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Gov. Evers Unveils Historic Investment Proposal for Wisconsin's Agriculture Economy and Farm Families

Governor's 2021-23 biennial budget to include more than \$43 million investment in agricultural industry
MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers today announced his 2021-23 biennial budget proposal will include a more than \$43 million investment in Wisconsin's agriculture economy and farm families aimed at expanding market opportunities, supporting new and innovative farming practices, strengthening the agricultural workforce, connecting local producers to foodbanks and pantries, and supporting farmer mental health and wellbeing.

“Our agricultural industry is Wisconsin's past and present, and it will be our future,” said Gov. Evers. “Our proud farming history is core to our state's culture and people, and Wisconsin farmers have carried and supported our state economy for generations. Long before the COVID-19 pandemic hit and then throughout this pandemic, our farmers and producers were fighting every day to save their farms and to save their industry while helping us put food on our tables. It’s time to join in this fight for Wisconsin’s farmers and their families and agricultural industries to ensure future economic prosperity our rural communities and our entire state.”

Gov. Evers has championed agricultural issues in Wisconsin. This announcement today builds on his investments from the 2019-21 biennial budget and his three-pronged initiative announced in his State of the State Address last year, including calling for a special session of the Legislature, the creation of the Office of Rural Prosperity at the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, and the establishment of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Rural Prosperity which provided its report to the governor late last year. The governor's more than \$43 million plan includes:

Expanding Local and International Market Opportunities

- Creating and funds the Wisconsin Initiative for Agricultural Exports, which will boost export opportunities for Wisconsin’s world-class agricultural products;
- Increasing funding for the Dairy Processor Grant Program by \$1.2 million over the biennium, which strategically invests in Wisconsin dairy processors to support innovation, jobs, and the competitiveness of our state’s signature industry;
- Investing \$20 million to help connect Wisconsin food banks and pantries with Wisconsin producers to provide food to families experiencing food insecurity
- Funding the Farm-to-School Grant Program to get fresh, nutritious, locally-produced foods onto kids’ plates in school cafeterias across Wisconsin;
- Creating and fund the Farm-to-Fork program to build connections between farmers and nearby non-school entities interested in purchasing local food for their cafeterias;
- Increasing funding for the Buy Local, Buy Wisconsin program, a grant program that funds local food efforts to increase the sale of Wisconsin-produced agricultural products;

- Providing additional funding for Something Special *from* Wisconsin™, a branded marketing program available to businesses who can attribute at least 50 percent of their ingredients, production, or processing activities to Wisconsin; and
- Creating and funds a Small Farm Diversity Grant Program which is designed to support producers adding new products, increasing production of an ag product where market opportunities exist, or starting a new farming operation entirely.

Three-Pronged Plan to Bolster Local Meat Processing

- Creating a Meat Processor Grant program to target the needs of the meat industry, incentivize innovation, and expand Wisconsin's overall meat processing capacity;
- Creating and fund a Meat Talent Development Program to specifically target meat industry workforce development and help spur growth in Wisconsin's meat processing industry; and
- Adding additional Food Inspector Positions at DATCP to ensure a safe, secure food supply as our meat industry grows.

Promoting Agricultural Innovation & Farmer-Led Conservation

- Creating and funding a Value-Added Agricultural Grant Program, which would provide education and technical assistance related to producing value-added agricultural products, such as organic farming and best practices related to grazing;
- Providing additional funding to counties in order to support three conservation staff per county;
- Increasing funding for the Producer-Led Watershed Grant Program, which supports farmer groups working collaboratively to address local water issues;
- Creating and funding Water Stewardship Grants which provides support for third parties assisting farmers with water stewardship;
- Creating and funding a Conservation Grant Program which supports farmers seeking to transition to more environmentally sustainable agricultural practices; and
- Providing funding in order to support additional UW-Extension specialists and county agents, who provide both on-the-ground technical assistance and research to support producers throughout Wisconsin.

Supporting Farmers' Mental Health & Wellbeing

- Creating a new Regional Farmer Mental Health Program to help increase farmers' access to mental health support services, coordinate local and regional peer support programs, and provide counseling and assistance to Wisconsin farmers; and
- Providing ongoing funding for the Farmer Mental Health Assistance Program, which supports a 24/7 counseling service, tele-counseling sessions, counseling vouchers, and building farmer peer-support networks.

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