

Howard Marklein: A time of transition

Posted on Tuesday, Oct 3, 2023

The column below reflects the views of the author, and these opinions are neither endorsed nor supported by WisOpinion.com.

Autumn is always a time of transition. The evenings are cooler, the days are shorter and our landscape provides stunning views of changing colors. We prepare for the winter over months that are full of fresh fruits and vegetables, sweet cider, wild game and holiday celebrations with family and friends.

The 17th Senate District is full of opportunities to participate in this time of transition. Our communities are the perfect places to pick up a pumpkin, taste a new wine, watch a football game or hunt from a tree stand. This is why Agritourism has become big business in the 17th Senate District.

According to the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP), any agricultural-based activity that brings visitors to a farm or ranch is considered agritourism. This can be anything from a hayride at a pumpkin patch to actively harvesting and cooking vegetables right on the farm to cider press demonstrations (and tastings).

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

Agritourism gives visitors to our communities a chance to connect with agriculture as they shop and incorporate experiences into their own autumn transitions. It also gives people in our communities a chance to showcase their properties, sell everything from food to décor and capitalize on the natural, agricultural richness of our communities.

As a grandfather, I see a lot of other grandparents sharing farm experiences with their children and grandchildren this time of year. They bring them to a farm to pick

pumpkins, but deep down I think some of us use these outings to rekindle childhood memories on the farm and share them with the next generation. Many of us who grew up on the farm want our children and grandchildren to understand what life was like for us.

I recently attended the ribbon cutting for the Round Barn at Vesperman Farms in Lancaster. Kyle Vesperman's farm is a prime example of agritourism in action which he, and his family, have built over the last 20 years. The round barn was their most recent addition.

In February, Kyle worked with Heritage Movers to transport a 60-foot-wide, vintage round barn from the former Weisbenner Farm on County Highway N several miles to Vesperman Farms. The 100 year old, historic barn will now become a unique destination at the farm that already has a solid fan base for their pumpkins, ice cream and corn maze.

As I attended the ribbon cutting, I reflected on the major economic impact of the unique intersection of agriculture and tourism in the 17th Senate District. According to DATCP, Wisconsin agriculture contributes \$104.8 billion to our economy. The industry employs 435,700 people, which is 11.8% of every worker in Wisconsin.

Traditionally, the Wisconsin ag industry has been very focused on dairy, livestock and crop production. We are one of the top states for vegetable processing, fruit production and 1.28 million cows. We are #1 in cheese with nearly 1,200 cheesemakers who produce at least 600 types, styles and varieties of cheese.

But now, local farms and businesses are extending their reach by creating experiences that draw people from all walks of life to taste, touch and learn right on the farm. And the focus for many of these experiences is in the fall when our farms are bursting with colors, flavors and activity.

Agri-tourism is about experience. Our communities offer experiences to visitors who may not fully understand the life cycle of the food they eat, the textiles they wear and the world around them. We give them the opportunity to connect with their world in a new way that is as old as time.

I hope you will take time to become an agritourist this fall, even if you already live and work on a farm or ranch. I hope you will seek a new experience or find a new flavor as we transition into winter.

-Marklein, R-Spring Green, is co-chair of the Joint Finance Committee and represents the 17th Senate District.