



BRAD PFAFF
STATE SENATOR

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Agriculture is More Than Economics, It's a Way of Life

June in Wisconsin means dairy breakfasts, festivals, and a month of appreciation for all things dairy. Agriculture in Wisconsin is more than just economics, it's a way of life. Throughout National Dairy Month, we celebrate Wisconsin's dairy past, present, and future, acknowledging the contributions of the dairy industry to our economy and our communities.

Farming is in my blood; generations of my family have been farming in northern La Crosse County since the late 1800s. Growing up on my family's dairy farm made me who I am and led me to a life of public service.

I remember milking cows on my family farm every day as a teenager. In those days, I learned more than just farming and the value of a hard day's work; I learned about agriculture's place in Wisconsin and what it needs to thrive.

I'll never forget the farm crisis that took hold in the 1980s, ushering in widespread economic hardship for farmers not experienced since the Great Depression. I watched as land values and prices for agricultural commodities plummeted, while farm bankruptcies sharply rose.

Family farmers were forced to leave their land after generations; leaving not just a business, but a home and a family legacy.

While milking cows on our family farm, I'd ask my dad about the farm crisis and what we could do about it.

Those moments in the barn with my dad are the reason why I worked on agriculture policy for Senator Herb Kohl and Congressman Ron Kind. Those moments are why I spent 8 years at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, working for the betterment of our family farmers. Those moments are why I became the Secretary-designee of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection and fought to get Wisconsin farmers the mental health resources they need.

Too many farmers in today's agricultural climate are under immense stress, at times navigating financial challenges and left wondering whether they'll lose the family farm they've had for generations. When times are tough, we must work together to help our neighbors. I've recognized these as the same struggles I first learned about from my dad 40 years ago, and am proud to have pushed for greater mental health support for farmers, both as DATCP Secretary and now as State Senator.

Those moments with my father on our farm nestled in the rolling hills, coulees, and valleys of western Wisconsin helped me develop an appreciation for the land and pristine beauty of the Driftless Region. That's why I worked on a bipartisan law this session to benefit our land and farmers by providing a crop insurance premium rebate to farmers who plant cover crops. Investments in soil health enhances our beautiful land and supports higher yields for farmers who will send their products to market.

Those moments growing up on my family's dairy farm showed me the importance of our dairy supply chain. The ability of dairy processors to innovate create more and work with more product benefits each link of the chain, which is why I voted for grants within the 2021-23 state budget to help dairy processors expand and move more dairy products to market. These investments coupled with a new law I supported to promote Wisconsin's dairy and agricultural products will raise their value and create new market opportunities for our dairy industry.

Wisconsin's legacy of agriculture and family farming is my "why." We should be proud of our agricultural heritage in Wisconsin, but never complacent. Our dairy industry is strong right now, but we must continue building for the future so that Wisconsin remains America's Dairyland.

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Senator Brad Pfaff represents the 32nd Senate District, which includes La Crosse, Vernon, Crawford, and southern Monroe County.