

Wisconsin Farmers Union: Recognizes rural leaders at 91st annual convention

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CHIPPEWA FALLS - The 91st annual Wisconsin Farmers Union State Convention, which drew 200 attendees virtually on January 29th, recognized members for their dedication to rural Wisconsin.

“As a grassroots organization, WFU’s strength resides in the leadership and determination of members such as these,” said WFU President Darin Von Ruden. “Their stories remind us that though we faced challenges in 2021, there was also a lot of good happening around the countryside.”

FRIEND OF THE FAMILY FARMER

Compeer Financial was named a Friend of the Family Farmer, with special recognition to Paul Dietmann. The award recognizes those who have gone above and beyond in efforts on behalf of family farmers and rural communities.

Dietmann is Senior Focused Lending Specialist at Compeer, a member-owned rural lending cooperative and Farm Credit System institution serving the upper Midwest. He co-leads Compeer’s Emerging Markets Program, which provides loans and business planning assistance to farmers who market products through local food systems.

“We are grateful to Compeer and to Paul for the important work being done to empower family farmers to achieve their dreams,” Von Ruden said. “From his work through the years in other roles to his current efforts with Compeer, Paul has been a steady and thoughtful champion for family farmers and rural communities.”

Dietmann, who resides in Prairie du Sac, previously spent 16 years with the State of Wisconsin, first as a county agricultural agent with the University of Wisconsin-Extension, then as director of the Wisconsin Farm Center, which is the farmers' assistance program in the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP), and finally as Wisconsin's Deputy Secretary of Agriculture. He is co-author of the books *Fearless Farm Finances: Farm Financial Management Demystified* and *Financial Risk Management for Specialty Crop Farmers*, and author of *Turning Grain Into Dough: Farm Financial Management for Organic Grain and Crop Rotation*.

Von Ruden voiced appreciation for Dietmann's participation in WFU's "meat-ing" series on meat processing, which helped engage various stakeholders around the need to invest in infrastructure and training in the industry.

BUILDERS AWARD

The Builders Award, given for outstanding commitment to building Farmers Union through county involvement, leadership development and member recruitment, went to Kirsten Jurcek of Jefferson.

"Kirsten has left an incredible mark on her community and lifts up Farmers Union in so many ways," said WFU Membership Engagement Director Kirsten Slaughter. "In addition to farming and leading a grazing network, she serves as an inspiring leader in Farmers Union."

In her leadership role with the Kenosha-Jefferson-Racine-Walworth Farmers Union, Jurcek engages young farmers, collaborates with other organizations, and has kept her chapter engaged and thriving, even through the pandemic.

Jurcek runs Brattset Family Farm, a second-generation 290-acre farm focused on grass fed and finished beef. She worked as a hydrogeologist for more than a decade before moving back to her family farm and shifting her focus to raising her kids and a grass-fed beef herd. Jurcek is a grazing educator with Glacierland RC&D, a role in which she has shared her knowledge and connected other farmers through trainings and pasture walks, including some hosted in partnership with WFU.

EMERGING LEADER AWARD

This is the second year that WFU presented a special Emerging Leader award to an

individual who has ignited energy and engagement in WFU. This year's Emerging Leader is Kristy Allen, owner and founder of The Beez Kneez, a beekeeping business based on her Trade River Ranch near Granstburg.

"As the president of the Polk-Burnett Farmers Union, Kristy has been a very thoughtful, powerful voice in the discussion around an Iowa-based hog corporation seeking to permit a 26,000 hog operation in the St. Croix River Valley," Von Ruden said. "Kristy has helped members engage with officials about the need to protect what they love about living and farming in the region. She has helped organize rallies, postcard campaigns, public testimony, and media coverage. We know these issues aren't easy ones to traverse, but Kristy has done an incredible job of bringing many voices into the conversation."

Additionally, Allen guided the chapter through the early stages of developing the St Croix River Valley Food Alliance, which seeks to strengthen and promote a thriving, resilient, and equitable local food economy. She has also enhanced communication within the chapter through the creation of monthly meet-ups known cheekily as "Chewing the Cud."

POLICY & ELECTION

WFU members also discussed the Special Orders of Business that will guide the organization through 2022. Issues on the ballot to be considered as top priorities this year included:

- Local and Regional Fiber, Textiles, and Tanned Farm Products
- Meat Processing Infrastructure and Services
- Preserving Small- and Mid-Size Farms
- PFAs
- Dairy Policy Reform
- Concentration in the Agriculture Industry
- Family Farmers Shaping Climate Change

Voting on Special Orders of Business, as well as election candidates for the WFU Board of Directors and delegates to the National Farmers Union Convention, is being done by mail-in ballot. Election results will be announced February 9th.