



## **BRAD PFAFF**

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### **STATE SENATOR**

#### **Senator Pfaff Addresses Wisconsin FFA Students**

On Monday, February 23, Senator Pfaff joined state workforce, education, and agriculture leaders in welcoming FFA students from throughout Wisconsin to the State Capitol. Senator Pfaff delivered the following remarks to a packed room of determined high school students:

Looking into this crowd, I see more than FFA members; I see the next generation of leaders in agriculture, business, science, and public service. Looking at all of you, I see a little bit of myself.

Because of my involvement with FFA and my farming roots, I stand before you as a State Senator representing 180,000 people who live in western Wisconsin.

I grew up on my family's farm in northern La Crosse County. Both my parents were raised on farms. My grandparents farmed across the road, and my uncle farmed just a few miles away. Agriculture is what I knew, what I enjoyed, and what I was taught.

The lessons I learned about hard work, responsibility, and perseverance didn't come from a textbook. They came from real experiences I had on the farm.

Because of my work on the farm, joining FFA was a no-brainer. But what I didn't realize at the time was just how much FFA would shape my future. My FFA instructor, Mr. Jim Brady, encouraged me to step forward and speak with confidence. My experiences through FFA helped me connect the dots between the farm and the world beyond it.

After high school, I wanted to build on those connections and challenge myself in new ways. I stepped out of my comfort zone and moved to the other side of the state to study business and public administration at UW-Green Bay.

While it seemed unconventional with my farming upbringing, my experience at UW-GB helped prepare me to serve as staff to the late US Senator Herb Kohl, at the USDA, as Secretary-designee of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection, and now as State Senator.

I vividly remember two questions Senator Kohl asked me during the interview process. "Brad, can you talk to farmers?" Then, "Can you talk to non-farmers?" I proudly and honestly answered yes to both of those questions.

Throughout my career, I continue to ask: How can I better connect the dots between agriculture, rural communities, and rural people AND those that live in cities and suburbs and have no idea what agriculture is all about?

I believe FFA is one bridge to this question.



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As you all know, agriculture and our farming practices are constantly evolving. Sixteen and twenty-four-row corn planters have largely replaced the old four and six row planter. The majority of our state's hay crop is no longer harvested with "kicker" balers.

As technology evolves and new generations begin farming, FFA programs and hands-on learning help Wisconsin remain a leader in dairy, genetics, vegetable production, and food processing.

That's why I believe you are uniquely equipped to lead. We need more leaders who can overcome adversity, build connections, forge alliances, and, ultimately, move people and our state forward... skillsets that you learn on the farm and through experiences, like FFA.

You are developing the tools—communication, teamwork, problem-solving—to connect the dots and bridge the divide.

Whether you go into production agriculture, engineering, science, finance, logistics, or something completely different, the lessons you are learning here will stay with you for a lifetime.

I want to share one last piece of advice with you. You are going to be challenged in life; you are going to be questioned; you are going to be told that you shouldn't follow a certain dream. You will face criticism and cynicism. Trust me, I've experienced plenty.

My advice to you: brush it off, stay curious, be creative, be open-minded, and don't be afraid to step outside your comfort zone.

Take it from the farm boy from Melrose-Mindoro who spent over seven years in Washington DC: you will learn more about yourself in difficult situations than you ever will in comfortable ones.

Together, you will help move Wisconsin agriculture, and our state, FORWARD.

