

Governor Highlights Farmer Wellness, Promotes Mental Health Initiatives

Written by GOV Press Wisconsin

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<http://newiproggressive.com/images/stories/S5/farm-family-s450.jpg>



We ensure farmers, farm families, and rural communities have access to mental and behavioral health services that meaningfully address the unique personal and professional challenges they face, says Gov. Evers.

MADISON — Last week, Gov. Tony Evers, together with Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) Secretary Randy Romanski, in celebration of Mental Health Awareness Month and the [Year of Mental Health](#), visited the Valley Springs Farm Bed and Breakfast in Reedsburg. During their visit, the governor and secretary toured the farm with owners Dorothy and Don Harms and held a roundtable discussion with the Farmer Angel Network, a group dedicated to building strong rural communities by providing education, resources, and fellowship with a focus on mental wellness and suicide prevention in Sauk County.



“As one of our state’s largest industries and a backbone of our economy, it is critical that we ensure farmers, farm families, and rural communities have access to mental and behavioral health services that meaningfully address the unique personal and professional challenges

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they face,” said Gov. Evers. “We are grateful for organizations like the Farmer Angel Network for the work they do, but they can’t do it alone. I urge the Legislature to join me in supporting the Farm Center and all their good work in our budget, and I look forward to continuing to work together for the health and wellness of farmers and farm families across our state.”

Since the mid-1980s, the Wisconsin Farm Center has provided farmers with a variety of services, including financial consulting, transition planning, conflict mediation, veterinary analysis, and veteran farmer assistance. The Center also connects farmers to mental health resources through several initiatives, including programs such as a 24/7 Farmer Wellness Helpline, tele-counseling services, counseling vouchers, online farmer support groups, Rural Realities podcast, and other new educational programs. These programs were funded through Gov. Evers’ 2019-21 and 2021-23 biennial budgets, and the governor’s 2023-25 biennial budget continues this work by providing \$100,000 annually to support these important services for farmers and their families.

The governor’s budget proposal also included a provision to create regional farmer support agents in Northwest and Northeast Wisconsin to expand the reach of the Farm Center’s core financial services and to assist farmers in accessing mental health support. Unfortunately, last week, the Joint Committee on Finance met for the first executive session of the budget process, and Republican committee members voted to remove [more than 540 provisions](#) from the governor’s budget, including the governor’s proposal to provide additional regional farmer support through the Farm Center.

“Under the governor’s leadership, the DATCP Farm Center has continued to strengthen our partnerships with industry and mental health providers,” said DATCP Secretary Romanski. “If you or someone you know needs a welcoming ear to talk to, please call the 24/7 Wisconsin Farmer Wellness Helpline at (888) 901-2558. This line is designed to provide farmers and their families access to services that can help as they navigate life’s challenges.”

“Depression, anxiety, and subsequent mental health struggles often are taboo topics, and farm families are unfamiliar with or do not have the means to access the health care needed,” said Dorothy Harms. “This is why the Farmer Angel Network was born. We work to build strong rural communities that support agriculture by providing education, resources, and fellowship with a focus on mental health. Although we are a small group, the Farmer Angel Network has become a voice for farmers, shining a spotlight on the need for continued support of mental wellness access for farm families across the country. Don and I are glad we could host this important forum with Gov. Evers and DATCP Secretary Romanski to advocate for continued state funding of mental health resources for Wisconsin farmers.”

For more information about the Farm Center, visit farmcenter.wi.gov or contact the Farm Center at (800) 942-2474 or farmcenter@wisconsin.gov.

If you or someone you know is struggling or needs support now, help is available. The [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) provides free, confidential support to anyone of any age experiencing a crisis. Call or text 9-8-8 for help or use the chat feature at

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988lifeline.org

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