

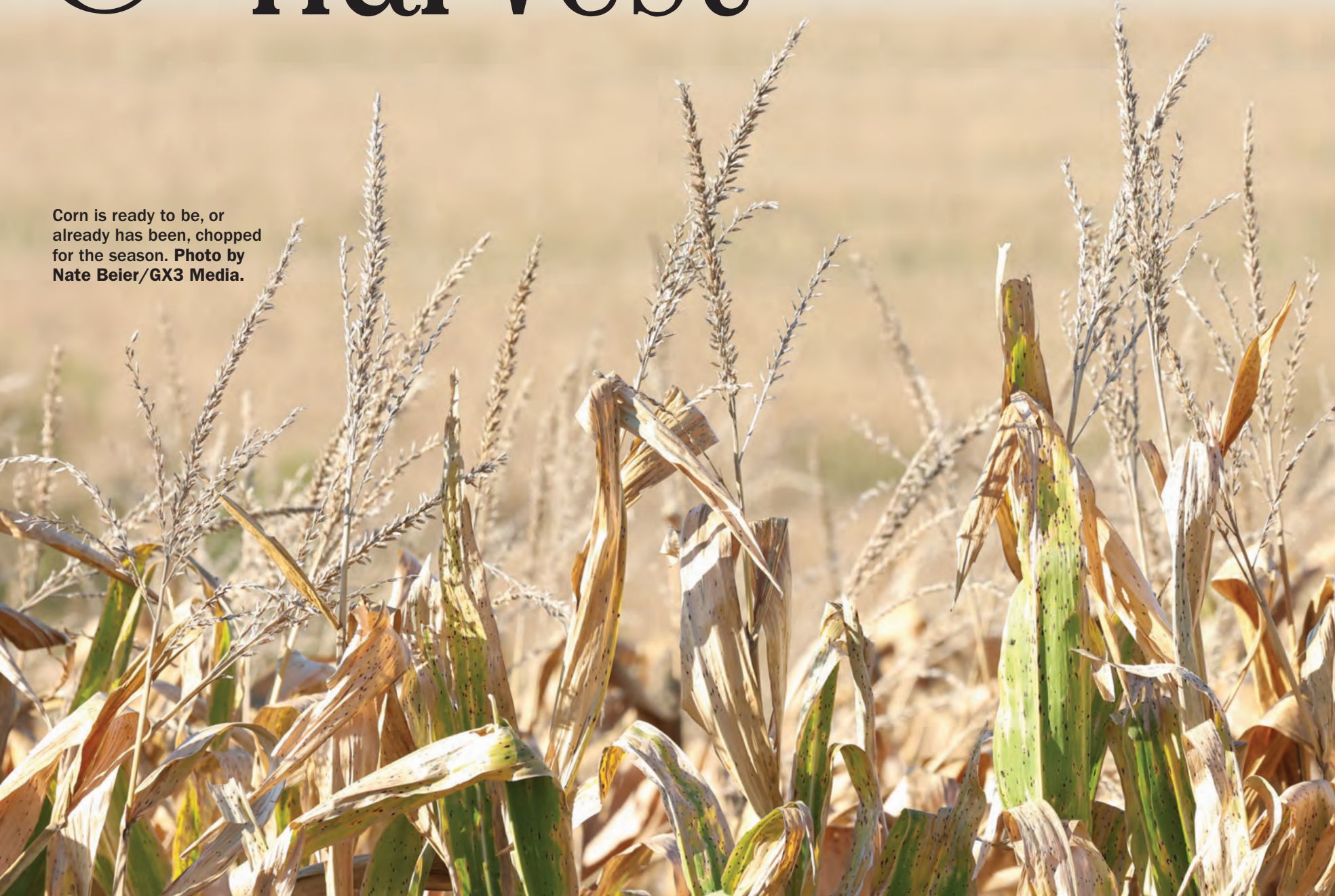
FALL FARM & Harvest

MONROE COUNTY
HERALD

Hillsboro
Sentry Enterprise

October 19th & 20th, 2022 | 12 pages

Corn is ready to be, or
already has been, chopped
for the season. Photo by
Nate Beier/GX3 Media.



Farmer chops up a field before summer comes to an end. Photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.

No Country For Young Farmers?

New farmers face substantial barriers to entering agriculture

BY NICOLETTE NAUMAN
Sentry-Enterprise Editor

In 2021, the State Agriculture Overview for Wisconsin, released by the National Agriculture Statistics Service (NASS), listed 64,100 operating farms in the state, accounting for more than 14 million acres of Wisconsin land.

For most Wisconsinites, the thought of farming may invariably bring up images of the family farm. For many farmers in Wisconsin, the farm has been in the family for at least two generations, passed down from parent to child. However

passing on a farm to the next generation of farmers has proven to be increasing difficult, with current farmers largely comprised of those ages 50 and older and younger, aspiring farmers, finding significant barriers standing between them and keeping the farming tradition alive.

Data collected by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) highlighted this trend back in 2012, when the department found that the average age of a farm's main operator had increased from roughly 50 years old in 1978 to roughly 58 in 2012. The increase in the average age hints towards farmers pushing

back retirement, which in turn leads to more than a few second- or third-generation farm kids looking elsewhere for economic opportunities until their parents or grandparents are ready to retire. As a result, it can be difficult for these farm kids to rearrange their lives to take over the family farm.

For new farmers who do not hail from farming families, acquiring land has proven to be a significant challenge. Here in Wisconsin, the average price per acre of agricultural land has hit \$5,416 in 2022, according to the Mid-Year update to the 2022 Wisconsin Agricultural Land Prices

Report. In Vernon County, part of the Southwest district listed in the report, average prices can reach as high as \$6,221 per acre. Young farmers looking to purchase land in Juneau County may see average per acre land prices as high as \$3,755, with those over in Monroe County looking at average prices per acre sitting around \$4,970.

A survey conducted in 2017 by the National Young Farmer's Coalition saw 61% of beginning farmers listing access to land as the key challenge to getting into the farming

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Agricultural land prices see increases in 2022

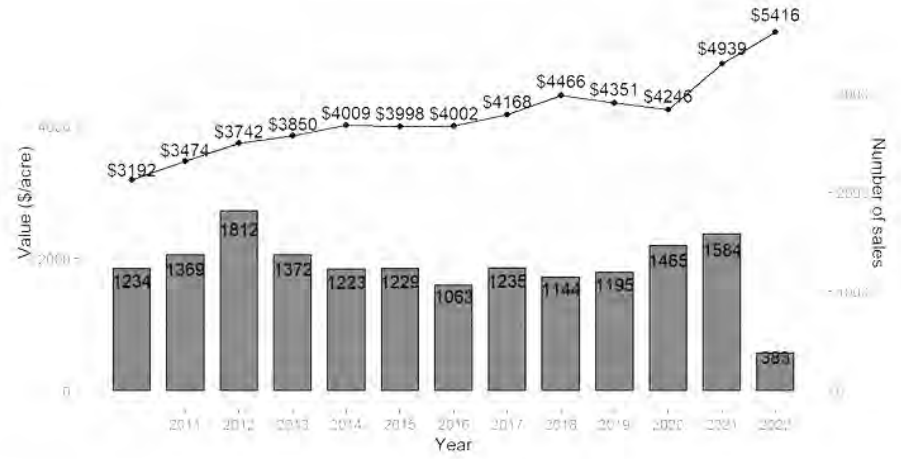


Figure 1. Average price of agricultural land sold in Wisconsin and the number of sales each year from 2011-2022.

This graph, courtesy of the University of Wisconsin – Madison’s Division of Extension, demonstrates the trends in the average price of agricultural land sold here in Wisconsin over the past twelve years.

BY NICOLETTE NAUMAN
 Sentry-Enterprise Editor

Farming and agriculture have long roots in Wisconsin’s heritage, history, and culture. As a state, we’ve taken no small amount of pride in the concept of the family farm and the dairy farmer. We’ve branded ourselves as America’s Dairyland, right down to the license plates affixed to our cars. However, the United States has seen a concerning trend when it comes to our family farms.

Here in Wisconsin, the amount of land being farmed declined for the first in four years back in 2021, dropping approximately 100,000 acres from 2020. This represents a less than one percent decline, but it is the first decrease in land farmed since 2017, according to data collected by the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), a division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The decline in farmed land could be accounted for by farmers looking to downsize or transition from more land-heavy farming practices, such as dairy, to those that are less land-intensive. Other farmers may be considering retirement, selling off their properties. In some cases, farmers and producers who opt to sell may sell to other producers. In others, particularly in farms located near more urbanized areas, the land may be sold off to individuals or developers looking to either get out of the city, own land for recreational hunting, or to develop the property in some other manner.

Data collected and published in the 2022

Wisconsin Agricultural Land Prices report, 2020 saw the most sales of agricultural land since 2012. While the data did show a decline of such sales in 2021, the total number of sales still outpaced the sales made in the six years prior to the onset of COVID-19.

The report’s author, an agriculture educator with Marathon County Extension by the name of Heather Schlessler, attributes the shift in sales to the initial price shocks and uncertainties of the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. For farmers, who had been dealing with flagging milk prices and other economic stressors for years before COVID-19, the onset of the pandemic may have been the final straw in their decision of whether or not to keep their farms.

Prior to COVID-19, most farms that sold were sold to other producers, keeping the land in agricultural use regardless of if the use switched between crops and animals. After the onset of COVID-19, if there were no producers looking to buy, then farmers looking to sell would sell to buyers outside of the agricultural industry, taking the land out of production.

According to the 2022 Mid-Year Report for the Wisconsin Agricultural Land Prices report, the average price of farmland sold between the start of year and the end of June was \$5,416 per acre—an increase of 8.8% from 2021 and a 21.6% increase from 2020. Prior to 2011, farmland was selling for roughly \$3,192 an acre on average, peaking

PRICES cont. on page 10

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4 little-known jobs in agriculture



The agriculture industry is indispensable, affecting both food supply and tourism. It presents various interesting job opportunities, some of which are less well-known. Here are four that might surprise you.

1. Mushroom growers are responsible for managing mushroom and compost production. They must also follow quality control procedures. Their schedule is variable and depends on the needs of the crop.

2. Orchard pruners trim apple trees in the summer and winter. They're seasonal workers and don't have any specific training. It's possible to quickly learn the ins and outs of prun-

ing on the job with more experienced workers.

3. Big game and ratite (flightless bird) producers raise animals like bison, wild boar, deer, ostriches, emus and rheas. They also manage production, administration and marketing, among several other tasks.

4. Floriculture (flower farming) supervisors coordinate and verify the work done by horticultural workers. They also perform a variety of tasks to produce flowering and ornamental plants.

The wonderful world of agriculture is full of possibilities.



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DATCP Secretary Romanski Joins Gov. Evers in Thanking Wisconsin Farmers



DATCP Secretary and Governor Tony Evers. Contributed photo.

Press Release

MADISON, Wis. – At this time of year, you don't have to drive far in Wisconsin to see combines running in the fields, tractors moving equipment, and trucks hauling grain. Wisconsin farmers are working from sunrise to long past sunset to harvest their crops and prepare their farms for winter. During this busy time, it is fitting that we all share our appreciation to farmers. On National Farmers Day, October 12, 2022, please join us in thanking Wisconsin farmers.

Wisconsin farmers are the foundation of the state's robust food supply chain, and it all starts on each of our state's farms. Wisconsin farmers understand that our soil and water resources are our strength, and they work tirelessly to ensure that our farmland is maintained for future generations. To help with that effort, the Governor's Task Force on Climate Change, which included input from Wisconsin farmers themselves, recommended the continuation of programs such as Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grants. Following these recommendations, there have been critical investments to increase the funding for this program to support farmers who implement conservation practices. We were also able to increase funding for county conservation staff so farmers implementing climate-smart practices have access to boots on the ground assistance.

Wisconsin farmers are a leader in producing a variety of crops including

potatoes, vegetables, cranberries, ginseng, and more. The state's farmers rely on a thriving processing industry to transform their quality products into the nutritious and delicious foods consumers rely on for their families. In Wisconsin, we have worked to ensure farmers and processors have the resources they need to keep their businesses moving forward. In the past biennial budget, we were able to double the funding for the Dairy Processor Grants. With this extra funding, we invested in 19 dairy processors this year alone, improving their profitability and making long-term investments so farmers continue to have a processor for their milk for years to come.

We have also made major investments in Wisconsin's livestock and meat industry so farmers don't experience delays in getting their animals to market. There was a meat processing grant program in the most recent budget, and with the help of our federal funds, we provided \$15 million to assist meat processors seeking to expand and build resiliency in the industry. With a targeted investment in workforce development for the livestock and meat processing industry, we have also been able to support the expansion of high school, university, and technical college programming to help grow the number of skilled workers for the industry.

As Wisconsin farmers produce top-notch products, we are working to increase export

THANKING cont. on page 10

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‘FARMERS’

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industry. As a result, many new farmers look to rent or lease land—a move which, though affordable, comes with a certain degree of instability and uncertainty. Banks may take issue with financing farming startups reliant on leases and rental agreements, which can make securing funding a challenge for those starting out.

Land aside, finding financing at all can be its own struggle. Start-up costs for new farmers have never been cheap, and economic fluctuations over the past two years have not helped in the slightest. Rising costs for seed, herbicides, fertilizers, and equipment can amount to a hefty bill even for long-established farmers. The inherent uncertainties that farming naturally entails can make the risk-reward calculations difficult to balance, as well. For young farmers who have attended college, the additional burden of student debt can make securing financing virtually impossible.

There have been a few efforts to help alleviate some of the barriers new farmers face in getting their foot in the door. The National Young Farmer’s Coalition campaigned for legislation to include farmers in the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program, as an example. The program, which already includes public sector jobs such as doctors and nurses, teachers, and non-profit employees, forgives the remaining student loan balance for public sector workers after a certain number of years.

Another possible avenue to address these issues comes in the form of the 2023 Farm Bill. The Farm Bill got its start in the 1930s as a way to address the impacts of the Great Depression on farms and the food supply. The bill must be renewed every few years, and at each renewal it can be reworked to account for different issues and to address different challenges.

Young farmers and agricultural advocates focused

on the aging farming population have voiced hopes that the 2023 Farm Bill will contain greater measures for addressing the challenges currently faced by young farmers trying to establish themselves in the industry. Proposed measures include efforts to improve access to land for young farmers, building greater support staff for farmers both current and future, and addressing student debt burdens for young farmers.

The current Farm Bill was enacted in December, 2018, and will expire in September of next year, at which point it will be replaced by a new iteration. Discussions regarding what measures will be put into the next Farm Bill are still being discussed and will likely see increased focus following the midterm elections.

Starting up as a new farmer comes with many challenges, most notably the cost of everything from land to equipment – especially if buying new.

Photo by Nate Beier/GX3 Media.



What's the difference between straw and hay?



If you're not closely involved in agriculture, you may be among the many people who think straw and hay are the same things. In reality, the two are very different materials that serve distinct purposes.

- **Hay** is made from the stems, leaves and seed heads of fresh grasses. The plant is still green and nutritious when harvested, making it a good food source for animals. Hay can also be used as mulch, as it adds nutrients to the soil and aids in moisture retention.
- **Straw** is the stalk that remains after a grain crop has been harvested. It's dry

and typically hollow; in fact, it's the ancestor to the modern drinking straw. Farmers can work the stems into the earth to enrich the soil or harvest the stems for other applications. Like hay, straw has nutrients that can benefit animals. However, because it's difficult for animals to digest, straw is more often used as bedding than food. It's also commonly used in other industries, such as biofuel, construction and hand-craft manufacturing.

Now that you know the difference between the two, you'll never mix up hay and straw again.



How will climate change impact agriculture?

Harvest quality has always been closely linked to climate conditions. Therefore, there's no doubt that global climate change will significantly affect agricultural production in the coming decades. Here are a few things to watch for.

CROP MOVEMENT

It's predicted that warm regions will face increasing incidences of drought and heatwaves that will ruin crops. Conversely, cold areas are expected to benefit from increased productivity by introducing new crops that were previously impossible to grow. This will result in a migration of crop production. Rising sea levels may also contribute to this movement, as flooding will increasingly affect coastal areas, causing crop destruction and soil deterioration.

INDIRECT EFFECTS ON POPULATION

A shift in agricultural opportunities may cause people to move to more productive areas. For instance, less prosperous regions

on the planet are most vulnerable to climate change. This is because they rely heavily on agriculture and often don't have the technical or financial means to adapt their practices to changing natural conditions.

GOOD AND BAD SURPRISES

Although some effects of climate change are already visible, the many variables at play make it difficult to predict the future. The success of crop production depends on moisture and precipitation, sunshine, the condition of the earth's atmosphere, the severity of winters and the proliferation of pests and disease. The fate of agricultural activities will also be influenced by the capacity of human beings to respond appropriately to the disruptions to come.

While it's nearly impossible to predict which scenario will come next, it's important to implement sustainable land stewardship practices to preserve the environment for future generations.



The chores must be done once or twice a day depending on the type of farm and the animals raised.

AGRICULTURE

What does it mean to "make the rounds"?

When you do your daily chores on the farm, you might say you're "making the rounds." These tasks often revolve around animal production. However, the duties performed depend on various factors, including the species and season. Here are the most common farm chores.

CHECKING THE HEALTH STATUS OF ANIMALS

Whether the farm focuses on dairy or meat production, checking the health status of the animals is very important. Animals that appear to be ill should immediately be examined by a veterinarian.

MILKING COWS

Automatic milking machines now dominate the dairy industry. However, some small farms continue to milk their cows by hand.

CLEANING AND MAINTENANCE

The bedding must be replaced, and the trays that collect chicken and rabbit droppings must be emptied. Moreover, all the milking equipment must be washed and sanitized. This list goes on depending on the number of different animal species and the size of the farm.

DISTRIBUTING FOOD AND WATER

Farmers must bring their livestock new feed and supply them with fresh, clean water.

These chores give only a glimpse into what farmworkers must do to produce high-quality food you can enjoy all year. Supporting local farms is the best way to thank these men and women for their essential work.



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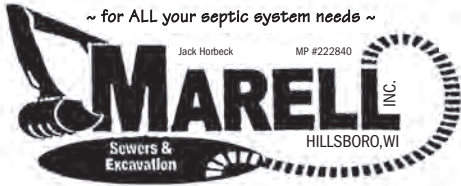
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DATCP Accepting Applications for Export Expansion Grants through November 16

MADISON, Wis. — As Wisconsin welcomes the world to America's Dairyland for the World Dairy Expo, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) is again accepting applications for export expansion grants. Applications may be submitted through November 16, 2022. These grants are funded through the Wisconsin Initiative for Agricultural Exports, a program proposed in Gov. Tony Evers' budget to promote the export of Wisconsin's agricultural products. Funds for the program were recently released by the Joint Finance Committee.

This grant aims to accelerate the growth of Wisconsin dairy, meat, and crop product exports. Applicants must be a not-for-profit organization, located in Wisconsin, and currently serving or have the ability to serve Wisconsin agribusinesses. Wisconsin agribusiness associations, technical colleges, universities, and economic development organizations are encouraged to apply.

Projects can receive grant funds for up to two years in duration with an option

to request an additional year. Grants will be awarded up to \$50,000 for meat and crop-focused projects, and \$100,000 for dairy-focused projects. Matching funds are required at 20 percent of the grant award and can be cash or in-kind. Eligible project expenses include, but are not limited to, travel associated with trade promotion activities, event promotion, marketing materials, advertising, subscriptions, contractor fees, and translation services, purchased market information, and data reporting services.

DATCP will use a competitive review process to select the most qualified projects. Selected projects will begin work in January 2022. Grant information and application materials are available at https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Growing_WI/WisconsinInitiativeForAgriculturalExports.aspx. For more information, contact DATCP Grants Specialist Ryan Dunn at ryand.dunn@wisconsin.gov or (608) 590-7239.

Wisconsin agricultural exports reached an

DATCP cont. on page 11



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'PRICES'

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in 2018 at \$4,466 per acre on average before declining to \$4,246 per acre on average in 2020.

The mid-year report goes on to break the price averages down by nine regions. Vernon and Sauk Counties form the northernmost boarder of the Southwest district, Juneau County forming the southwestern corner of the Central district. Monroe and La Crosse Counties form the southernmost board of the West Central district.

In 2010, the average price per acre for agricultural land was \$3,176 for the Southwest district, \$2,674 for the Central district, and \$2,952 for the West Central district. In 2022, the average price has increased to \$6,221 for the Southwest district, \$3,755 for the Central district, and \$4,970 for the West Central district.

While the report did not foresee any actual

impact on farms currently in operation beyond a possible "retirement cushion" for those farms whose current operators are approaching retirement age and have no plans in place to pass the farm on to a descendent, it did provide some possible impacts in other areas.

One such area is the future of a viable dairy industry in Wisconsin. The report indicates that the average Wisconsin dairy farm requires two to three acres of cropland in order to produce the amount of forage and grain consumed by each cow in the herd. With a not-insignificant portion of Wisconsin farmers in the 50 years of age or older category, high land prices can impact the future of the industry by making it difficult for new farmers to purchase land and begin their own businesses.

opportunities. The Wisconsin Initiative for Agricultural Exports (WIAE) is a program designed to help boost the export of Wisconsin dairy, meat, crops, and other products by 25% over five years. We are, in collaboration with the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, enhancing Wisconsin's trade promotion activities, designating funds for agribusinesses, and fostering innovation in exporting. Wisconsin products are one of a kind, and we know that, with the help of WIAE, Wisconsin products will have a better chance to become a household name across the world.

Wisconsin agriculture generates a \$104.8 billion economic impact to our state's economy each year, and each dollar starts with our farmers. Farmers contribute to their local schools, businesses, and communities, benefiting the entire state. We will continue to

work to make sure farmers have the resources they need. Their success is our state's success, and that's why we should continue to strategically invest in and support them.

So, today, please join us in not only recognizing and thanking those who put food on our tables, but in supporting them in any way you can. Buy locally-grown Wisconsin products at a farmers market. Slow down for farm equipment on the roads. Visit an agritourism site this fall. Say thank you when you see a farmer in your community.

Thank you, farmers! We wish you a safe and plentiful harvest season. We are grateful for your hard work, lifelong commitment, and dedication to feed the world. You, as farmers, are one of Wisconsin's strongest assets, and we will continue to work to celebrate your success and ensure you have the tools you need to produce and thrive.

'THANKING'

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'DATCP'
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all-time high of \$3.96 billion in 2021. Through the WIAE, DATCP is working collaboratively with the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation to build on that momentum by promoting Wisconsin agricultural products in the international marketplace. The WIAE provides flexibility to respond to exporting challenges and facilitates unique opportunities that connect exporters with international markets and buyers. For more information on the WIAE, sign up for email updates and visit the DATCP website.

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5 myths about GMOs

Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) have been the topic of many animated discussions. To help you keep things in perspective, here are five myths debunked.

1. "GMOS ARE HARMFUL TO YOUR HEALTH."

Many activists decry the genetic manipulation of foods. However, very little data supports their concerns, as many studies confirm they're safe. However, the long-term effects of the process remain uncertain. Therefore, it's reasonable to take a cautious approach.

2. "GMOS ARE COMPARABLE TO NATURAL SELECTION."

Genetic manipulation is sometimes compared to the evolution organisms undergo in nature. This comparison is dubious because humans force and prolong the cohabitation of genes in laboratories in the case of GMOs. The genes undergoing modification wouldn't necessarily have crossed paths under natural conditions.

3. "GMOS ALTER HUMAN DNA."

Whether modified in a laboratory or not, the genetic material in foods ends up in the blood plasma during digestion and not in the DNA.

Cells have a protective system that prevents genes from interfering with their own genetic material.

4. "STUDIES SUPPORTING GMOS ARE BIASED."

Even though studies may be subsidized by corporations that benefit from pro-GMO findings, that isn't enough to discredit them. From a purely scientific perspective, the value of a study rests on the methodology employed and the credibility of the deductive process. That said, the funding sources for a study do require additional attention since they may affect the objectivity of the results.

5. "THE GMO DEBATE IS OVER."

Although most scientific data regarding GMO safety is positive, it's nonetheless essential to maintain intellectual curiosity and debate around the subject.

Lastly, genetic modification is a relatively new process and still requires vigilance.



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