

Growing Wisconsin

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SEEN *and* HERD

Dairy goats play a growing role in Wisconsin's economy

TECH GIANTS

Farm equipment gets a high-tech boost

WIDE WORLD OF FARMS

In America's Dairyland, farm families raise pigs, poultry and more



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A black silhouette of two men in business attire shaking hands. They are positioned in the center of the page, with the large white text overlaid on them. The background is a light blue sky with a white horizon line. A thick red diagonal line runs from the bottom right corner towards the center, partially overlapping the silhouettes.

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EDUCATION ANIMAL SCIENCE DAIRY SCIENCE ENVIRONMENTAL
HORTICULTURE RECLAMATION ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION



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Data compiled from a combination of exit survey results implemented by the School of Agriculture and the Academic and Career Advising Center.



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AGED GOAT

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- Honey like flavor

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Katy Cheesemaker

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 **COW'S MILK**
GRAN QUESO

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Ruth Kase
Monroe, WI
Hester Cheesemaker

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WHEN YOU'RE HAVING FUN, WE'RE HAVING FUN.

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36 Apples

HOW ABOUT THEM APPLES

Wisconsin's apple growers offer fresh fruit and farm outings. The state is one of the top apple producers in the United States, with its orchards providing millions of pounds of the delicious fruit to households across the country each year.



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THE POWER OF WISCONSIN DAIRY

Wisconsin dairy contributes

\$43.4 billion

annually to Wisconsin's economy, creating and supporting jobs, local communities and public services.



Wisconsin dairy farms:

- ▶ Are **96%** family-owned
- ▶ Range from **<10 to 1,000+ COWS**, averaging 138
- ▶ Produce more milk every year. In 2016, Wisconsin dairy farms produced **30 billion pounds** —14% of the nation's milk supply.

Big numbers:

- ▶ **9,300 dairy farmers**, including a new generation of forward-thinking leaders
- ▶ **200+** cheese, butter, milk and dairy processing plants
- ▶ **120+** ag colleges, research stations, discovery farms and extension offices, including the world-renowned Center for Dairy Research and The Center for Dairy Profitability

Cheese RULES:

- ▶ More than **25%** of all cheese sold in the U.S. is **made in Wisconsin**
- ▶ Our rigorous Master Cheesemaker certification is the **only program** of its kind outside of Europe, ensuring our quality is second-to-none



In Wisconsin, dairy is more than just our currency. It's our engine. Our heritage. And, our heart and soul. To learn more about America's Dairyland, visit AmericasDairyland.com.



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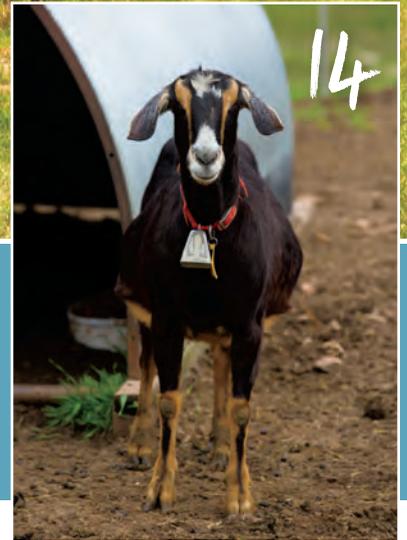
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Shannon and Melissa Wolf raise their sons, Mitchel, Nolan, and Ross, and pigs at their farm in Lancaster.

Photo by Michael D. Tedesco



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Wisconsin Farm Bureau is *A Voice for Farmers.* *A Vision for Agriculture.®*

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Growing Wisconsin

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Born and raised in Marquette County, Secretary Ben Brancel raises registered Angus and Hereford beef cattle with his wife, Gail. They live on their family's multigenerational 290-acre farm.

Welcome to *Growing Wisconsin.*

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection is proud to contribute to the *Growing Wisconsin* magazine each year. This publication offers a way for all of us to learn the who, what, where, when, why and how behind our farms and agricultural products. By reading these stories, we can all appreciate the efforts to put food on our plates, clothing in our closets, roofs over our heads and fuel in our vehicles.

As you will read, each story in agriculture is unique. Some farms have been in the family for generations. Other entrepreneurs have developed and now sell new, innovative technologies around the world. From our apples and potatoes to hogs and bison, Wisconsin's agricultural diversity is our strength.

The best stories are the ones that are shared. Please share this magazine with your friends, family and neighbors. When you are done, leave the copy at your local community center, office or clinic. Thank you for joining us in *Growing Wisconsin*.

Sincerely,

Ben Brancel

Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture,
Trade and Consumer Protection

Alice in Dairyland helps promote the state's entire agriculture industry.



GROWING FORWARD

Wisconsin agriculture continues to flourish with modern innovations

Though cheese and milk are major components of Wisconsin's agricultural economy, the state is much more than America's Dairyland. Especially as the country's agricultural landscape is changing and adapting, Wisconsin leads the pack in innovative practices, while continuing to grow important commodities.

Wisconsin impressively ranks first in the nation in many commodities, including cheese, cranberries, dry whey, snap beans for processing, ginseng, oats, mink pelts, dairy goats and corn for silage.

These crops are grown on some of the state's 68,700 farms, which cover 14.4 million acres. The average farm in Wisconsin is 210 acres. The industry provides approximately 413,500 jobs, or about 12 percent of the state's employment annually. In addition, the majority of the state's farms are family-owned and -operated.

But though these farms are rooted in family tradition and history, Wisconsin farmers are keeping pace with the modern age, embracing technological advancements and practices that effectively increase yield, quality, environmental protections and safety.

One such example is farm equipment. Wisconsin farmers use high-tech machinery with GPS systems that allow them to better map and manage the land. Dairy farmers take advantage of robotic milking systems to increase efficiency and reduce labor needs.

Young farmers are a large asset to the industry. As family farms continue to pass down from generation to generation, young farmers bring knowledge and tech savvy to the fields. Their innovative ideas are bound to push Wisconsin agriculture even further forward.

— Rachel Bertone



PHOTOS BY STEVE WOIT AND SHARON VANORNY | CHERRIES: COURTESY OF DOOR COUNTY VISITOR BUREAU





Berry Good

There's a good chance that the tasty cranberries used to make your juice, sauce or cocktail came from Wisconsin.

The state is the nation's leading producer of cranberries, harvesting 61 percent of the country's total crop. It's Wisconsin's No. 1 fruit crop, and, fittingly, the state's official fruit as well.

The state's cranberries are grown in 20 counties, covering approximately 21,000 acres. Though many believe the fruit grows in water, that's actually a myth, and in reality, cranberries grow on low-running vines in sandy bogs or marshes. When the marsh is flooded for harvest, the berries float to the top, due to the tiny air pockets inside them.

Most of Wisconsin's berries end up in food and beverage products, such as cranberry juice. Only 5 percent of the state's crop is sold as fresh berries. Learn more about cranberries at wiscran.org.



IN 2016,
WISCONSIN'S
CORN FOR GRAIN
CROP BROUGHT
THE STATE
\$1.9 BILLION.



Wisconsin consistently ranks
3rd in the U.S. for potato production,
behind only Idaho and Washington.



The Big Cheese

Helping the state live up to its nickname as America's Dairyland, a Wisconsin cheese cinched the top spot at the World Cheese Championship Contest in 2016.

Emmi Roth USA's Grand Cru Surchoix was the champion, and is an Alpine-style cheese that is aged a minimum of nine months. It's similar to Gruyere, with a firm texture and flavors of caramel, fruit and mushroom.

The competition was fierce, as the Wisconsin cheese narrowly edged out two European finalists, but the win paid off; the cheese is in high demand at specialty shops.

See more winners at worldchampioncheese.org.

56.5

AVERAGE AGE OF A
WISCONSIN FARMER



Textbooks And Tractors

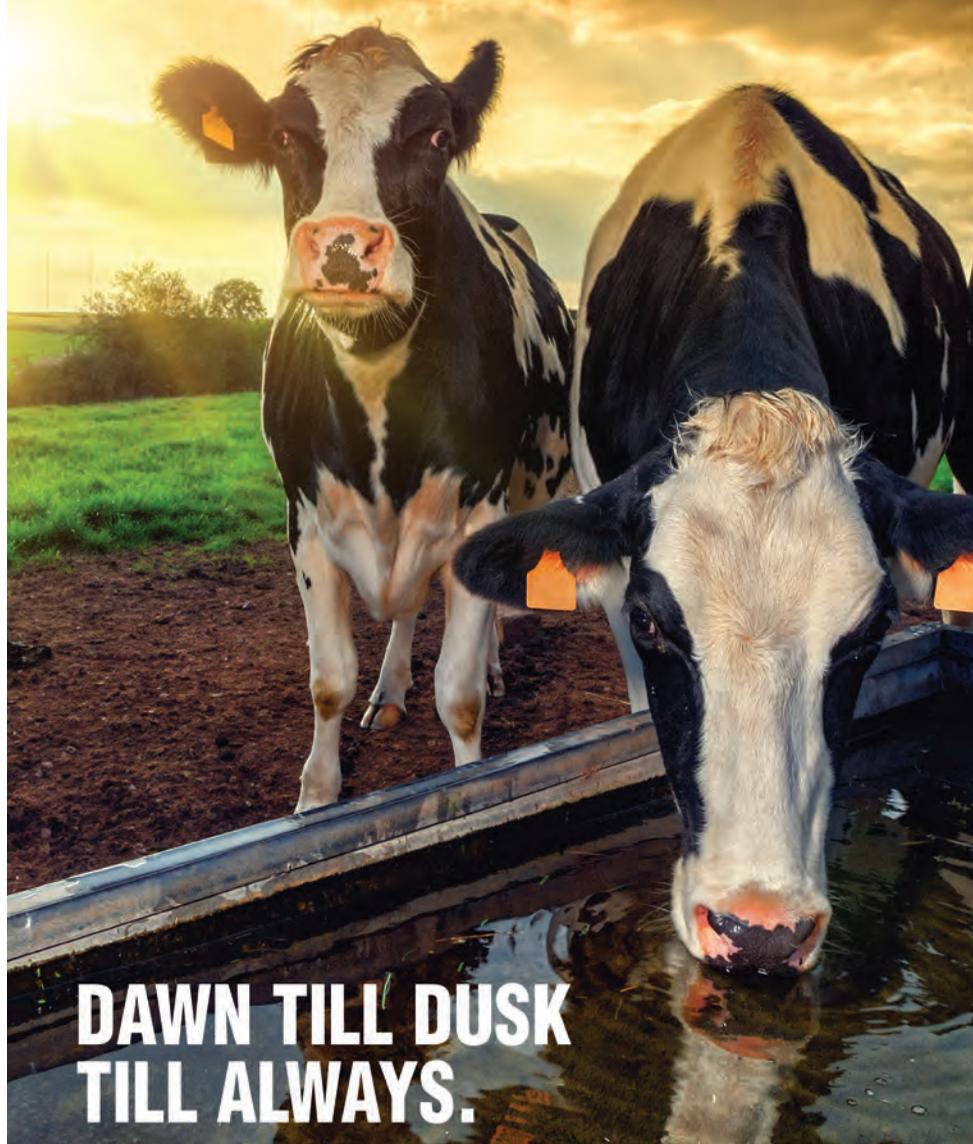
Wisconsin's students are becoming experts in reading, mathematics, science – and now agriculture.

Thanks to the Ag in the Classroom (AITC) program, teachers in kindergarten through 12th grade have lesson plans to teach students the basics of agriculture through their existing curriculum. Topics include everything from agriculture and technology to careers in agriculture and ag history.

The program aims to help students understand the importance of agriculture, not only for the state and economy, but also in their everyday lives.

Ag in the Classroom is a national program coordinated by the United States Department of Agriculture, but implemented at the state level. Wisconsin AITC is carried out through the Wisconsin Farm Bureau and supported by several state organizations, agriculture groups, and the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. Learn more at wisagclassroom.org.

Sources: Wisconsin Potato and Vegetable Growers Association, USDA National Agricultural Statistics, USDA Census of Agriculture



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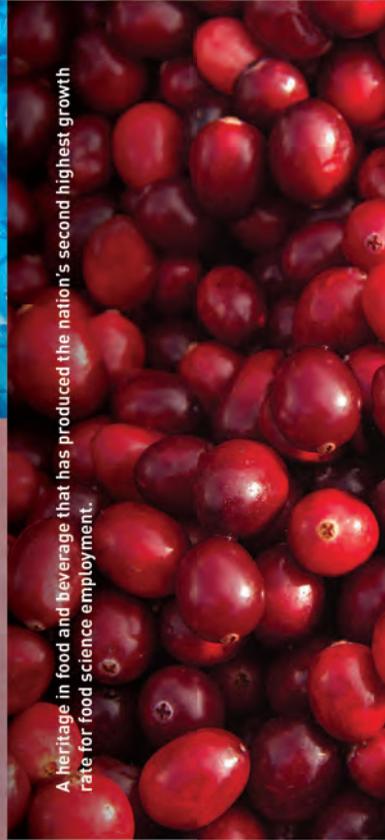
The Wisconsin Energy Institute promotes diverse scientific thinking from academia and industry to create integrated energy solutions.

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WISCONSIN'S PRINCIPAL AGRICULTURAL COMMODITIES

A glimpse at the state's leading ag products

BROILERS

Americans consume more chicken than any other country in the world. Wisconsin produced 54 million broilers – or chickens grown for meat – in 2016, earning over \$108.6 million in production value.

CATTLE & CALVES

Wisconsin consistently ranks as one of the top states for cattle and calves. The state is home to more than 3.5 million dairy and beef cattle and calves as of January 2017.

CORN

U.S. growers produce more than 36 percent of the world's corn supply. Wisconsin harvested over 3.2 million acres of corn for grain in 2016, earning \$1.9 billion.

CRANBERRIES

Cranberries are grown in 20 counties in Wisconsin, the leading cranberry state. Local farmers produced 6.13 million barrels in 2016.

DAIRY

Wisconsin ranks second in national milk production, behind only California. Dairy adds \$43.4 billion to the state's economy every year. In 2016, Wisconsin dairies produced over 30.1 billion pounds of milk.

EGGS

Eggs have 6 grams of protein, making them a high-quality protein source. In 2016, Wisconsin hens laid over 1.6 billion eggs for a production value of more than \$78 million.

HAY

Wisconsin farmers produced 8.6 million tons of hay and haylage or forage in 2016, earning \$735 million. This includes alfalfa hay, a high-protein legume that's a great food source for livestock with high energy needs.

HOGS

The average market hog provides 371 servings of pork. Wisconsin is home to 325,000 hogs. In 2016, the state's hogs had a production value more than \$85.5 million.

POTATOES

Wisconsin ranks third in the U.S. for potato production. The state produced 2.8 billion pounds in 2016 for a \$279.1 million production value.

SOYBEANS

Soybeans provided a whopping 54 percent of edible vegetable oils for the nation in 2016. The same year, Wisconsin farmers harvested more than 1.9 million acres with a production value over \$1 billion.

#1

Wisconsin ranks No. 1 in the U.S. for cheese, cranberries, ginseng, mink pelts and more.

1 of every 12 jobs in Wisconsin is related to agriculture.



Wisconsin cheesemakers produce more than 600 types of cheese.



Wisconsin ranks **4th in the nation** for maple syrup production.

16.5M

APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF
TIMBERLAND ACRES IN WISCONSIN

Sources: USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service; Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection; 2016 Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics Bulletin

SEEN *and* HERD

Dairy goats play a growing role
in Wisconsin's economy





STAFF PHOTOS BY MICHAEL D. TEDESCO

Diana Murphy of Cross Plains is one of Wisconsin's many dairy goat farmers making a splash in the goat milk and cheese industry.

AGRICULTURE IS GROWING AT WISCONSIN'S TECHNICAL COLLEGES



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It's nutritious, delicious and making a big splash in Wisconsin agriculture.

Goat milk is said to have many health and beauty benefits, and is an increasingly popular item found in the fridges and bathroom cabinets of homes across the U.S. Wisconsin is no exception. In fact, the state leads the nation in both fluid goat milk production and dairy goat inventory.

Local farms produce enough of both to support a thriving local goat milk industry, including specialty cheese manufacturing plants, a fluid milk processor and licensed farmstead cheese producers.

The state's farms and cheesemaking operations run the gamut in size and quantity of output. In Belmont, for instance, Montchevre has grown from a small operation since its founding

“We do the whole cycle here, from breeding the animals to milking them, taking care of the kids, hauling the milk, making and delivering the cheese, to billing it out.”

Diana Murphy, *Owner of Dreamfarm*

in 1989 to become the leading goat cheese producer in the nation. The company uses French cheesemaking techniques that produce a smooth and creamy texture. In fact, Montchevre won the Wisconsin State Fair cheese contest in 2015, the first time a goat cheese has won the competition.

Other notable goat cheese producers include LaClare Farms in Malone, Carr Valley Cheese in La Valle and Woolwich/Saputo in Lancaster.

More Than a Dream

Dairy goat farmer Diana Murphy, who lives in Cross Plains, grew up on what she calls a “typical Wisconsin cow dairy farm.” She enjoyed the farm life through childhood and into her teens. But she wanted to set out on her own career path after high school and trained to become a graphic designer.

As that field entered the computer era, Murphy got an itch to return to the farm. So she and her husband, Jim, bought a place in Cross Plains and started raising goats and chickens, as well as daughters, on what is now named Dreamfarm.

“I found that I really enjoyed having animals back in my life,” says Murphy, who runs the small



Left: Alicia Murphy tends to dairy goats at Dreamfarm. Right: Diana Murphy makes goat cheese in the Dreamfarm creamery.



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- Tidy View Dairy: First and third Wednesdays at 10 a.m.
- Hudson Dairy: Every Thursday at 10 a.m. and first and third Saturdays at 10 a.m.



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farmstead creamery with one of her four daughters, Alicia, and Jim's help when he isn't working at his full-time job.

She has sold her cheese (and eggs) through a local CSA, or community-supported agriculture farm, as well as at a farmers' market, grocery co-ops and

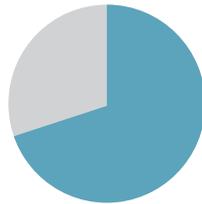
a couple of nearby restaurants.

"We do the whole cycle here, from breeding the animals to milking them, taking care of the kids, hauling the milk, making and delivering the cheese, to billing it out," Murphy says. "That's all done here on the farm."

#1



WISCONSIN RANKS 1ST IN THE NATION FOR MILK GOAT INVENTORY.



As much as **70%** of the world's population depends on goat milk as a food source.



Wisconsin is home to **12%** of the nation's total milk goats.

44,000

MILK GOATS ARE AT HOME IN THE STATE.

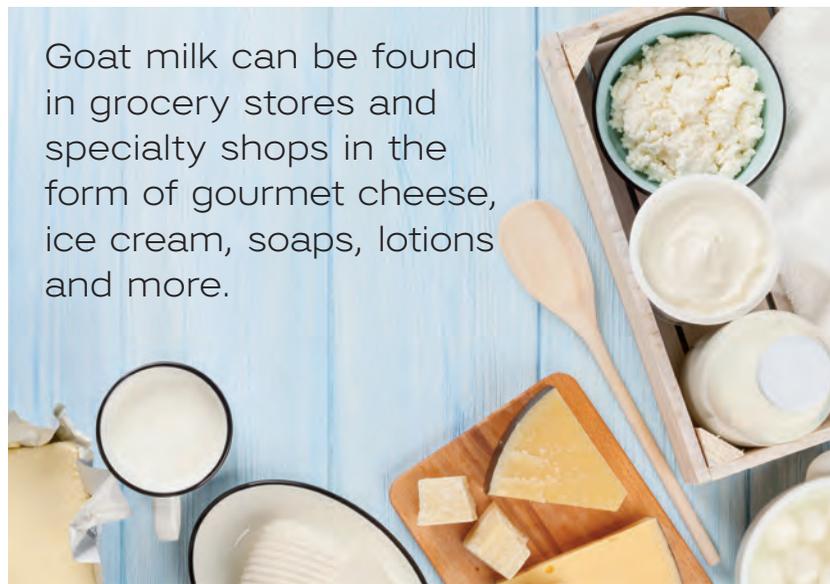
Sources: Wisconsin Dairy Goat Association, USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2016 Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics Bulletin, Wisconsin Ag in the Classroom

Enhanced Training

To help educate Wisconsin's dairy goat producers on how to provide high-quality milk for the goat cheese industry and improve farm sustainability, Southwest Wisconsin Technical College (SWTC) launched a new dairy goat herd management program in May 2017.

Supported by a \$100,000 lead gift from Montchevre, the program focuses on the production, financial and management skills needed in a dairy goat operation. The certification will benefit students and the industry as a whole.

"Our target audience is those individuals who are considering dairy goat production," says Deb Ihm, agriculture coordinator and farm business production management instructor at SWTC. "They may have no experience with the industry at all, and this



Goat milk can be found in grocery stores and specialty shops in the form of gourmet cheese, ice cream, soaps, lotions and more.

is a good way to get some education and experience."

Ihm says the program is also targeted to beginning producers, or even those at mid-career.

"We're encouraging all those

interested in the dairy goat industry to take these classes and hopefully pick up on a few things and fine tune their management skills," Ihm says.

- John McBryde

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CHERRIES PHOTO COURTESY OF DOOR COUNTY VISITOR BUREAU | BLOSSOMS | ISTOCK.COM/CHIKAPHOTOGRAPH



Full
BLOSSOM

Door County leads the state's
solid heritage in tart cherries

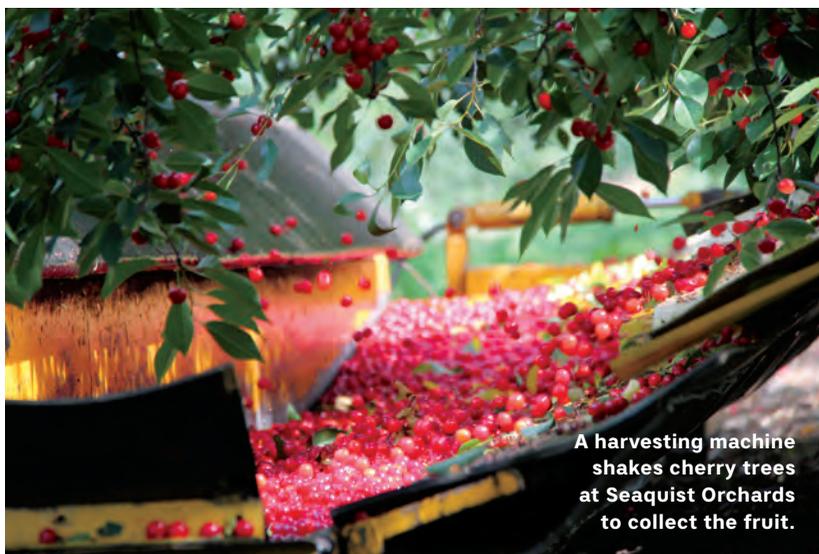
When it comes to Wisconsin cherries, Door County is at the center of the industry. Or, as Jon Jarosh of the Door County Visitor Bureau puts it, “We are the heart of the state’s cherry industry. Almost all of Wisconsin’s cherry crops are grown here in Door County.”

That’s been the case since the 1890s, when cherry trees were first planted in the county, located on the peninsula between Green Bay and Lake Michigan. Both geographically and geologically, it’s an ideal region for growing the primarily tart cherries Door County is known for.

“Conditions are suitable here for cherry trees,” says Jarosh.

Surrounded by water, the county enjoys winters that aren’t typically bitter cold and, therefore, its lands are protected against early frost and likely to have conditions for proper pollination in the spring.

In addition, the area sits atop the Niagara Escarpment, which runs from Wisconsin through Canada and to Niagara, New York. “We are situated on literally hundreds of feet of dolomite limestone,” Jarosh



A harvesting machine shakes cherry trees at Seaquist Orchards to collect the fruit.

says. “Cherry trees can get their roots down into that and get their nutrients.”

Cherry Farms Aplenty

There was a time when cherries were so prolific in Door County that it had the nickname Cherryland USA. The county was the largest producer of tart cherries in the country in the mid-1900s. “What’s amazing is that all those cherries were picked by hand,” Jarosh says. “Now, 90

percent are picked by machine.”

Of course, cherry orchards, processors and markets are plentiful in Door County. Notable ones include Cherry Lane Orchards in Sturgeon Bay, Orchard Country Winery & Market in Fish Creek and Choice Orchards Farm Market in Sturgeon Bay.

A Sight to See

The largest cherry farm in Door County, and the oldest still operating, is Seaquist Orchards

PHOTO COURTESY OF DOOR COUNTY VISITOR BUREAU

Pounds of tart cherries Wisconsin growers produced in 2016:

11M



SEAQUIST ORCHARDS IN DOOR COUNTY GROWS ABOUT **1,000 ACRES** OF TART CHERRIES EACH YEAR.

Get ‘Em While They’re Ripe

Did you know cherries don’t ripen once they have been picked? So it’s very important to pick cherries at their peak ripeness. At Seaquist Orchards, machine harvesters shake trees to harvest the cherries when ready. The farm handpicked cherries until 2006.

The Montmorency, a tart cherry, is the most popular cherry. You can eat them fresh or use them to make pies, preserves and juice.

Sources: USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, Wisconsin Ag in the Classroom, Seaquist Orchards

Farm Market in Sister Bay. Anders Seaquist settled there in the early 1900s and soon discovered the favorable conditions for growing cherry trees. In 1983, Dale Seaquist and his son, Jim, formed a partnership and went to work growing the business.

With several family members tending to different aspects of the business today and a large group of young children in line for the future, Seaquist Orchards is indeed a multigenerational operation.

In addition to the boost to the Door County economy from growing, harvesting and processing cherries, industry benefits are also realized in the number of visitors who travel there. They come in the spring, usually in May, when the cherry trees are in blossom, and return in July to early August for harvest time.

“People love coming up here to see the cherry blossoms,” Jarosh says. “They walk through the cherry orchards, or they’ll just drive through the county.”

– John McBryde

WISCONSIN RANKS 4TH IN THE NATION FOR TART CHERRY PRODUCTION.



Door County leads Wisconsin in tart cherry production. Its farmers have been growing cherries since 1896.



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What's
COOKING
in Wisconsin?



FARM FLAVOR

Read more about Wisconsin's top farm products, and find recipes using ingredients grown and raised in the state at FarmFlavor.com.

TECH GIANTS

Farm equipment gets a high-tech boost

From Cal Dalton's commanding seat in the combine, a high-tech screen flashes localized information, making his farming more efficient.

GPS, or global positioning system, satellites communicate with his combine to display site-specific corn yields on the in-cab computer screen, logging an impressive average of 289 bushels of corn per acre for one of his fields. Altogether, his cornfields averaged about 200 bushels per acre in 2016 – a record for his farm.

Dalton says technology, from seed to equipment, greatly contributes to his award-winning yields. He uses computer-generated prescriptions to plant biotech seeds with GPS at variable rates across the field.

The signals guide auto shutoffs on the planter to reduce seed overlap during planting. Technology in his sprayer ensures a consistent pesticide application rate per acre, regardless of speed.

He grows corn, soybeans and hay, and raises beef cattle near Endeavor, where he continues the farming tradition of his grandparents, great-grandparents and the state.

“Technology has allowed us to produce more yield and better quality crops than we’ve done even in our own generation,” says Dalton, a repeat corn yield contest winner for the Juneau/Adams/Marquette County region of the Wisconsin Corn Growers Association competition. “I think technology has allowed farmers to work longer, better and smarter.”

High-Tech Grain

Wisconsin ranks among the top 10 corn-growing states, producing more than 573.1 million bushels of corn for grain in 2016.

GPS contributed to those bushels. Farmers throughout Wisconsin use it to pinpoint soil nutrient needs within fields and map yield by location. They may plant, fertilize or spray in varying



TRACTOR MONITORS: ©ISTOCK.COM / LIVINGIMAGES | HARVEST PHOTOS BY SHARON VANORNY

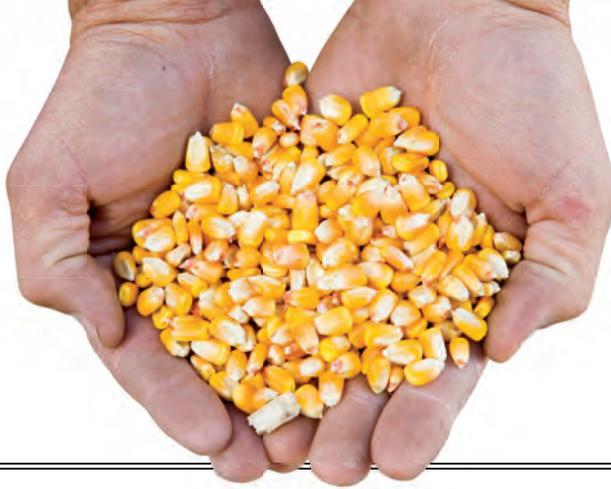


Top: GPS and other technology help Wisconsin farmers run their high-tech farms. Bottom: Cal Dalton in Endeavor uses the latest technology in his equipment to harvest corn.

Local farmers harvested over

3.2M

acres of corn for grain in 2016.



Wisconsin set a record corn for grain yield of 178 bushels per acre in 2016.



Wisconsin is located in what is known as the Corn Belt.

IN 2016, WISCONSIN CORN AND CORN PRODUCT EXPORTS HAD AN ECONOMIC IMPACT OF

\$302M.

Sources: USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2016 Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics Bulletin, Wisconsin Corn Growers Association

quantities across a field using GPS signals that map down to sub-inch accuracy. On some farms, the technology allows farmers to steer tractors hands-free.

“My grandfather would be totally amazed if he were riding in the combine with me today,” Dalton says. “He would be amazed with all the computers we have in the new tractors and the size of them.”

Farming the Future

Evolving farm technology generates staffing and training demands for farm equipment dealerships like Service Motor Co. The Wisconsin-based family corporation, in business since 1916,

“I think technology has allowed farmers to work longer, better and smarter.”

Cal Dalton, *corn farmer*

has beefed up its precision farming department’s staffing and support in the last decade, says Kevin Sommer, vice president of sales and a fifth-generation owner.

“We have had to invest, train and embrace the precision farming side of the business,” he says. “With GPS in a lot of tractors, we’ve had to staff and train for it. It’s a three-year training process to ensure we have someone who has the knowledge to support that side of the business.”

The dealership’s sales staff, parts representatives and service technicians also must embrace and understand new farm technology. As a result, Service Motor Co. maintains a partnership with Fox Valley Technical College, based in Appleton, to train prospective employees.

The ongoing relationship helps shape qualified technicians to service the increasingly high-tech equipment Service Motor sells. The family business provides equipment for classroom use, and also offers students internship

programs as well as tuition and tool reimbursement opportunities.

“With technology that keeps enhancing, it’s a different level of technicians we are looking for as we embrace the use of computers to diagnose tractors,” Sommer says. “It’s important we partner with the college so that students know there is a career path and option with Service Motor Co.”

According to Dalton, it’s important for farmers to keep on top of technology and trends.

“I think you never stop learning. If you do, then you might as well retire,” he says. “I try to make it a point to go to at least four to five farm shows per year to keep up with the technology, because it changes so fast.”

– Joanie Stiers

FIND MORE ONLINE

Learn more about how farmers embrace new technology at

Wlagriculture.com.

READY For Their Close-Ups

DATCP broadens inspection horizons

Maintaining a balance is important for the field inspectors with the Division of Food and Recreational Safety in Wisconsin's Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP).

Their jobs require them to be thorough in inspections that run the gamut from the quality of foods to the purity of swimming pools.

DATCP's responsibilities have expanded even more since an organizational change brought 35 staff positions from the Department of Health Services' Food Safety and Recreation License unit over to DATCP's Division of Food and Recreational Safety. So the staff inspects everything from food plants and dairy farms to hotels, campgrounds, and more.

"The idea was to get our sanitarians cross-trained so that whichever agency they started out in, they would learn the other peoples' work enough to cover their

area," says Steve Ingham, the division's administrator. "The goal was to be more efficient, that people wouldn't be driving as far to do inspections and, in some situations, a single inspector could do all sorts of business at a given place."

Those who own and run the facilities being inspected are impressed.

Gabe Chernov, who owns Birch Trail Camp in Mequon, says his experience with the annual DATCP summer inspection is always a positive one.

"Seeing it when the kids are there enables them to see if we're doing things right and within the law, and it enables us to showcase our camp," Chernov says.

"I feel they really give a good inspection and I'm challenged by it, but I also feel we're a good partner," he adds.

— John McBryde

O Christmas TREE

State's farmers grow quality Christmas trees for happy holidays

In the midst of the annual holiday hustle and bustle, one symbol stands tall, offering families a carefree activity that will leave lasting memories – selecting their Christmas tree.

“Families aren’t just buying a Christmas tree when they go to a choose-and-cut lot,” says Donna Gilson, spokesperson for the Agricultural Resource Management Division of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP).

“They’re getting an experience and leaving their kids with

memories,” she adds. “It’s a time in the crisp winter air, maybe followed by some hot chocolate and even a sleigh ride, with no electronic screens in sight.”

Plenty of Pines

Lucky for Wisconsinites, the state has lots of opportunities to venture out and pick the perfect tree.

“Wisconsin growers harvest around 600,000 trees each year,” says Cheryl Nicholson, executive secretary for the Wisconsin Christmas Tree Producers Association. “We’re considered

a specialty crop and part of the green industry.”

She adds that many growers have a cut-your-own farm, helping the industry promote that “feel-good” family value. Most of them also include additional activities such as sleigh rides, gift shops, hot chocolate and cider for a true destination outing. Plus, real trees are better for the environment, allowing consumers to feel positive about buying one.

Derek Ahl is one of the partners at Northern Family Farms in Merrilan – the largest Christmas tree farm in the state. Though his farm doesn’t offer a choose-and-cut option (they sell only wholesale), he agrees with Gilson and Nicholson, adding that the tradition is backed by the entire industry.

“Agritourism is a staple in this industry,” Ahl says. “There are many families that go to farms

“There are many families that go to farms or retailers as a tradition, and I think that tradition and family values are what make our industry unique.”

Derek Ahl, Northern Family Farms partner



The Christmas tree industry is thriving in Wisconsin, which ranks fifth in the nation for Christmas tree production.



IN 2014, WISCONSIN CHRISTMAS
TREE SALES TOTALED

\$16.2M.

Sources: Wisconsin Christmas Tree Producers Association,
USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2016
Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics Bulletin



Why pick real trees?

They are renewable and recyclable, while artificial trees have non-biodegradable plastics and metals.

THE STATE'S GROWERS HARVEST
AROUND 600,000 TREES A YEAR.



DATCP nursery inspectors Carol Beatty and Marcia Wensing check farm Christmas trees to ensure they are free of pests and diseases.

or retailers as a tradition, and I think that tradition and family values are what make our industry unique.”

Northern Family Farms grows about 3,000 acres of Christmas trees per year, including Fraser fir, balsam fir, Scotch pine and white pine. Other popular varieties in the state include Meyer spruce, Colorado blue spruce and concolor fir.

“Wisconsin’s climate and soils make it a good place to grow trees,” Nicholson says. “Some soils that aren’t great for other crops can produce good Christmas trees. We have large populations of potential customers in Wisconsin or nearby cities, so the market for our trees is nearby.”

Safety First

To make sure trees are pest-free before shipping across state lines, DATCP performs yearly inspections for pests and diseases at licensed businesses.

“The biggest threats they’re looking for are gypsy moth and pine shoot beetle,” Ahl says. “The gypsy moth caterpillar can defoliate forests and reduce timber quality. DATCP comes out to our farm and inspects every field before harvest.”

Gilson says that the inspections also help DATCP find new pests that haven’t been dealt with before.

“It provides a valuable service to growers as we spot any pests or diseases that are present that might affect their production, even if they aren’t ‘regulated pests,’” she says.

Not only do these inspections protect growers and forests, but they also ensure that all Christmas trees being sold are healthy as well, keeping the industry viable and keeping ornaments as the only decorations on trees.

“The Wisconsin Christmas tree industry seems to be quite healthy,” Ahl says. “Supply and demand are in balance after a large overproduction of Christmas trees in recent years.”

– Rachel Bertone



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CANNED GOODNESS

Food processors set the table for local industry growth

If you have frozen or canned vegetables in your freezer or pantry, chances are those vegetables were grown in Wisconsin. The state is a prime growing region for major vegetable crops used for canning and freezing, and is second only to California in the production of the primary processing vegetable crops.

“Typically, Wisconsin’s climate is not too hot or too cold, nor too wet or too dry. When you are picking up corn, green beans, peas, carrots or beets at your favorite retailer, there is a strong probability they were grown here in Wisconsin,” says Todd Eucke, marketing manager for Lakeside Foods Inc. in Manitowoc.

Planting Powerful Partnerships

The food processing sector supports more than 1,000 Wisconsin producers during the busy harvest season. Processors give producers like Andrew

Wallendal, owner of Wallendal Supply Inc. in Grand Marsh, another market outlet for their crops. Wallendal is a second-generation farmer who grows potatoes, sweet corn, peas, lima and kidney beans, and cabbage. Most of his produce is contracted to processors.

According to Wallendal, taking part in the supply chain helps farmers diversify, providing them greater economic stability.

“New technologies, such as GPS guidance, also help increase productivity,” he says.

Rooted in Relationships

Food processors have a tremendous impact on farmers’ bottom lines. They give farmers options in the marketplace and ability to spread out risk to receive the maximum return on their investment.

“Specialty vegetable crops like peas, green beans, beets and

sweet corn provide diversity to the producers that grow these crops for our facilities. This can help them manage risk from a financial standpoint and also helps to spread the workload, as these crops are typically planted and harvested at different times than typical row crops like corn and soybeans,” says a Seneca Foods Corporation spokesperson.

Seneca Foods operates nine plants in Wisconsin to produce its canned goods. The vast majority of the crops processed by Seneca in the state are grown within 50 to 75 miles of the company’s facilities.

Likewise, Manitowoc-based Lakeside Foods, in business for 130 years, relies heavily on local growers. Lakeside Foods started with one small pea canning facility and now has 12 plants in operation producing canned and frozen vegetables.

“The backbone of our company



Wisconsin food processors like Seneca Foods and Lakeside Foods source vegetables, fruit and more from thousands of American farms.

SENECA FOODS

Seneca Foods' storied history started about seven decades ago, when it contracted with the Minute Maid brand to co-pack the first frozen grape juice in the nation. In the following years, Seneca added apple processing, fountain fruits, syrups and maraschino cherries to the mix.

The 1960s saw Seneca introduce vitamin C-enriched apple juice – a first in the industry. In the following decades, Seneca added vegetable processing – both canned and frozen – expansion of the juice line, expansion into the global marketplace, and more.

Today, Seneca continues to grow and, as its motto states, “think globally, grow locally.”



LAKESIDE FOODS

Lakeside Foods got its start in the 1880s when its founder noticed Wisconsin soil grew high-quality peas, and so began a small pea-processing operation in a hotel on the shores of Lake Michigan.

The operation soon grew into the state's first canning plant, with more to follow. Eventually, Lakeside expanded to include green beans, tomatoes, corn and sauerkraut.

Today, consumers enjoy many foods produced by this Manitowoc-based company, including canned and frozen vegetables, frozen meals and more.

Lakeside Foods prides itself for expertise and exclusive focus on private branding, acting as a key supplier to major national retailers.



Sources: SenecaFoods.com, LakesideFoods.com

is our grower base. We have some growers that go back four generations,” Eucke says. “With processed vegetables, we have a great program for our growers which means very little cash outlay on their end.”

The close relationship between Wisconsin food processors and growers also has advantages for consumers.

“Canned and frozen vegetables are harvested at the most optimum time,” says the Seneca Foods

spokesperson. “They make their way from the field to canning or freezing within a matter of hours, and are nutritionally equivalent to their fresh alternatives – especially those fresh items that may have been harvested hundreds or even thousands of miles away and subject to days, if not weeks, in storage before reaching a consumer’s home.”

Wisconsin’s central location in the nation helps producers serve markets in the Midwest

and keep costs low in a highly competitive market.

“Canned and frozen alternatives provide a value proposition to those who may not always have other forms available or who cannot afford them. Canned and frozen vegetables are sold in the supermarket at a cost today that is not much different than it was 20 years ago and help families stretch their grocery budgets,” says the Seneca Foods spokesperson.

– Teree Caruthers



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FARM FINANCE 101

Many farmers opt for ag loans to help start, grow operations

Farming costs can add up quickly, so it's no surprise that many farmers need financial assistance, either with getting started or keeping their existing operations up and running.

Fortunately, it's easier than you might think to get an agricultural loan, according to Paul Dietmann, emerging markets specialist for Sun Prairie-based Compeer Financial. He encourages farmers to keep detailed financial records, because those come in handy when it's time to apply for assistance.

"When a farmer is looking for a loan, the first thing we usually require is a balance sheet, which is a financial statement that shows everything he or she owns and owes," Dietmann says. "We also gather a prospective borrower's tax returns, and we combine those with the balance sheet to look at historic cash flow and put together an income statement for the farm."

Dietmann adds that lenders are looking for a cash flow projection that shows the farmer's income will be sufficient to cover operating expenses as well as loan payments, while also enabling the borrower to comfortably pay for family living costs.

Though it may be easier for a farmer who already has a working operation to demonstrate his or her profitability, Dietmann says he regularly works with beginning farmers, too.

The key is having a solid plan that shows when cash will come in throughout the year and how it will be used.

One popular option for farmers seeking assistance is the Farm Credit system, which is organized as local, farmer-owned farmer-led

cooperatives.

Established in 1916 to help farmers and rural interests, Farm Credit is a nationwide network of 77 customer-owned lending institutions, including Compeer Financial. According to Dietmann,

the system ensures farmers have access to reliable credit, and it's designed to help them succeed.

"Farm Credit is a great option for farmers who are looking for capital," he says.

- Jessica Walker Boehm

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Twins Bayland and Ashlynd Laffin pick juicy apples with Shannon McCulloch at Helene's Hilltop Orchard in Merrill.



How About Them APPLES

Wisconsin apple growers offer fresh fruit and fun farm outings

If you're trying to avoid going to the doctor by eating an apple a day, head to Wisconsin. The state is one of the top apple producers in the nation, yielding millions of pounds of the all-American fruit each year.

In Trempealeau, Jess Ecker helps operate Ecker's Apple Farm along with her mother, sister and husband. The farm has been family-owned and -operated since 1945, but it was converted to an orchard in the late 1970s. Ecker says the orchard covers about 100 acres, with 40 dedicated to apple production. They grow many different varieties, including Gingergold, McIntosh, Gala, Riverbelle, Fuji, Red Delicious and Honeycrisp.

"Honeycrisp has a beautiful color, a sweet and tangy flavor profile, and a cell structure that explodes with juice as you take a bite," Ecker says. "It's a great eating apple, but also bakes well. It's a big hit when dipped in caramel and rolled in nuts and candy."

The farm also grows English cider apple trees and blueberry bushes that offer U-pick

opportunities for customers in the summer.

Ecker says that apples do well in Wisconsin, thanks to the state's favorable climate.

"Wisconsin's land and climate are conducive to apple growing in general," Ecker says. "We get just the right amount of hot and cold temperatures to support a solid growing season for apples. Good rainfall, decent sun exposure and cool autumn nights that turn apples red are some other factors that make Wisconsin a hot spot for growing apples."

Those cool autumn nights also attract families to the farm, and Ecker's offers lots of activities focused around apples, as well as a beer garden they added in 2014.

"We offer pick-your-own apples in September and October, and haul guests around the orchard with our tractor," Ecker says. "We also started throwing a large farm party, the Honeycrisp Hootenanny, in mid-October each year. It's a celebration of Honeycrisp apples, bluegrass music and beer."

Fresh Apples for All

At Helene's Hilltop Orchard in Merrill, the majority of the apples grown on the farm's 20 acres are sold retail through U-pick sales. Guests have the opportunity to stroll through the orchard in the fall and fill a bag with fresh apples. Afterward, they can stop by the farm's on-site commercial bakery for a delicious caramel apple walnut muffin, apple pie, apple dumpling or

apple turnover made from scratch with freshly harvested apples.

"About 80 percent of our apples go through U-pick," says Olivia Telschow, orchard manager, who runs the farm with her mother, Helene (the orchard's namesake), her husband and her three children. Her father, Dave, is now retired and continues to mentor her in production and care of the trees.

"The rest of the apples we harvest

for ourselves to use for our bakery products," Telschow adds. "It's extremely important to us to use our own products in baking. We bake thousands of apple pies that have about three pounds of sliced apples in them."

Telschow says that Helene's Orchard is involved in agritourism as well, and they hope to really educate consumers about apples by letting them pick their own.

51.5M

Pounds of apples Wisconsin's orchards produced in 2015



Wisconsin ranked
10th in the nation
for apple production
in 2015.

THE AVERAGE
AMERICAN EATS
ABOUT **65 APPLES**
EVERY YEAR.

Wisconsin is home to more than

300

commercial apple orchards.

APPLES ARE THE
MOST WIDELY
PLANTED TREE FRUIT
IN WISCONSIN.

Sources: USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Wisconsin Ag in the Classroom



“In the fall we have a cow train ride that goes through a corn path, along with a hay wagon ride, corn maze and barnyard play area filled with agricultural equipment for children to explore. The U-pick helps create an experience for visitors and gives them a better understanding of where the apples come from,” she says.

The orchard grows three types of apples for visitors to choose from – Cortland, Honeycrisp and McIntosh – as well as some experimental heritage trees that are used to create a robust, flavorful cider.

About half the country’s apple crop is made into apple products like juice, applesauce, jams and jellies, and pie filling.

“Those types of apples are in high demand from hard cider producers,” Telschow says.

She adds that they’re always working to please the consumer, too.

“We have a lot of experimental trees planted to see how they do,”

she says. “We’re always looking to what we can add, like maybe an early-season apple. Our apples aren’t really ripe until the middle of September, but people want it earlier.”

– Rachel Bertone

POPULAR APPLE VARIETIES GROWN IN WISCONSIN



MCINTOSH



GOLDEN DELICIOUS



GALA



HONEYCRISP



RED DELICIOUS





The historic Alice in Dairyland program celebrates 70 years in 2017.

Alice in DAIRYLAND

Wisconsin women compete to serve as an ag ambassador for the state

Celebrating its 70th anniversary in 2017, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection's Alice in Dairyland program promotes Wisconsin agriculture in a unique and impactful way.

Each year, women ages 21 and over from across the state compete to become the new Alice, a role that entails public relations skills as well as agriculture knowledge. The role also involves a year of public speaking engagements, television and radio appearances, social media marketing, and other activities designed to share information about Wisconsin's ag economy.

In addition, the chosen Alice has the opportunity to tour various Wisconsin agribusiness destinations during her tenure, which helps her learn more about the state's diverse industry.

"Alice gets to see a lot of what goes on behind the scenes in agriculture and learn from producers across the state, then share that message with

consumers on a very personal level," says Nicole Nohl, director of the 70th Alice Finals Committee. "She shares her journey by blogging and using social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, and she participates in media campaigns."

Alice in Dairyland Evolves

Established in 1948, Alice in Dairyland started out as a contest at the Wisconsin State Fair in which the winner was selected through a pageant process, then traveled across the U.S., promoting Wisconsin's dairy industry.

Today, the selection process is far more competitive and rigorous, and the winning Alice rarely travels outside the state. Not only does she focus on promoting the state's dairy products, she promotes Wisconsin's entire agriculture industry.

In order to apply, prospective Alices must have at least three years of marketing experience as well as experience conducting a public relations campaign, plus an interest in agriculture.

Crystal Siemers-Peterman, 70th Alice in Dairyland (left), with Ann O'Leary, 69th Alice in Dairyland

Once the initial applicants are narrowed down, the remaining candidates undergo several rounds of interviews and complete a writing assignment. Finalists have about six weeks to prepare for the finale events – three days packed with presentations, speeches and interviews. A selection panel votes on the winning Alice.

“It’s a very involved, intense process,” says Ti Gauger, program director of Alice in Dairyland. “There’s not a lot of on-the-job training, so we need the chosen Alice to be ready to begin almost immediately. She basically needs to be a media professional who is capable of doing the job before she starts, and she needs to have stamina. She will have an average of 400 event appearances over the course of the year, and she will see about 10,000 students during classroom visits.”

The newest Alice, Crystal Siemers-Peterman, was selected in May 2017. She is excited to continue the Alice in Dairyland tradition.

“Wisconsin agriculture is the core foundation of our state and its economy,” Siemers-Peterman says. “Agriculture continues to fuel our state with various careers and award-winning products. It’s important to have a cohesive message about agriculture, and I am confident that I can provide that through the visibility and exposure of Alice in Dairyland.”

Program Prepares Alices for Continued Success

Thanks to the experiences the program provides, Alices often go on to build successful careers. For example, the 1971 Alice, Marsha Lindsay, established a thriving advertising agency, while Dr. Mary Hopkins-Best, who was named the



1973 Alice, became the dean of the College of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Stout.

Additionally, 1982’s Alice, Dorothy Farrell, began working with Sargento Foods in 1983 and remained with the company until her retirement in 2016. Another example is Liz Henry, the 1986 Alice, who developed a Wisconsin-made bourbon with her husband under the brand J. Henry & Sons.

“Alices get a broad sense of everything Wisconsin agriculture has to offer, and she gets a lot of

valuable professional experience in several areas,” Gauger says. “She also meets and connects with so many people during her tenure, and Alice alumni are typically very helpful when it comes time for the current Alice’s next steps.”

– Jessica Walker Boehm

FIND MORE ONLINE

Find out more about Wisconsin’s dairy industry at Wlagriculture.com.

Giving Dairy a BOOST

Local dairy farmers join forces to use automatic milking robots



Bacon's Rolling Acres in Columbus is on a roll, using the latest in dairy technology robotic milking techniques. It's one of the many innovative Wisconsin dairy farms incorporating the most current technology know-how.

Owned by Ed and Julie Bacon, the 800-acre operation houses a sophisticated robotic dairy facility and the latest milking technology, helping the farm safely produce high-quality milk while making the cows comfortable.

Shortly after buying the farm from Ed's retired parents, the couple decided to invest in robotic milking. They met with Lely company consultants for solutions, eventually adding two Lely milking machines to their operation.

The Bacons have seen a sharp improvement in production and cow satisfaction. Their cows are able to come and go as they please, deciding for themselves when they want to be milked.

"It's a really ideal environment for the cows," Julie says. "They are able to make all of their own decisions."

Consideration for the cows'

comfort and quality of life was the driving factor in their decision to upgrade their farm, although they are reaping other benefits such as increased milk production and pregnancy rates, and decreased farm labor.

According to Bellana Putz, customer sales support manager for Lely's North American headquarters in Pella, Iowa, the Lely robots can tell the producer how much milk each cow is producing.

The cows wear collars that identify when they come in to milk, alert producers when they need to be bred, and monitor their grazing and activity. With so much data collected from the monitoring tags and robots, farmers can keep a closer eye on their cows.

"The collar helps us know when they're sick about a day before we'd otherwise notice," Julie says.

Ed adds, "Because we have so much information at our fingertips, we're able to monitor the cows' production and performance a lot better. Every day we have new information to keep up with them."

- Hannah Magnuson

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PROTECTING WISCONSIN



PHOTO BY LAURIE LAWRENCE, DATCP

Farmers lead statewide watershed conservation efforts

Wisconsin is serious about conservation, and its farmers are leading efforts across the state to ensure watersheds are protected. The state's top agricultural agency is also there to help.

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) developed the Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant program in an effort to improve the quality of the state's waterways. In the program's first two funding cycles, it awarded just under \$440,000 to 15 different producer-led groups.

"This funding is helping the agricultural industry by leading a positive change toward more conservation agriculture," says Rachel Rushmann, the program's director. "It helps to increase participation in on-farm research and the adoption of conservation practices, which will ultimately lead to improved soil and water quality through a more informed and engaged agricultural community on best management practices."

Working Together

One group at the helm of these producer-led initiatives is the Milwaukee River Watershed Clean Farm Families organization. It is made up of farmers in Ozaukee County – Jim Melichar, Bob Roden, Neal Maciejewski, Mike Paulus, Dave Brunnquell and Joe Roden – who wanted to do their part in conservation, as well as demonstrate that they care about the area's land and water as much as urban residents do. Together, these producers farm between 6,000 and



Cover crops help conserve moisture in the soil, prevent erosion and reduce the use of fertilizer.

7,000 acres, most of which are in the Milwaukee River Basin.

The group meets regularly and works with county land and water conservationists, agribusinesses, local land trusts, the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service. It organizes promotional and educational materials, and holds workshops and field days.

Field days are a way to communicate directly with producers about methods and technologies that help protect the soil and water resources. Farmers get the opportunity to learn about conservation tillage equipment, cover crop seed application and low-disturbance manure injection.

Thanks to the grant program, financial help is also available for qualifying applicants. This money can help offset some of the costs of cover crop seed planting or help pay for the rental of low-disturbance



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manure-injection equipment or no-till, strip-till, ridge-till or mulch-till equipment.

“We’ve seen that these groups can be really effective in helping to increase the adoption of conservation practices and farmer participation in their watersheds through farmer-to-farmer outreach and education,” Rushmann says.

Peninsula Pride

More than 40 farmers in Kewaunee and Door counties joined together to promote conservation efforts in their area. Peninsula Pride Farms is made up of farmers in northeastern Wisconsin and serves as an environmental stewardship coalition to bring together the agricultural community, university research and scientists to meet water quality challenges.

Peninsula Pride received a grant to work with farmers to protect groundwater through protective land management practices. Like the Milwaukee watershed group, they reach these producers through field days, the creation of educational materials and on-farm demonstrations.

“Farmers, by nature, are innovative problem solvers,” says Don Niles, a dairy farmer in Casco, who led the organization of the group. “We can be most effective by working toward solutions in a collaborative manner.”

Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant funds can assist farmers engaged in conservation methods, including paying for the rental of low-disturbance manure-injection equipment.



Planning for the Future

In fiscal 2016 and 2017, DATCP awarded grants from an appropriation of \$250,000, with the maximum award to any producer-led group of \$20,000 each fiscal year.

Its farmer groups range in size from five to over 50 members and funded projects include group startup costs, farmer-to-farmer outreach and education, incentive payments for practices, research on cover crops and nitrogen use efficiency, and recruitment and branding.

Rushmann says the groups track their successes through several metrics including number of hours spent on planning activities, number of acres of conservation

practices installed, completed work plans, number of soil samples taken, attendance at outreach events, increase in number of group participants and partnerships, number of farm assessments, number of new farms involved in the group, and more.

“This is a unique program that gives producers the opportunity to lead a change in their local communities,” Rushmann says. “They have and can accomplish great things to help improve everyone’s understanding of agriculture and protect our soil and water resources.”

To inquire about grant funding, visit datcp.wi.gov or contact rachel.rushmann@wisconsin.gov.

– Blair Thomas

“This is a unique program that gives producers the opportunity to lead a change in their local communities.”

Rachel Rushmann
Director, Producer-Led Watershed
Protection Grant Program

PRODUCER-LED WATERSHED PROTECTION GRANT PROGRAM

The program was developed by the Wisconsin DATCP in an effort to improve the quality of the state’s waterways.

\$20K APPLICANTS CAN BE AWARDED UP TO \$20,000 IN WATERSHED PROTECTION GRANT FUNDING.



WIDE WORLD OF FARMS

In a state known for dairy, farm families raise pigs and more

Wisconsin may be known as a dairy state, but pigs also play a major role in the state's agriculture industry. The history of pork production in the state runs deep.

The 1920 Census of Agriculture showed that 80 percent of all farms in the state had pigs, with a total of 1.6 million swine. Those animals not only provided meat for home consumption, but also provided the pork for sausage makers who fed the taste of the state's first- and second-generation Polish and German populations.

Today, there are fewer farms producing pork in the state, and

total swine numbers are lower than the peak years of the mid-1940s that saw more than 2.5 million pigs on Wisconsin farms. But the industry continues to thrive – contributing to the overall economy and creating thousands of jobs.

The state is home to a wide variety of swine operations, from small to large and all types of production. Some smaller and mid-sized producers continue to feed the considerable demand for market pigs from both local and national meat processors. Others focus on producing young pigs, which are moved to other farms after weaning until they reach

market weight.

Recently, there has been growing interest in Wisconsin as a place to raise pigs, notes Tammy Vaassen, executive vice president of the Wisconsin Pork Association (WPA). Ironically, it has to do with the fact that the state is not hog dense.

“Producers are able to maintain distance from one pig farm to another farm,” she says. “By doing that, we help to reduce the exposure to potential pig diseases that can transfer between closely spaced farms.”

While many pig farms have stayed small, other Wisconsin family farms have expanded



The Wolf family raises pigs at their operation, Wolf L&G Farms, in Lancaster. They also have a cow-calf herd and grow corn, soybeans and alfalfa.

to take advantage of technology and provide stability for future generations. Wolf L&G Farms in Lancaster is a prime example.

Commitment to Quality

Shannon and Melissa Wolf have been operating Wolf L&G Farms in

Lancaster for more than a decade, taking over management from Shannon's parents. With gradual, planned growth, the farm currently includes a 1,200 sow farrow-to-finish (birth to market) hog operation, and 300 beef cows, over 1,000 acres of corn, 300 acres of

soybeans and 200 acres of alfalfa.

The expansion has not only made room for the family; it has also been good for the surrounding area. In addition to family members, the Grant County farm also employs seven full-time people from within the local community.

Raising food is a responsibility the Wolfs take seriously. The farm is certified in the Pork Quality Assurance Plus® program and has hired an outside auditor to do a site assessment for their hog operation. This provides an extra set of eyes on ways they might improve animal care, which is key to the farm's success.

“We’re fortunate to represent a great group of farmers, like the Wolfs, who are dedicated to providing wholesome and delicious pork to consumers.”

Tammy Vaassen, *executive vice president of the Wisconsin Pork Association*

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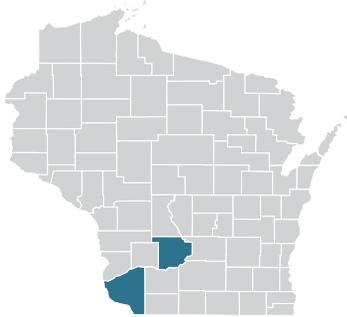


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Many cuts of pork are very lean, which means less fat and calories.



THE AVERAGE AMERICAN EATS **46 POUNDS** OF PORK EACH YEAR.



Grant and Sauk counties have the largest hog inventories in Wisconsin.

325K Wisconsin is home to about 325,000 hogs.

WISCONSIN IS THE TOP STATE FOR RAISING ORGANIC HOGS.



Sources: USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, USDA Census of Agriculture, Wisconsin Ag in the Classroom

PIG PHOTO: FOTOLIA/ANATOLII

Those efforts fit with their personal farming philosophy: Always be open to change. Don't cut corners. Produce the best, always.

Tech Drives Improvement

Technology helps them meet those goals. "Our hogs are housed inside so that we can control their environment," Melissa Wolf says. "We keep the pigs cool in the summer, and run heaters in the winter to protect them from harsh temperatures. We have an electronic feeding system in our sow barn, which helps us monitor how much they are eating and allows us to manage herd health."

The farm's field machinery is equipped with GPS and variable rate applications, which maximizes crop yields while following a nutrient management plan for manure and fertilizer applications. These technologies are also used during planting and harvest.

Technology like that being used by the Wolfs drives both economic and environmental sustainability,

Vaassen points out. Today, each pound of pork produced requires 41 percent less water and 78 percent less land than it did 50 years ago. In addition, the carbon footprint for each pound of pork produced has shrunk by 35 percent.

Cultivating Conversations

Consumer education requires ongoing efforts for agriculture producers. Working with WPA, Wolf conducts virtual tours in the farrowing (birthing) barn for elementary schools from around the state, focusing on the safe and humane practices used in modern production.

"There are fewer consumers and their families who have any connection to the farm, resulting in lack of understanding of farming practices," she says.

"We follow strict biosecurity rules on our farm to prevent disease introductions to the pigs, so we don't allow visitors into our barns. But through virtual technology, we are able to connect with hundreds

of students to bring the pigs and barn to their classroom."

WPA is looking for ways to expand that program, while also focusing on other areas of consumer education.

"We attend various consumer events throughout the year, sharing information on how pigs are raised today," Vaassen says. "We also talk about the nutritional benefits of pork, provide easy-to-prepare recipes, and remind consumers that pork chops and roasts can be cooked to 145 degrees Fahrenheit for a juicy, tender and safe meal. We're fortunate to represent a great group of farmers, like the Wolfs, who are dedicated to providing wholesome and delicious pork to consumers."

- Teree Caruthers

FIND MORE ONLINE

Read more stories about Wisconsin's family farmers at WIAgriculture.com.

IN A FIELD OF THEIR OWN

Wisconsin's potato industry is rooted in diversity and sustainability

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, potatoes remain America's favorite and most-consumed vegetable. That's good news for potato farmers in Wisconsin, which ranks as one of the top states for potato production, just behind Idaho and Washington.

Location Is Key

The state's mild climate and sandy soil make it the perfect place for a wide range of potato varieties. In fact, Wisconsin produces more varieties than any other state.

"The sandy soil that we have in this part of the state in combination with irrigation from our underground aquifer make for good potato growing," says Andy Diercks, a fourth-generation farmer who operates Coloma Farms in Coloma with his dad, Steve. "Potatoes are susceptible to lots of diseases and stresses, so the combination of irrigation and sandy soils allows us to manage those conditions as well as possible. Our proximity to the East Coast is also an advantage of growing in Wisconsin versus Idaho, Colorado and Washington."

The Diercks family owns 2,700 acres, on which they grow roughly 800 acres of potatoes, along with corn and soybeans. "We grow potatoes for three different supply chains – fresh for grocery stores and restaurants, frozen for fries and tater tots and chips," Diercks says. "We grow between 8 and 10 varieties of potatoes, including Norland red; Superior white; Alegria and Jelly yellow; and Goldrush and Silverton russet potatoes for the fresh market."

Dick Okray, owner of Okray Family Farms in Plover, also has a long family history in Wisconsin potato farming. His family began growing potatoes in 1905 as Joseph Okray & Bros. Co. Today, the farm grows 1,770 acres of russet, red and yellow varieties for the fresh retail market. Okray says in addition to Wisconsin's climate, soil and location, the availability of a skilled workforce has proven a major advantage for the company.

"We have the best and most extensive potato research team in North America, and we work cooperatively with them to grow food in the best and most efficient ways possible."

Andy Diercks, *Coloma Farms*



Okray Family Farms, located in Plover, has been growing potatoes for over a century.

WISCONSIN GROWERS OFFER A WIDE SELECTION OF POTATO VARIETIES, INCLUDING RUSSET, WHITE, RED, YELLOW, FINGERLING, AND BLUE AND PURPLE.

Sources: USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, Wisconsin Ag in the Classroom

Local farmers harvested

64,500

potato acres in 2016.



“We are blessed with long summer days, sandy soils and abundant water. It also helps to be close to our markets – Minneapolis, Chicago, Indianapolis and most Midwestern cities. But a talented workforce is essential. Our crew are seasoned veterans,” Okray says.

Research Yields Innovation

Another advantage of farming in Wisconsin is the access to research and development through the University of Wisconsin.

industry to help growers develop more sustainable farming practices.

“We educate our team on an ongoing basis, using the latest technology from UW-Madison and other collaborators, public and private,” Okray says. “Miles of windbreaks, low-till projects, woodland enhancement, as well as collaboration with the Wisconsin Institute for Sustainable Technology at UWSP, are just a few of our ongoing projects. Growing more with less is the ultimate goal.”

Wisconsin, thanks to scientists at the University of Wisconsin, is considered a worldwide leader in potato research and developing new, better potato varieties.

“I probably wouldn’t still be farming were it not for the relationship our farm and our grower association (Wisconsin Potato and Vegetable Growers Association) has with the University of Wisconsin-Madison,” Diercks says. “We have the best and most extensive potato research team in North America, and we work cooperatively with them to grow food in the best and most efficient ways possible.”

Another resource for growers, the Peninsular Agricultural Research Station in Sturgeon Bay, serves as a field laboratory for vegetable research. The station is also home to the NRSP-6 US Potato Genebank, which maintains the world’s largest collection of wild and cultivated potato species. The facility collects, classifies, evaluates and distributes some 5,000 samples of potato species.

The Wisconsin Institute for Sustainable Technology at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point works with the potato

Dierck says Wisconsin potato farmers understand the importance of sustainability.

“All the potato growers in Wisconsin are family farms, and we all want to provide our children and grandchildren the opportunity to care for our farms the way we have. We want them to have the tools and resources to make better choices than we can make now. That requires constantly working with other growers, researchers and partners, along with new technology and practices to grow food better,” he says.

The goal, he adds, is to grow food with zero impact on the environment, both on and around the farm, “because we have a responsibility to leave our little patch of Earth the same or better than when we started farming it.”

– Tere Caruthers

FIND MORE ONLINE

Explore the state’s seed potato industry at Wlagriculture.com.

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Wisconsin ranks first in the nation in the production of green beans for processing, beets for canning and cabbage for kraut. We rank second in the nation in the production of carrots and peas for processing and third in the production of potatoes, sweet corn and cucumbers for pickles; and are a top-ten producer of onions. Specialty crop production and processing account for \$6.4 billion in annual economic activity and nearly 35,000 Wisconsin jobs!



**WISCONSIN
POTATOES**

wisconsinpotatoes.com



POULTRY

POWERHOUSE

Poultry processors boost the state's thriving chicken, turkey industries

Wisconsin is where key poultry businesses find the resources necessary for future growth and success. Leading the way are companies like Jennie-O Turkey Store, a recognized leader in turkey processing with a plant located in Barron; Brakebush Brothers Inc., a Westfield processor of value-added chicken products; and Gold'n Plump, a business unit of Pilgrim's with a chicken processing plant in Arcadia.

By following the forward-thinking vision of their founders, and utilizing local resources and innovative strategy, these businesses have found a unique advantage: the ability to produce high-quality products while advancing the community at large, a win-win all around.

The People Factor

"Jennie-O Turkey Store supports local farmers by purchasing 6.2 million bushels of corn and nearly 83,000 tons of soybean

meal used to produce our turkey feed. As the largest employer in northwestern Wisconsin, we employ approximately 1,800 people in the area," says Brent Koosmann, Jennie-O's director of marketing.

These diverse team members are not only active contributors within the company, but in their communities as well. Jennie-O takes pride in giving back to the community, a core value defining how it operates today.

"It is our belief that by supporting our local communities through donations and participation, we are helping to build a stronger and successful future for all," Koosmann says.

This support includes investing in local schools, food help, and community and civic organizations. In 2016, Jennie-O made 185 donations to nonprofit organizations in Wisconsin, including around 18,000 pounds of product for hunger relief efforts.

As the largest employer in Marquette



County and a major employer within a 50-mile radius that spans 11 counties, Brakebush provides jobs to over 900 employees in Westfield.

Carl Brakebush, chairman of the board, explains that one of the company's greatest assets is "the people aspect, including the different cultures and work ethic of our Wisconsin citizens. A lot of chicken companies are being purchased by foreign companies, but we are proud to be U.S. family-owned and -operated."

Further exemplifying this, Brakebush is expanding and adding 90,000 square feet to its Westfield facility, with completion expected in November 2017.

"We are growing and planning to hire more people at Westfield," adds Steve Ross, marketing manager. "When Brakebush started, it started on relationships, and it continues that way 90 years later."

The Innovation Factor

Continuing the path set by its founding visionaries, innovation begets tradition at Jennie-O and Brakebush.

For Jennie-O, there's always been a strong commitment to leadership in innovation, and it's a process that involves the entire team.

However, the innovation process for both companies goes beyond product development and marketing. It also includes continuous improvements at farms and plants. Brakebush's state-of-the-art computerized poultry processing plants hold multiple production lines with impressive capacities ranging from 5,000 to over 12,000 pounds per hour.

Additionally, recent investments into two new facilities, along with the well-established Brakebush Transportation truck fleet, has allowed the company to meet the ever-changing needs of its customers.

The Quality Factor

In recent years, the poultry industry has been hit by a new definition of quality from consumers who are interested in hot-button issues like animal welfare.

Recognizing this important trend, some of the chicken Brakebush purchases is raised without antibiotics and is American Humane Certified™.

Similarly, Jennie-O's and Gold'n Plump's experienced production and veterinary teams follow strict measures to ensure the optimum health of their flocks.

All things considered, looking out for the best interests of customers and their communities isn't a requirement, but for Wisconsin's poultry companies, it's just part of the package.

— Keri Ann Beazell

FIND MORE ONLINE

Discover more about the state's important agribusinesses at WIAgriculture.com.

54.1M Chickens raised for meat in Wisconsin in 2016



IN 2016, THE STATE PRODUCED

227.2

MILLION POUNDS OF BROILER MEAT.

Turkeys raised today produce **twice** as much meat with half as much feed compared to the 1930s.



WISCONSIN RANKS 19TH IN THE U.S. FOR BROILER PRODUCTION.

Sources: USDA Poultry - Production and Value (2016 Summary), 2016 Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics Bulletin, USDA Census of Agriculture, FarmersFeedUs.org

All About Organics

MOSES conference encourages organic farming, sustainability

It's only natural that one of the nation's largest organic events is held in Wisconsin every year. After all, the state is one of the leaders in organic production and sales.

The MOSES Organic Farming Conference, hosted by the nonprofit organization Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service, is a three-day event held annually in La Crosse to promote organic and sustainable agriculture, providing education, resources, and expertise.

More than 170 vendors attracted thousands of people in February 2017 to learn about organic farming techniques. The conference offered more than 60 workshops, two keynote speakers and a two-floor exhibit hall. Workshop topics covered information about field crops, livestock, soil health and more. Plus, organically grown food was featured.

The conference is highly

anticipated and supported by Wisconsin's diverse organic community, including members of the Wisconsin Organics Advisory Council (WOAC), a 12-member panel appointed by the State Secretary of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. It provides guidance to the Secretary, the Governor, the Legislature and other state agencies on actions that can be taken to further Wisconsin's industry.

"The WOAC brings together public and private resources to promote Wisconsin's national leadership position in organic agriculture," says Angie Sullivan, organics, grazing and specialty crop specialist with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. She works closely with Wisconsin's organics community, including members of the council.

"The advisory council supports

organic production, processing and purchasing opportunities for Wisconsin farmers, processors and consumers," she continues. "Many of the council's members attend the conference, and they're always excited, proud and honored to have the largest organic farming conference in the country held right here in the state."

Council members offer extensive knowledge of all things organic. One example is Harriet Behar, who is the organic specialist for MOSES and also on the National Organic Standards Board. She has an expansive knowledge of organics, thanks to 16 years as an organic inspector, 30-plus years as an organic grower and work with national coalitions.

Learn more about the conference at mosesorganic.org.

—Brittany Stovall



170 More than 170 vendors attracted thousands to the MOSES Organic Farming Conference in 2017.

Workshop topics covered field crops, livestock, specialty crops, soil health, business strategies and more.

SAVE THE DATE:
THE 2018 CONFERENCE WILL TAKE PLACE FEB. 22-24 AT LA CROSSE CENTER.



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL D. TEDESCO

BOUNTIFUL BISON

NorthStar bison farm provides
tasty, healthy bison meat for all



Thousands of bison roam on farms across Wisconsin, providing consumers with flavorful, healthy meat, which fans describe as slightly sweet and deliciously tender.

One such farm, NorthStar Bison, offers grass-fed bison out of Rice Lake. Lee and Mary Graese started their bison adventure in 1994, growing it into the family operation it is today with their then-young children, Renee, Sean, Marielle and Lexi.

Both husband and wife grew

up on farms and had no interest in returning to their agricultural roots. Instead, they pursued health-focused careers in dietetics and exercise.

However, Lee Graese eventually felt a calling to own a couple of bison. It was then that the two bought their first bison pair named Billy and Sarah.

“Twenty years later, NorthStar Bison has grown to consist of a few thousand acres, a processing plant, approximately 2,000 head of bison and more,” says son Sean Graese, who helps with the farm. He lives

with his wife, Sami, only a few miles down the road.

“We also have an online store that markets our grass-finished bison meat, along with locally grown, grass-fed beef, lamb and goat, as well as pastured chicken, turkey, pork, rabbit and elk,” he adds. “A hobby out of control, as Dad would call it.”

Bison Benefits

According to the Wisconsin Bison Producers Association, there are nearly 100 members growing bison

NorthStar Bison, a farm located in Rice Lake, grows grass-fed bison meat. The family-owned farm is operated by Sean Graese (left) and his family.

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Wisconsin Pork Association
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Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association
wisconsinpotatoes.com

Wisconsin State Fair Park
wistatefair.com

Wisconsin Technical College System
wistechcolleges.org

World Dairy Expo
worlddairyexpo.com

statewide. At least a dozen dining establishments serve bison meat as burgers, short ribs and more.

Not only is the meat rich in flavor, but there are lots of nutritional benefits to eating bison. It's nutritionally dense, a great source of zinc, niacin, iron, vitamin B6 and selenium, and lower in saturated fat.

NorthStar bison are grass-fed, with the company motto saying it's "good for land, good for the animals and good for people." Grass-fed meat translates into richer flavor and is said to contain more omega-3 fatty acids as well, along with having other health and taste benefits. The farm also focuses on raising animals in a stress-free environment and "field harvests" the bison, allowing them to leisurely graze the land right up to the moment they are slaughtered.

An interesting fact, Lee Graese says, is that bison as a species have "nearly zero purposeful genetic narrowing or selection for specific traits such as loin size, tenderness or certain types of muscling."

"If we were to remove the ear tags from our animals and pull the fence, our bison would be self-sufficient or essentially 'wild' for all intents and purposes," he adds. "That is a fantastic quality that, as an industry, we are committed to maintaining. But that also creates a bug in attempting to supply restaurants with their '9-ounce Friday Night Steak Special,' for example. Bison are all shapes and sizes, which is great, but difficult to manage."

Though the bison industry is fairly small compared to other ag sectors, it's growing, Graese notes.

"Demand has really caught on and has far surpassed supply," he says.

- Brittany Stovall

Top: NorthStar Bison meat is prepared at its processing plant.



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The American bison is also commonly known by the name American buffalo, but they are different. A bison has typical cow horns. In buffalo, they are huge, sweeping arcs.

ON GUARD

DATCP Weights and Measures team protects consumers at the pump and more



From the price and quality of fuel at gas stations to the price and quantity of food in the grocery checkout line, the Bureau of Weights and Measures at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection has customers covered.

Bureau inspectors play an important role in making sure customers receive what has been advertised. They regularly monitor the accuracy of gas pumps, price scanners, scales and package weights across the state. Inspectors also regulate fuel quality and hazardous material storage tanks.

“The mission is to ensure a safe and fair marketplace where consumers get what they pay for and businesses can compete fairly,” Bureau Director Judy Cardin says.

The team’s work helps every consumer in Wisconsin save money, though it may not always

be apparent that the team is out there hitting the pavement.

For example, at gas pumps, “We’re checking to make sure that the gallon of fuel registering on the dispenser is actually what the consumer is receiving. We’re sampling the fuel to see if it meets quality standards,” Cardin says.

The safety of dispensers and storage tanks is also checked, with the team making sure all measures are in place to prevent leaks and meet fire safety requirements.

Nearly 100 inspectors at the state and city level perform this work to carry out the weights and measures, fuel quality, and storage tank programs.

In 2016, weights and measures inspectors conducted 221,420 inspections at 6,287 business locations, where they measured amounts and price accuracy.

“We measured 5,743 samples

of fuel to make sure they met national standards for fuel quality,” Cardin says.

Of those, 98.8 percent of the samples were compliant. “Our state measures very well against other states in the country, because we have a very thorough and comprehensive inspection program,” Cardin adds.

Customers at gas pumps in Wisconsin can feel confident they are getting the amount of fuel, or even more, that they purchased. Of 44,773 grades of fuel samples tested in 2016, a vast majority was found to contain more gas than advertised for every gallon purchased.

“Customers were either charged accurately or actually given more than indicated 99.6 percent of the time,” Cardin says.

– Brittany Stovall



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