

Wisconsin Farmers Union: State of the State address response from WFU President Darin Von Ruden

Posted on Wednesday, Jan 25, 2023

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Wisconsin Farmers Union applauds Governor Tony Evers for focusing on issues including rural infrastructure, clean water, mental health, and climate change in his 2023 State of the State address. These topics have also been top of mind for our Farmers Union members.

WFU appreciates the administration's efforts to address much-needed infrastructure throughout the state. Investment in rural roads and bridges and efforts to reach "the last mile" with broadband have not gone unnoticed.

We appreciate efforts to address and eliminate health disparities across the state. People in rural areas are suffering from a lack of options for healthcare and a shortage of medical professionals. The Governor identified the state of mental health in Wisconsin as a "quiet, burgeoning crisis," and we have seen that to especially be true in rural areas and among the farming population. WFU applauds the Governor's declaration of 2023 as the Year of Mental Health and looks forward to ensuring that this focus extends into our rural community and farm families, where the pressures of market forces, weather, and finances can take a heavy toll. We thank the Governor for taking this issue seriously and understanding its urgency.

Among the biggest wins for family farmers over the past year was the \$15 million investment in expanding infrastructure and the workforce for meat processing in the state. Farmers throughout the state expressed frustration with the bottleneck being caused by a shortage of meat processing options, and we look forward to continuing to work with the Governor's office, DATCP, and the UW system to

continue building up the workforce and regional processing options.

Wisconsin farmers know the importance of protecting our natural resources. Our ties to the land run deep and we need clean water for our families and livestock, which is why many farmers are leading the charge on conservation issues. WFU was proud to take part in the Governor's Task Force on Climate Change and to provide input for the Speaker's Task Force on Water Quality. WFU encourages the State Legislature to take seriously the issue of PFAS and continue to invest in improving water quality in the state. WFU policy supports banning the use of PFAS, and encourages legislation that requires PFAS producing companies to contribute to a fund that compensates farmers and homeowners who have been impacted by PFAS contamination in their wells, soils, livestock, crops, or their own health. We also call for continued efforts that empower farmers to be climate champions, including through producer-led watershed initiatives.

All Wisconsinites deserve clean water, access to affordable health care and high-speed broadband, and beyond that, a connection to what is happening at the Capitol. We encourage our legislators to find unity and forge relationships across the aisle so we can do some serious good for all of Wisconsin in 2023. WFU looks forward to working with our policymakers in Madison to continue making forward progress on the issues that matter to farmers and our communities in the year ahead.