workforce. The initiative attracts new talent, funds technical college students, and connects processors with qualified job seekers. To date, the program has certified 162 workers in Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) safety protocols and trained over 300 technical college students. Additionally, the funding established the [Humane Handling Institute](#) at UW-River Falls. As a first-of-its-kind program, the institute has already provided hands-on training in humane pre-slaughter handling, stunning, transport, and equipment maintenance for nearly 200 industry professionals.

DEVELOPING AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

Wisconsin continues to face ongoing teacher shortages driven in part by educator retention, with only 55.6% of teachers still teaching in public schools by their seventh year.¹² In the 2025-26 school year, four postsecondary institutions offered agriculture education programs, with 72 juniors and seniors enrolled in an agriculture education major, down from 77 in the previous school year.¹³ DPI had 36 agriculture educator changes within the state and six new programs were established. DPI is taking a comprehensive approach to addressing these challenges and supporting current and future educators through the Wisconsin Education Workforce Initiative.



- **Attract:** Increase the number of students exploring careers in education, diversify the workforce, and increase the number of adults pursuing pathways to licensure.
- **Prepare:** Grow preparation programs in high-need subject areas and increase connections between schools and programs to create additional student-teaching and clinical-placement opportunities.
- **Recruit:** Reduce the gap between the number of individuals completing educator preparation programs and those obtaining employment in a school district, and provide opportunities for schools to recruit teachers through school-based experiences.
- **License:** Process licenses quickly, provide clear information about pathways to licensure, and ensure transparency for the public.
- **Develop and Retain:** Support a positive culture and climate for teachers through trust and effective coaching, and improve educator practice and student outcomes through continuous improvement.

In June 2026, DWD awarded \$1 million in grants to four organizations to train 84 educators through the [Wisconsin Fast Forward](#) Teacher Training and Recruitment Grant Program. The funding supports efforts to train and recruit teachers

where shortages are most prevalent in Wisconsin. Five grants awarded in 2025 are expected to support 200 educators.

ADVOCATE TO STRENGTHEN AFNR CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Career and Technical Education (CTE) combines academic and technical skills with the knowledge, training and professional skills needed to become lifelong learners and succeed in future careers. CTE in Wisconsin is primarily funded through a combination of federal and state investments. The federal Strengthening Career and Technical Education in the 21st Century Act grant program invests in both secondary and postsecondary CTE. This program is administered jointly by DPI and WTCS. Funding is intended to grow and enhance CTE programs rather than maintain basic operations. Allowable uses include career exploration systems, professional development for CTE educators, instructional equipment and supplies, and curriculum development. The state Legislature also appropriates funding for CTE incentive grants through a program jointly administered by DPI and DWD. These funds are strictly performance-based rather than direct program funding. School districts apply for the grants as a reimbursement after their students graduate with completed industry-recognized certifications in high-need fields. State lawmakers allocate a fixed biennial budget pool for these disbursements, which is then prorated among all approved district claims statewide. Wisconsin is one of only five states that do not provide specific CTE funding for high school programs, creating uneven access to CTE across districts.¹⁴

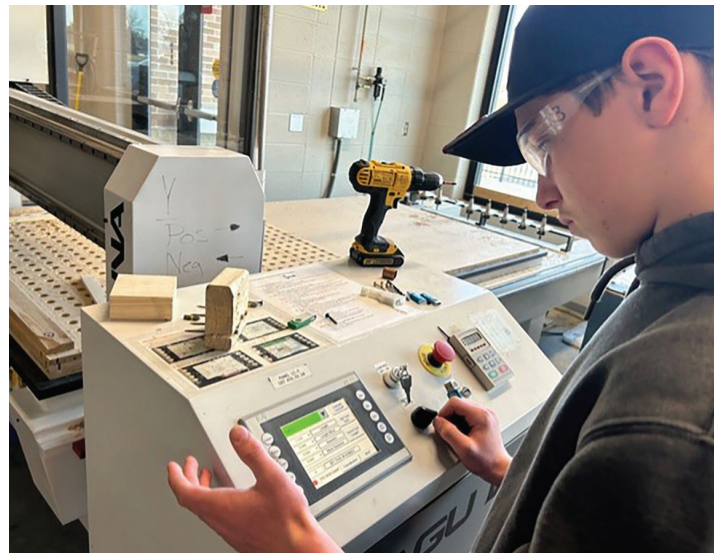
CTE concentrators are students who have taken two or more CTE courses in a career pathway. These students have a graduation rate of 95% higher than the state graduation rate for all high schools.¹⁵ In the 2024-25 school year, the AFNR career pathway had 7,559 concentrators, up from 6,974 the previous school year.¹⁶ The council previously recommended increasing the number of eligible certifications for CTE incentive grants, and members of the council coordinated efforts with high school teachers to submit new certifications for consideration. For the 2026-27 school year, DWD added 11 new AFNR certifications to the approved list for CTE incentive grants. Because school districts apply for incentive grants after students graduate from high school, the impact of the additional certifications will become more evident over the next several years.

The Fabrication Laboratories Grant Program is a state-funded initiative managed by the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) that supports K-12 hands-on STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and math) education by helping public school districts purchase high-tech workshop equipment. For the past 10 years, this program has supported education by assisting public school districts with equipment purchases used for instructional and educational purposes in school-based fab labs. In SFY 2026, WEDC funded 11 grants that together totaled \$250,000.



PORTRAIT OF A GRADUATE

A statewide effort to define the knowledge, skills, and mindsets every Wisconsin student needs to succeed after high school – no matter the path they choose. Grounded in Wisconsin's values and commitment to strong public education, the portrait provides a shared vision for preparing students for college, careers, service, and life. It focuses on preparing students for real life by emphasizing essential skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, adaptability, and lifelong learning.



STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 2

BUILD PARTNERSHIPS THROUGH STRATEGIC OUTREACH AND PROMOTION TO AMPLIFY AND EXPAND PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS IN AGRICULTURE, FOOD, AND NATURAL RESOURCES.

Subcommittee Co-Chairs: **Alicia Pavelski** and **Brad Brusveen**

Strong industry engagement and partnerships are essential to ensuring education workforce programs reflect current and emerging business trends. These partnerships can provide real-world learning experiences that bridge the gap between classroom instruction and the workplace while increasing awareness of career opportunities and advancement within the industry. Strengthening connections among partners and increasing awareness of education and workforce systems will help the council establish baseline performance and identify opportunities for improvement.

CONNECTING EDUCATORS WITH BUSINESSES

In Wisconsin, Academic and Career Planning (ACP) is led by DPI, and every school district provides ACP services to students in grades six through 12. After 10 years of ACP, DPI is enhancing the program by increasing one-on-one career advising; integrating career-connected learning across content areas and grade levels; developing a statewide Portrait of a Graduate; expanding career-based learning experiences and career pathway programs; and using Xello, an ACP software platform, to increase engagement with employers and the business community. DPI has engaged with the council to strengthen connections with the business community and more clearly identify career pathways and connections to higher education in students' local communities. These enhancements will allow school districts to highlight locally available opportunities while giving employers and workforce development partners opportunities to connect with educators and students.

WTCS forms strong connections with employers throughout the state and requires an active industry advisory committee for every full-time occupational program. Employers are encouraged to contribute to curriculum development, donate equipment, deliver career awareness and exploration activities, provide internships, employ graduates, and develop customized training for their employees. Colleges host career fairs, lunch-and-learns, and industry tours. The UW Office of Economic & Employer Engagement is responsible for advancing the UW mission through business and economic-related stakeholder engagement. Staff across all universities partner with businesses on sponsored research, access to talent, professional development, technology solutions, and strategic investment.

UW-Madison Extension connects university research and expertise with communities to address complex issues through research-based education programming. Extension specialists present economic outlooks twice a year, providing updates on input costs, crop prices, government payments, and crop insurance changes. Extension also hosts [Badger Dairy Insight](#), a monthly research-based webinar focused on animal welfare, breeding, automation and nutrition. The Wisconsin Youth Tractor & Machinery Safety Certification Program provides training for youth ages 14 and 15 who work on farms not operated by their parents. Extension also offers workshops and one-on-one facilitation to help farmers and farm families with business development, succession and transition planning, and estate planning.



RECRUITING THE NEXT GENERATION OF RESOURCE PROFESSIONALS

DNR has made promotional videos a key part of its efforts to recruit new conservation wardens and raise awareness of career pathways within the agency: [Help Make a Difference – Become a Wisconsin Conservation Warden](#).

A primary effort by this subcommittee has been expanding career exploration resources that expose youth and adults to careers in agriculture. Given the council's limited resources, the subcommittee is exploring opportunities to compile existing videos and partner with education and industry organizations to promote them. One example is the DNR's approach to recruiting conservation wardens, which includes information about the hiring process, how candidates can prepare, what to expect during training, and what a typical day looks like for a warden.

PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES

During the past year, the council took steps to better understand Wisconsin's K-12 education and workforce systems. To help council members serve as champions of these systems, members identified a need for an easily accessible collection of education and workforce resources they can use and share with their networks. The council plans to update its website with a repository of resources for students, job seekers, educators and employers highlighting the opportunities available across the state. This repository will be updated regularly, with council members and partners helping to promote new resources and opportunities.

In September 2025, DATCP Secretary Randy Romanski was elected president of the [Midwestern Association of State Departments of Agriculture \(MASDA\)](#). MASDA includes the commissioners, secretaries, and directors of agriculture from Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. As MASDA president, Sec. Romanski hosted the 2026 MASDA Regional Meeting in June 2026 in Madison. This event included industry tours, business meetings, and panel discussions. One of the panel discussions focused on youth engagement. Two panelists were alumni of the Wisconsin Agriculture Youth Council and highlighted ways the council works to develop the industry's future workforce.

Growing a company's global exports requires specialized knowledge and sound strategy. WEDC and DATCP collaborate on export development through International Market Access Grants for agricultural businesses. Wisconsin companies can be reimbursed for specific expenses associated with a short-term export development project that will grow their presence in an international market. WEDC contracted grants to five agriculture companies in SFY 2026. In 2025, Wisconsin exported \$3.99 billion in agricultural, forestry, and food products to 148 countries, the third highest total on record. Wisconsin ranked first nationally in exports of ginseng, cranberries, specialty cheese, bovine genetics, and mink pelts.¹⁷ Six companies, primarily from the dairy industry, also participated in WEDC's trade mission to Mexico in 2026. These partnerships help ensure Wisconsin businesses continue to grow to their full potential.



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE STUDENT EMPLOYER CONNECTOR

Organized by the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at UW-Madison, the Food and Agriculture Student Employer Connector engaged 135 students with more than 20 employers and industry professionals representing Wisconsin's diverse food and agriculture sector in October 2025. Designed as an informal networking event, the connector helped students explore career pathways, ask questions, and build professional connections without the formality of a traditional career fair. The event strengthened connections between students and industry while increasing awareness of the wide range of careers available in Wisconsin's food and agriculture workforce.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 3

RETAIN AND GROW AGRICULTURE, FOOD, AND NATURAL RESOURCES WORKFORCE. DRIVE THE INNOVATION AND PRIORITIES OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES.

Subcommittee Co-Chairs: **Bob Hagenow** and **Jen Pino-Gallagher**

During the first year of implementing the strategic plan, Subcommittee 3 focused on learning more about Wisconsin's workforce system and the resources available across the state. Council members will benefit from an increased understanding of the workforce system and will be better prepared to support AFNR businesses and anticipate where additional resources may be needed.

SUPPORTING THE CURRENT WORKFORCE SYSTEM

DWD's Bureau of Workforce Information & Technical Support (BWITS) reports on current employment statistics, 10-year industry and occupational projections, hot jobs and [county profiles](#). A Wisconsin "hot job" is an occupation with a median wage above the statewide median, projected growth above the statewide average, and high number of projected openings. The bureau's interactive [Career Pathways dashboards](#) allow users to explore career clusters to see projected openings and median wages. The leading occupation in the agriculture career cluster is farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural managers, with 1,966 annual openings and a \$94,000 annual median wage.¹⁸

The Bureau of Job Services (BJS) supports all Wisconsin employers by connecting them with talented job seekers. Business service teams assist with recruitment events, reasonable accommodations guidance, host labor law clinics, and respond to large layoffs and business closures. BJS also provides targeted outreach to rural communities, seasonal farmworkers, and formerly incarcerated individuals. Three percent of all businesses served in SFY 2026 were from the AFNR industries. Complementing these statewide initiatives, DWD's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) delivers specialized rehabilitation technology services to help individuals with disabilities enter the workforce. Services include comprehensive ergonomic evaluations, vehicle modifications, tailored assistive devices, and user training. In 2025, DVR provided this technology assistance to 35 AFNR businesses, 31 of which were farming operations.

DWD's Migrant and Seasonal Farm Worker (MSFW) program provides employers with information about the H-2A program. H-2A allows agricultural employers that anticipate a shortage of domestic workers to bring nonimmigrant foreign workers to the United States for temporary or seasonal agricultural labor or services. The MSFW program also conducts outreach to seasonal workers and provides services generally available through local job centers, including career guidance and counseling, job development, training, and referrals. The program works closely with the local National Farmworker Jobs Program grant recipient to promote training opportunities that can help seasonal agricultural workers stabilize or advance in agriculture employment. In 2025, the program inspected and certified 287 migrant labor camps, and more than 3,000 H-2A worker visas were certified for Wisconsin employers.





DNR CAREER FAIRS

The DNR hosted six career fairs across the state in 2026. The fairs were held in Spooner, Woodruff, Oshkosh, Milladore, Milwaukee, and Fitchburg. Attendees had the opportunity to speak one-on-one with current DNR staff, ask questions, explore natural resources and environmental protection careers, and learn how to apply for positions online. Dozens of people with a range of ages and education backgrounds attended. The DNR typically has job opportunities available in natural resources, environmental sciences, engineering, law enforcement, business, customer service, information technology and administrative support, with a variety of full-time and limited-term employment positions.

Wisconsin was the first state in the country to establish a registered apprenticeship program, in 1911, and the first state to create a youth apprenticeship program, in 1991. The number of contracts in both Registered Apprenticeship (RA) and Youth Apprenticeship (YA) has increased steadily since 2012. The program continues to grow within emerging industries and has seen consecutive record high numbers of employer sponsors in recent years. YA is a one- or two-year opportunity for juniors and seniors in high school. The program combines related instruction with mentored employment across 83 occupational pathways. In the 2025-26 school year, 1,294 students participated in the AFNR pathway, sponsored by 1,180 employers. In Registered Apprenticeship, 16 employers in the agriculture sector sponsored 25 active apprentices, including 15 who began their apprenticeship in 2025. Organic vegetable farm manager is the largest agriculture occupation with 16 total RAs, adding 8 new contracts in 2025. 106 employers in the utilities sector sponsored 901 active apprentices, including 218 new contracts in 2025. Electric line worker, gas distribution, and designer technician are the largest utility occupations with 559 total RAs, adding 139 new contracts in 2025.¹⁹

WEDC leads the state's business development efforts, and its 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 to link businesses to their customers through strong digital connections. The ORP website 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.

In addition, WEDC's Wisconsin Cooperative Development Grant 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 businesses before making significant investments. In SFY 2026, five grants totaling more than \$190,700 were awarded. Since the program's inception, more than \$896,650 has been directed toward developing cooperatives and assisting existing co-ops as well as private businesses interested in converting to the cooperative model. Of all projects funded since the program's inception, 47% are in the agriculture and food sectors.

COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS

The activities highlighted in this report demonstrate the council's commitment to fulfilling its statutory purpose. The council's original functions remain important to the success of Wisconsin's agriculture, food, and natural resource sectors. During SFY 2026, the council approved a four-year strategic plan and began implementation and measurement of its outcomes. Although several members reached the end of their terms, agencies identified new members, ensuring the council continues to benefit from experienced individuals committed to Wisconsin's agricultural, food, and natural resource industries.

As technological advances and labor shortages continue to affect education and workforce systems, sharing best practices and coordinating resources will become increasingly important. These efforts will help ensure Wisconsin prepares the next generation of workers with the skills to advance agriculture, food, and natural resource industries.

In the next year the council recommends that each subcommittee continue to advance their work to:

- Further analyze education program offerings in relation to broader education trends and in-demand occupations.
- Identify opportunities and promote best practices for businesses to engage with educational institutions and teachers to strengthen connections between classrooms and careers.
- Strengthen CTE programs and explore opportunities created by the newly implemented Workforce Pell program.
- Increase promotion of resources available to students, job seekers, teachers and businesses.
- Identify best practices for business to recruit talent and connect with underused talent pools.

COUNCIL MEMBER APPROVAL OF ACTIVITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Wisconsin Agricultural Education and Workforce Development Council's SFY 2026 report was distributed electronically to all council members. Each member was asked to review the report, provide input, and approve or dissent from the annual report at the council's Sept. 22, 2026, meeting. No dissent opinions were received and the annual report was approved unanimously.

CONTACT WAEWDC

The WAEWDC welcomes and appreciates input from the public and uses feedback to advise its work and direct initiatives. Contact us with questions or comments about the report or WAEWDC's work at

WAEWDC@dwd.wisconsin.gov.



NOTES

- ¹ <https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Publications/WIAgStatistics.aspx>
- ² <https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Publications/WIAgStatistics.aspx>
- ³ <https://wedc.org/key-industries> access on 8/7/2026
- ⁴ <https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Publications/WIAgStatistics.aspx>
- ⁵ <https://wedc.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/EPC-Profile-2026.pdf>
- ⁶ <https://wedc.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Forest-Products-Snapshot-2026.pdf>
- ⁷ [Graduate Outcomes 2025](#)
- ⁸ [Graduate Outcomes 2025](#)
- ⁹ [Dual Credit | WTCS](#)
- ¹⁰ <https://www.wisconsin.edu/education-reports-statistics/high-school-students-taking-uw-courses/>
- ¹¹ <https://wisconsinfastforward.com/pdf/wffAnnualReport2025.pdf>
- ¹² <https://dpi.wi.gov/education-workforce>
- ¹³ [Enrollments by Academic Programs | Education Reports & Statistics](#)
- ¹⁴ [Most states fund hands-on job training in high schools. Why not Wisconsin?](#)
- ¹⁵ [CTE Annual Report](#)
- ¹⁶ <https://wisedash.dpi.wi.gov/Dashboard/dashboard/22170> access on 7/27/2026
- ¹⁷ <https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/AgDevelopment/ExportStatistics.aspx>
- ¹⁸ [Career Clusters - WisConomy](#) access on 9/3/2026
- ¹⁹ [2025 Apprenticeship Year in Review](#)



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