

Tech transforming the Midwest's most important industries

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Technology is transforming some of the Midwest's most important industries, driving change in manufacturing and agriculture.

So said a panel of experts who spoke at the Wisconsin Entrepreneurs Conference yesterday in Madison on how these sectors and others are shaking things up in the Rust Belt.

Brian Waller, head of the Technology Association of Iowa, has seen manufacturers in his home state digitizing their manufacturing floors, hiring more IT specialists and emphasizing cybersecurity.

For example, Well's Blue Bunny Ice Cream of La Mars, Iowa, is an ice cream manufacturer that now defines itself by its technology.

"They see themselves as a technology company," Waller said. "They've harnessed business decisions with real-life data and dashboards... What you're seeing is manufacturers thinking differently, they're hiring differently."

The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation's head of sector strategy development, Kelly Armstrong, notes that Wisconsin's strengths lie in water tech, food and beverage, and aerospace and aviation.

"What we're seeing across the board is an uptick in larger manufacturers that are making these investments," she said, adding that is especially true with OEMs — original equipment manufacturers — that are pushing technological changes down through the supply chain.

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