



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Rep. Mark Spreitzer, 608-266-1192

Rep. Mark Spreitzer announces program to attract new farmers

MADISON- Today, Rep. Mark Spreitzer (D-Beloit), along with Senator Janis Ringhand (D-Evansville) introduced legislation to create a student loan reimbursement program for new farmers. As Wisconsin's current farmers age, our economy must find new farmers to take their place. The average age of a farm operator in Wisconsin is 54.5 years, and there are more than twice as many farm operators between the ages of 55 and 74 as between the ages of 25 and 44.

"Agriculture is central to Wisconsin's heritage and to our economy, largely due to the efforts of our farmers," Rep. Spreitzer said. "We must look for ways to encourage a sustainable future for farming in Wisconsin. In order to continue Wisconsin's strong tradition of family-supporting farms that feed our state and beyond, we must recruit and retain new farmers from diverse backgrounds."

With increasing interest in local and sustainable food, many college students from non-farming backgrounds are taking an interest in agriculture. It is also more important than ever to encourage young people from farming backgrounds to pursue a career in agriculture.

Whether through an associate's or bachelor's degree, or the Farm & Industry Short Course, higher education is essential to the success of today's new farmers. However, new farmers are not immune to the mounting burdens of student debt. In Wisconsin, 70% of students graduating with a bachelor's degree borrow to fund their education. Upon graduation, the average debt is between \$30,000 and \$32,000 for those attending public and private institutions, respectively.

"I haven't met a single farmer, or person in or close to the agricultural industry, that has disagreed with the idea that we need to get young people back on the land and carry our ag legacy forward in Wisconsin," said Monticello native and young farmer, Jacob Marty. "I know many talented young people that would love to farm, but it isn't feasible for them because of student loan debt. Aiding young people to pursue their farming dreams would reinvigorate our agricultural community with new ideas, energy, and stewardship."

The New Farmer Student Loan Assistance Program would reimburse up to \$30,000 of student debt for those who commit to operating a small or medium-sized farm in Wisconsin for at least five years.

"This bill addresses the need for more new, educated farmers from both farming and non-farming backgrounds," Spreitzer noted. "By awarding grants to qualified new farmers, we can help reduce or eliminate their need to find extra money for monthly loan payments while launching a farming career."

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45TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

State Capitol: PO Box 8953, Madison, WI 53708 (608) 266-1192

Toll-free: (888) 534-0045 FAX: (608) 282-3645 E-mail: Rep.Spreitzer@legis.wisconsin.gov

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