

\$1 Million Initiative Will Support Rural Entrepreneurs

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<http://newiproggressive.com/images/stories/S5/small-business-owner-m-s5.jpg>



WEDC, UW-Madison Division of Extension will collaborate to assist rural start-ups

MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers today announced a \$1 million initiative led by the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison) Division of Extension and the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) to provide much-needed resources, support, and technical assistance to rural entrepreneurs across the state. Through the initiative announced by Gov. Evers today, UW-Madison Division of Extension will work closely with WEDC and other partners across the state to develop the initiative to provide training, technical assistance, and legal and financial advice to rural entrepreneurs in need of support to start a business or bolster their existing business.



“The success of our rural communities is vital to the success of our entire state, but we know rural entrepreneurs face gaps in access to the resources and technical assistance they may need to reach their goals,” said Gov. Evers. “I’m proud to be investing in creating this critically important collaboration between WEDC and Extension to continue investing in the ingenuity, entrepreneurship, and prosperity of folks who call our rural communities home.”

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“We know that in Wisconsin great ideas can come from anywhere,” said WEDC Secretary and CEO Missy Hughes. “Yet rural entrepreneurs often lack the access to capital and network of knowledge of other entrepreneurs. Our aim is to make sure everyone in our state has the chance to turn their great ideas into reality.”

“We know that rural communities and economies can thrive when local ideas get the opportunity to grow into established businesses,” said UW-Madison Extension Dean and Director Karl Martin. “We are working with entrepreneurs and industries right in their own communities to leverage the knowledge and talent all around them. This is an exciting opportunity to focus on the kinds of businesses that can benefit from training and guidance to bring innovation and action to rural areas.”

Last month, WEDC and the UW-Madison Division of Extension also [announced](#) five rural communities were chosen to participate in the Community Economic Analysis for Rural Wisconsin Communities pilot program, which is funded by a \$150,000 Capacity Building Grant from WEDC and provides resources for rural communities to engage in comprehensive economic development planning for long-term success.

Both initiatives build on Gov. Evers’ previous and ongoing investments in rural economic development and the success of Wisconsin’s rural communities. In his 2020 State of the State address, Gov. Evers announced the creation of the [Wisconsin Office of Rural Prosperity](#) at WEDC to provide assistance to Wisconsinites navigating state programs and resources tailored to rural communities, businesses, and workers. During the address, the governor also [announced](#)

the creation of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Rural Prosperity, which was comprised of community leaders that worked to solicit feedback and ideas from more than 500 Wisconsinites from across the state. The Commission [released](#)

their report in December 2020 with 10 overarching recommendations for achieving rural prosperity, including investing in the UW-Madison Division of Extension and the University of Wisconsin System to bolster the Wisconsin Idea and support regional solutions.



Also aligned with the Commission’s recommendations, Gov. Evers has committed more than \$15 million to Wisconsin’s meat processors. Earlier this year, Gov. Evers announced up to \$5 million in the [Meat Talent Development program](#) to help attract students to meat careers,

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provide financial support to students in Wisconsin meat processing training programs, support program development, and connect the meat processing industry with potential employees. And in May, he announced the creation of the

[Meat and Poultry Supply Chain Resiliency Grant Program](#)

, investing up to \$10 million in the program to continue to grow Wisconsin's meat processing industry and improve the long-term viability of the state's livestock industry. Additionally, the 2021-23 biennial budget included \$200,000 in each year of the biennium for

[Meat Processor Infrastructure Grants](#)

and increased annual funding for the

[Dairy Processor Grant Program](#)

from \$200,000 to \$400,000 to provide additional support to Wisconsin's dairy industry.

Gov. Evers has also invested hundreds of millions of dollars in state and federal funds in infrastructure projects to connect rural communities to high-speed internet and improve thousands of miles of highways and local roads. Additionally, Gov. Evers has provided \$128 million in federal funds for the [Workforce Innovation Grant Program](#) to encourage local leaders, employers, and organizations, including those in rural communities across the state, to develop leading-edge, long-term solutions to the workforce challenges facing the state. Further, he has committed \$100 million for the

[Main Street Bounceback Grant Program](#)

, which has already helped more than 6,200 small businesses and nonprofits across all 72 Wisconsin counties move or expand into vacant storefronts.

And after years of Republican disinvestments in education, Gov. Evers has worked to make historic investments in education at every level by investing in public schools and in special education, school mental health, sparsity aid, and school transportation costs, including a [recent announcement](#)

of \$90 million to support school-based mental health services and to meet staffing needs, keep classroom sizes small, and provide other direct classroom support. This is all in addition to his efforts to expand mental health services for farmers and farm families, support childcare and early education for working families, and invest in apprenticeship and career pathways for family supporting jobs—all of which aligns with the work and recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Rural Prosperity to ensure Wisconsin's rural communities continue to grow and succeed for years to come.