



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
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## **Rep. Spreitzer, Sen. Ringhand Introduce Bill to Support Beginning Farmers**

**Madison** – Today, Rep. Mark Spreitzer (D-Beloit) and Sen. Janis Ringhand (D-Evansville) introduced bipartisan legislation to create a student loan reimbursement program for beginning farmers. The average age of a farm producer in Wisconsin is 56 years, and there are more than twice as many farm producers between the ages of 55 and 74 as between the ages of 25 and 44. As Wisconsin's current farmers age, our state must find new farmers to take their place.

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

"Wisconsin has a strong tradition of agricultural excellence," said Sen. Ringhand. "Rep. Spreitzer and I are proud to uphold that tradition by introducing this bill, which will support beginning farmers in the first years of their career of service to the state."

Whether they obtain an associate or bachelor's degree, receive a technical certificate, or graduate from the Farm & Industry Short Course program, higher education is essential to the success of today's beginning farmers. In 2017, 64% of Wisconsin students graduating with a bachelor's degree borrowed to fund their education. The average debt at graduation in 2017-18 was \$30,724 for UW System resident undergraduate students. A nationwide study of young farmers conducted by the National Young Farmers Coalition highlighted the stark impact of higher education debt on beginning farmers: 53% of respondents are currently farming but are struggling to make their student loan payments, and nearly 30% of respondents did not pursue farming or are waiting to start farming because their student loan debt is more than a farming salary would support.

"I haven't met a single farmer 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, who raises beef, pork, chickens, and sheep as the 6th generation on his family's farm. "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 Beginning Farmer Student Loan Assistance Program would reimburse up to \$30,000 of student debt for those who commit to managing a farm or a component of a farm in Wisconsin for at least five years.

### **45<sup>TH</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT**

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“This bill addresses the need for more educated beginning farmers from both farming and non-farming backgrounds,” Rep. Spreitzer noted. “By awarding grants to qualified beginning 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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