

Dept. of Workforce Development: Agricultural training highlighted during June Dairy Month

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WAUSAU (Village of Maine) – The state’s dairy farms are a source of pride, food and jobs for America’s Dairyland. The growing complexity of dairy-related jobs – ranging from herd health and data management to diesel maintenance and robotics – make workforce training and development more important than ever.

The Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD), Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) and other members of the Wisconsin Agricultural Education and Workforce Development Advisory Council are focused on delivering new training opportunities and extending the appeal of agricultural careers to those with no former on-farm experience.

With a University of Wisconsin-Madison Extension [report](#) finding that dairy farms and dairy processing operations generate a combined \$45.6 billion in revenue and more than 157,000 jobs in Wisconsin, a skilled workforce is critical to a thriving economy.

Members of the council recently toured Northcentral Technical College’s [Agriculture Center of Excellence](#), the only working dairy farm and learning laboratory in the Wisconsin Technical College System.

“Wisconsin’s flagship industry is agriculture and dairy is a key component,” said DWD Secretary-designee Amy Pechacek. “Partnerships among state government, educational institutions and employers are preparing the next generation for jobs for this important industry.”

Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection Secretary Randy Romanski says farm operations continue to evolve to meet consumer needs.

“Wisconsin is number one in cheese, but we also lead the nation in number of dairy farms, dry whey for humans, and milk goats,” said DATCP Secretary Randy Romanski. “Agriculture is part of our past, present, and future, and the work we do to support agricultural career pathways and the next generation of agricultural leaders is vital.”

The Agriculture Center of Excellence opened in 2011 and is located on 120 acres just north of Wausau. It offers educational programs ranging from veterinary and dairy science to diesel technology and gas utility construction. Students work first-hand with animals, equipment and crops. Cows are milked three times a day with a robotic milking system, and a predetermined feed ration is dispensed as each cow is milked. Meanwhile, robotic manure collectors slowly cruise the aisles to keep the barn clean.

“We offer a comprehensive and modern agriculture education that prepares students of all kinds for the vast array of opportunities available in this field,” said Greg Cisewski, Dean of the School of Agricultural Sciences, Utilities, and Transportation at Northcentral Technical College. “Students graduate with skills that propel their careers and boost the state’s economy.”

In addition to the work of educational partners such as Northcentral Technical College, DWD has expanded ag education through youth apprenticeship, which now offers 14 new occupational pathways including [dairy grazer](#). Additionally, DWD’s Fast Forward skills training grant program is offering [paid internships](#) in high-demand fields such as agriculture. UW-River Falls will receive \$244,426 to create innovative experiences in agriculture for students. Learn more about the [Wisconsin Fast Forward Program](#).