

Big Agenda for Small Farms

Posted on Aug 19, Posted by [Jeff Smith, State Senator District 31](#) Category [Wisconsin](#)



Sen. Jeff Smith writes about the ways we can support our state's family farms and preserve Wisconsin's status as an agricultural leader in the country.

EAU CLAIRE, WI - When it comes to farming, one thing is certain – it connects us all. Many of us in western Wisconsin can trace our roots to farming. But even if we've personally lost a physical connection to the family farm, all Wisconsin residents have an obvious connection to Wisconsin's agricultural heritage.

Many Wisconsinites share a romanticized view of our state's family farms: the rooster crowing, cows mooing and machinery running through the field. The same sounds and smells that we remember connects us all to the farm.

But, let's face it, one of the main reasons many Wisconsinites are connected to the state's farms is the need to eat. We must remember farming is a vital economic driver for the state, contributing \$104.8 billion to our state's economy every year. Wisconsin has a significant role in agricultural production within the country and even the world. In fact, Wisconsin exported more than \$3.3 billion of agricultural products to 151 different countries in 2019, according to

the [Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protections \(DATCP\)](#) . It's also worth noting the agricultural industry's contribution to Wisconsin's workforce, which makes up 11.8% of our state's employment.



To preserve Wisconsin's status as an agricultural leader in the country, it's our job as elected officials to support our family farms. If our rural communities are to survive, our small family farms must survive. It's as simple as that.

This session, as the Ranking Member on the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Revenue and Financial Institutions, I introduced 9 bills and voted in favor of legislation to support Wisconsin's family farms and promote rural prosperity throughout our state. These bills strengthen Wisconsin's agricultural industry by encouraging residents to start farming, establishing sustainable farming practices, developing the state's hemp program and more. Even the development of the "Better Broadband" bill package I introduced in January had farmers in mind to better connect them to agricultural experts and consumers.

These legislative efforts will support our farmers and sustain Wisconsin's role of being America's Dairyland, but there's still more we can and should do.

Due to the lack of action by the Majority Party, Governor Tony Evers called a special session on agriculture in January to pass legislation to further support our farmers by creating a Small Farm Diversity grant program; bolstering the Farm-to-School program; promoting practices to diversify farm operations; providing additional mental health services; and much more.

Since then, of course, everything changed with the COVID-19 pandemic overshadowing all that we do.

Fortunately, Governor Evers allocated \$50 million of the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act money to create the Wisconsin Farm Support Program to provide direct payments to Wisconsin farmers who have faced financial challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. From the first round of Farm Support Program applications, which

happened in June, 11,884 Wisconsin farmers received a \$3,500 award, amounting to \$41.6 million. In counties within the 31st Senate District alone, 1,390 farmers received a Farm Support Program award, which came to a total of \$4.8 million.



Last week, the Department of Revenue (DOR) and DATCP announced a second application period to distribute the \$8.4 million in funding still remaining for the Wisconsin Farm Support Program. The second round of grant applications are now being accepted until midnight, August 24th. Residents who did not receive a payment in the first application round and who have a gross income from farming between \$10,000 and \$5 million are eligible. Gross income does not mean profit and is limited to sales. Payments are expected to be made by DOR in mid-September.

Beyond these government efforts, we all can do our part in supporting our state's agriculture industry by buying local. Insist on Wisconsin farm products. Dairy products produced in Wisconsin are universally accepted as the highest quality in the world. The produce you can get from local farms is the freshest and best tasting by far. Support your neighbors who feed the world. We need them. We need each other.

Wisconsin residents interested in the Wisconsin Farm Support Program should visit [Revenue.wi.gov](https://revenue.wi.gov).

Tags: Untagged