

Howard Marklein: Ag In Our Communities

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Summer is the season when ag is in the spotlight. The ag industry is front and center every day as our crops grow, animals graze and farmers are hard at work. There are also seasonal events that give us a chance to connect directly with agriculture. Dairy breakfasts, county fairs, ag tourism, Farm Technology Days, weekly farm markets and roadside stands give us a literal taste of Wisconsin agriculture.

In June, I was lucky to volunteer at most of the dairy breakfasts in the 17th Senate District. I served coffee, dished out eggs and enjoyed conversations with dozens of people. These meals provide great opportunities for agricultural families to showcase their hard work and for non-farmers to experience farms firsthand. And who can beat ice cream for breakfast?

In July, county fair season begins! I try to visit as many of our county fairs as I can throughout the next couple of months. It is so fun to walk through the barns to visit with all of the young people who are raising and showing animals. Their hard work and dedication is admirable. My wife Peggy and I usually bid on an animal or two to fill our freezer. I was lucky to be the winning bidder for the Reserve Champion hog raised by Kaylee Schwartz at the Lafayette County Fair on July 15, 2023.

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Farm Technology Days, an annual outdoor farm show that showcases farm progress, was held July 18-20, 2023 right in our backyard at the Badger Steam & Gas Engine Club's grounds, hosted by Sauk County. This interesting event is hosted

by a different county every year and moves around the state.

As a member of the Sauk County Farm Bureau, I volunteered for a shift at Gate 1 and took some time to visit with the vendors and visitors. Farm technology is always evolving and this show is a great way to see what is new in the industry.

As autumn approaches in just a few short months, ag tourism in Wisconsin takes the spotlight. Everything from pumpkin patches to apple orchards to hayrides to roadside stands attract us to experience agriculture in new ways. I, for one, am looking forward to a slice of pie with some Wisconsin ice cream!

All of these opportunities are an important way for nonfarmers to learn about life on a farm. The average American is three generations removed from production on a family farm. Farmers and ranchers only make up less than 2% of the population nationally, but our communities are rich in agriculture. The 17th Senate District is the most ag-dependent district in Wisconsin. This is why I am very focused on supporting the industry in the State Senate.

Wisconsin has maintained its ranking as our nation's number one cheese maker with a quarter of our nation's production. The 17th Senate District has more cheesemakers than any other district. An estimated 928 million pounds of specialty cheese accounted for a quarter of our production in 2022. That is an increase of 51 million pounds from the previous year.

Promoting our strong agricultural industry, which accounts for 16.4% of the total state revenue, is critical for our economy. I am extremely proud of our work to complete the state budget with strong agricultural support while protecting Wisconsin's checkbook.

On June 21, 2023, Governor Tony Evers signed my Ag Roads Improvement Program (ARIP) into law. This program will provide \$150 million in one-time funds to rebuild the first mile roads and bridges our farmers use. This will allow for eased pressure on transportation of goods with lifting of weight restrictions.

Additionally, the Joint Committee on Finance authorized \$250,000 annually in one-time funding for commercial driver's license (CDL) training grants. This program will work to reduce the shortage of drivers across Wisconsin to keep freight and product moving across our state.

We also made significant investments to grow supply chains, improve the environment, innovate and grow exports.

Meat Processor Grants – \$1.8 million.

Dairy Processor Grants – \$1 million.

Ag Export Promotion – \$2 million.

Farmer Mental Health Assistance – \$100,000.

Ag in the Classroom – \$287,800.

Nitrogen Management – \$2 million.

Cover Crop Rebates – \$1.6 million.

Producer-led Watershed Protection Grants – \$2 million.

PFAS Fund – \$125 million!

Again, I am proud to support all of the farm families in our communities. See you at the fair!

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