

Wisconsin Farmers Union: Praises funding for meat talent development efforts

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CHIPPEWA FALLS — An announcement by the Governor's office and the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection today brings welcome news for Wisconsin farmers and meat processors who have suffered from a shortage of laborers in the processing sector.

Governor Evers announced this morning the allocation of up to \$5 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for meat talent development assistance. According to a release from the Governor's office, the funding "will be used to attract and provide financial support to students in Wisconsin meat processing training programs, as well as support program development and connect the meat processing industry with potential employees."

This effort follows through on support that was proposed in Gov. Evers' 2021-2023 budget. During the budget process, \$200,000 was designated for a Meat Processor Grant Program, as well as four new meat inspector positions at DATCP, but funding was not made available to improve upon workforce challenges.

"There is a severe shortage of skilled butchers, which is why this investment in Wisconsin's meat processing industry is so important," Wisconsin Farmers Union President (WFU) Darin Von Ruden said. "While the priorities passed in the budget are appreciated, this additional funding addresses the longer-term issues of labor recruitment, training, and retention. We're grateful to the Evers administration for continuing to build on their commitment to investing in Wisconsin farmers and rural communities through the ongoing efforts around meat processing."

Von Ruden noted the announcement is timely, given WFU's recent release of a [Meat Processing Report](#) that called for increased funding to train the next generation of meat processors. WFU members identified Meat Processing Infrastructure as a Special Order of Business for the family farm organization in both 2020 and 2021.

“Small processors, in particular, have struggled to find skilled workers who can adapt to different roles and understand the unique cutting needs of a range of different carcasses from regional producers,” he said. “The ability for Wisconsin farmers to direct-market their animals — an avenue that opens the door to fairer prices — hinges on our small and mid-scale meat processors in Wisconsin having the labor they need to operate at full capacity and reach their full potential.”

Wisconsin Farmers Union, a member-driven organization, is committed to enhancing the quality of life for family farmers, rural communities, and all people through educational opportunities, cooperative endeavors, and civic engagement. Learn more at www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com.