

# Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation: Statement on Governor Evers' state budget proposal

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MADISON – Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation President Jim Holte issued the following statement regarding Gov. Tony Evers' budget proposal.

“Gov. Evers' budget proposal highlighted several items that impact Wisconsin's farmers and rural communities.

In his inaugural address earlier this year, Gov. Evers declared it the year of 'clean water'. Our farmers know that every year is dedicated to being good stewards of their land and water resources. Farmers live on the land they work and understand clean water is a critical resource for families, livestock, crops and surrounding rural communities.

Wisconsin Farm Bureau is happy to see the governor prioritize funding for farmers in northeast Wisconsin's karst areas to assist them to implement the new targeted performance standards. For farmers to implement best management practices they require the correct tools and technology as well as education and outreach. Providing \$730,000 each year of the budget will help to start applying these practices.

The Producer-Led Watershed grants saw an increase in funding for grant allocations up to \$750,000 each year. Additional funds were also recommended to increase funding for nutrient management cost-sharing for farmers.

Roads, bridges and highways are an important foundation to our state's \$88 billion

agricultural industry. Increased funding to towns and counties for infrastructure is crucial to keep our rural communities functioning. The governor's proposal for an \$0.08 cent increase in gas tax in addition to indexing should generate a sizeable increase in revenue for transportation. However, the proposal provides less than \$2 million dollars in added funding during the biennium for the Local Road Improvement Program. This does not provide the significant investment in rural Wisconsin's infrastructure that it so desperately needs.

The Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection received some increases in program funding. Programs such as the Farm-to-School Grant Program and Buy Local, Buy Wisconsin Grant Program which is aimed at helping support efforts to increase the sale of Wisconsin-grown or produced food products were among them. Much needed attention was also given to mental health support for farmers. The additional funds to the Farm Center at DATCP are welcomed to continue to provide necessary services, especially during a downturned agricultural economy.

Wisconsin's hemp industry has the potential to be a great emerging opportunity for farmers. We appreciate Gov. Evers' proposal that provides funding for the hemp program along with three positions to assist in the licensing, registration and testing of hemp. This funding is needed to give hemp the support it needs to be a successful commodity for Wisconsin's farmers.

Wisconsin is America's Dairyland and we must continue to invest in our dairy industry. The \$200,000 annual funding for the Wisconsin Initiative for Dairy Exports and the grants for small dairy processors will help our specialty cheese industry. To continue leading at the forefront of the dairy industry, Wisconsin needs a fresh, innovative approach. We hope that as discussions continue on the budget, a proposal is considered for a UW Dairy Innovation Hub. By combining technology with innovative solutions to help meet the future needs for dairy, we can't afford to not invest in this critical proposal for the future.

Gov. Evers' budget proposal focused heavily on changes to Wisconsin's education system. We appreciate the effort to "improve access to research and expertise for farmers, individuals and local governments" by increasing the county-based UW-Extension agricultural positions by 20 full-time employees. However, Wisconsin Farm Bureau would like to prioritize the positions of integrated specialist roles which would hold a joint appointment between UW-Madison College of Agricultural and Life Sciences and UW-Extension. These specialists perform and teach the very

specialized research that is essential to Wisconsin farmers.

While there were numerous things that we were pleased to see Gov. Evers include in his budget proposal, we want to be sure that our state's struggling agriculture sector is not forgotten as budget discussions progress.

We understand that this is a first-step in a multi-step process and look forward to working with state legislators as they deliberate on the 2019-20 biennial budget.”