



Commentary from Secretary Brad Pfaff **National Ag Day: Agriculture Connects All of Us**

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About one in nine people working in Wisconsin holds a job related to agriculture. Agriculture is the cornerstone – one of the most important components of our state’s strong and diverse economy. March 14, National Ag Day, is an opportunity for all of us – those of us who are from the farm and those who are not – to take a moment and reflect on the importance of agriculture and our state’s family farmers in our day-to-day lives.

Agriculture is not just the farms and the fields we see as we drive along the interstate or back roads. It is more than just the farmers’ markets or the days you remember spending on your grandparents’ farm. It’s more than the \$88 billion that agriculture brings into Wisconsin every year. It’s the farm families that grow our crops and care for our livestock. It’s the local schools and libraries where their children learn, and the small local businesses they support in their rural communities. Agriculture is a source of pride in our heritage, a source of jobs, and a source of support that helps keep our rural areas thriving.

Wisconsin is a proud, diverse, and strong agricultural state, from our productive farms to our rural manufacturing to our urban food processing. No state raises more cranberries than Wisconsin. We rank among the nation’s top producers of processing vegetables, and are second only to California in fresh organic vegetables. When you squeeze toothpaste onto your brush, the mint flavoring probably came from our top-ranking mint farms. Our wine grape growers are coming into their own, along with our hops growers. With about 72,000 milk goats, our state also leads the nation in the dairy goat industry.

Our state is and will continue to be known as America’s Dairyland with thousands of dairy farms across Wisconsin. I grew up on my own family’s dairy farm in northern La Crosse County. It is there that my admiration and deep respect for farmers began. As we always say, we need farms of all types and sizes, and we have room for them all. We all know that farmers are facing challenging times with high production, low prices in the marketplace, and trade uncertainty.

What makes me most proud to be part of our state’s agriculture industry is that when a challenge presents itself, farmers come together to address it. Some farmers are incorporating technology into their barns and farm machinery to gain efficiencies. More and more dairy farmers are turning to grazing as a system that cuts down on feeding costs and managing manure. Our Dairy Task Force 2.0 is working to develop recommendations to support the industry, find new ways to improve profitability, and to carry our dairy heritage into the next generation.

Governor Evers has made water quality one of his top priorities. Whether we are talking about groundwater or surface water, we all share an interest in keeping it clean. Farmers and their families drink the same water as their neighbors. Streams and aquifers don’t follow town lines or county borders or city limits. It’s an issue that connects us all, and we all share in the solution. The Governor has proposed new resources in his budget to focus on water quality, including additional funding for DATCP to help counties work directly with farmers to further their conservation goals.

Wisconsin agriculture has many growth opportunities, from local markets where farmers are adding value and selling straight to consumers, to international markets. Wisconsin ag products are enjoyed by consumers in all corners of the world. Wisconsin also leads the way in new, cutting-edge ag production

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and processing. Hemp is an example of a product with countless new opportunities. In our second growing season, applications to grow hemp have grown from under 250 last year to more than 1,400 this year. Industrial hemp also creates numerous opportunities off the farm, including agronomics, processing, and marketing.

National Ag Day is a good time to remember that agriculture connects us to one another, to our past, and to our future. It's a day for farmers to connect with their non-farm neighbors and share our story – a story that is so important to everyone's daily life, and to our economy in Wisconsin and the nation. We all share in the strong, diverse economy that agriculture helps support. Let's celebrate that. Happy National Ag Day!

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