

WISCONSIN GOVERNOR PROCLAIMS STATEWIDE AGRICULTURAL TOURISM WEEK, SEPT. 21-OCT. 2, 2023

Economic Engine Builds Momentum

For the third year running, Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers has proclaimed the last week of September as Wisconsin Agricultural Tourism Week. “We continue to see the public’s growing demand to meet farmers and visit farms of all kinds,” said Governor Evers. “Families and individuals are seeking out the experiences only working farms can provide — relaxation, entertainment, education, food and adventure,” he said. The Governor will be joined by several state leaders to help launch this special week with visits to several farms throughout the state.

Tourism on farms continues to increase, with visitors enjoying a wide range of activities, including farm-to-table events, wine tastings, harvest festivals, craft breweries, distilleries, farm weddings, art tours, baking classes, and herding dog competitions, just to name a few. “People are getting into their cars and traveling to farms in growing numbers,” said Sylvia Burgos Toftness, a board member of the Wisconsin Agricultural Tourism Association (WATA).

According to Allied Market Research, visitors are seeking on-farm stays, education, ecotourism, and satisfying their curiosity about rural and farm living. “Wisconsin’s agricultural producers want to, and are prepared to, meet this demand with welcoming farm-based experiences,” said Burgos Toftness.

“Our website, www.wiagtourism.com, makes it easy to find an afternoon or weekend of ag-ventures,” said Sheila Everhart, WATA Executive Director. “Our site’s easy to use and includes an interactive map that helps visitors find all kinds of activities, foods, and beverages. The WATA member farms include petting zoos, event barns, wineries, you-pick orchards and berry patches, pasture walks, corn mazes, tree farms, pumpkin patches, and more,” she said.

Nationally, the agricultural segment of the tourism industry tripled from \$202 million in 2002 to \$949 million in 2017, an increase of nearly 370%, according to the most recent U.S. Census of Agriculture report. This steady increase is part of a large global trend. Wisconsin’s deep agricultural foundation in combination with its vibrant tourism industry fuel a powerful economic engine. Agriculture contributes more than \$104.8 billion annually to Wisconsin’s economy. The state is home to 64,100 farms on 14.2 million acres, with an average farm size of 222 acres. Annually, 435,700 jobs, or 11.8% of state employment, are involved in agriculture.

The Wisconsin Department of Tourism saw overall tourism surge in 2021, generating \$20.9 billion in total economic impact, an increase of 21 percent over 2020. In 2022, Wisconsin hosted over 111.1 million visitor trips, generating \$1.5 billion in state and local taxes.

“Many small - and medium-scale Wisconsin family farms need the revenue on-farm tourism generates,” said Everhart. “We must continue to streamline our regulatory environment so that agricultural tourism and innovation can flourish, and help our farmers, ranchers, and foresters meet the growing demand for agricultural education, experiences, food, feed, fuel and fiber.”

**Check out these photos from the State Fair Stage for Presentation:
“LUV-R-AG Wisconsin America’s Agricultural Tourism Destination”
Find a Farm Trivia; Plan your next Ag-Venture.**

The audience was fully engaged, eager to find ag-ventures and appreciative of the Amazing Prizes! The Department of Tourism Staff were impressed and have asked WATA to host the trivia again in 2024. A job well done TEAM.

Thank you to the follow Agricultural Tourism Destinations that donated over 30 prizes for the trivia contest: Busy Barns Adventure Farm, Schuster’s Farm, Justin Trails Resort, Mulberry Lane Farm, The Traveling Cheeshead, Valley Springs Farm, Farmview Event Barn, The Little Farmer, Something Special from Wisconsin, The Red Barn Corn Maze, AVenue Orchard, Inukshuk Alpaca Menagerie Ranch & Country Shoppe, Jerry Smith’s Produce & Pumpkin Farm, Everhart Family Farms, Nature’s Touch Activity Center, LaClare Creamery, and Wisconsin Rapids Area Convention and Visitors Bureau.

A special thank you to WATA members who helped host the booth and facilitate the on-stage trivia contest: Sylvia Burgos Toftness, Jean Bahn, Afton Krysiak, Megan Rosenberger, Clara Hedrich, Malorie Paine, Dave Carlson, Cynda Carlson, Shawn Lehman, Amy Smith, Lauren Smith and Sheila Everhart.





News to Know...

~Congrats to Something Special from Wisconsin! Members of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection's (DATCP) Something Special from Wisconsin™ (SSfW) program won 22 of 37 awards at the 2023 Wisconsin State Fair Grand Champion Eats and Treats competition last month.



"We are extremely pleased with the Something Special from Wisconsin™ member companies' success at the Eats and Treats competition," said Lois Federman, SSfW director. "The Something Special from Wisconsin logo brings instant recognition and credibility to products, which helps separate them from the rest. The results of the competition are a testament to the fact that SSfW companies are producing products of the highest quality and desirability."

~Grownups Can Now Get In on the Fun at Farm Camp. [READ MORE.](#)

~NEW! LaClare Family Creamery Tour and Dinner

For those attending the Ag in the Classroom Training on October 27 or traveling the night before, join us Friday evening for a tour and meal at LaClare Family Creamery. Learn about the cheeses and cheesemaking operations and enjoy dinner featuring artisan cheeses. Advance registration is required, and an additional \$15 fee applies. Dinner 5:30 p.m. Tour 6:30 p.m. [Register here.](#)

Support Your Local Fairs and Festivals

If you have never been to a fair and you want to know a little more about what to expect, please visit our YouTube video. It will take you through everything a fair as to offer and the fun you can have! [Video tour Wisconsin Fairs](#)

[Check out Fairs in all 72 Wisconsin Counties](#)



September 6-10,



September 8-10,



Check this out!

Visit wiaqtourism.com to view video/social media clips or for additional information and to find your next ag-venture. [Find your Next Ag-Venture Video - A must Watch!](#)

The Wisconsin Agricultural Tourism Association has been driving agricultural tourism promotions for three decades to help travelers find Wisconsin farm ag-ventures.

Thank you Chris Bradley Productions and Shawn at Bon Sens Media LLC.



YOUTUBE.COM

Find your Wisconsin Ag-Venture!

EAT- Learn-Do & Have FUN in Wisconsin. Wisconsin Agricultural Tourism is an agricultural...



**Write your Senators to Support
Wisconsin Family Farms!
Oppose Senate Bill 332 (SB 332)/
Assembly Bill 304 (AB 304)**



Many Wisconsin farms rent out historic restored and re-purposed barns (also known as wedding barns) to people for private events. Their business model is simple: They rent out private space on their private property for invitation-only private events.

Wisconsinites often rent wedding barns for life celebrations, like weddings, birthdays, retirement celebrations, and family reunions. This private event model is popular with consumers and used to pay farms' expenses and preserve their history of being a working agricultural farm. It is also 100% legal under state law. In fact, wedding barns have been safely and legally operating in Wisconsin for over 40 years.

The state's alcohol industry is pushing proposed language that will harm Wisconsin family farms by unnecessarily limiting their ability to rent out wedding barns. SB 332/ AB 304 as written would require private event venues, including farms, that host events where invitation only adult guests consume alcohol to get a permit **and limit these events to no more than six days per year and one day per month.**

These restrictions will impose a heavy burden on small farms that simply want to rent out wedding barns. It will also take away farms' ability to diversify and supplement their income, which is often necessary in today's economy to protect the economic vitality of small farms and rural communities in the state.

You can help protect Wisconsin's family farms—and **consumer choice** for all Wisconsinites—by contacting your state senator. Let your senator know that the state should not classify private farms as a “public place” for invitation-only private events where invited adult guests consume alcohol, and the state should not limit how often farms can rent private space to private parties.

WATA Advocacy Alert - Learn how [AB 304](#) & [SB 332](#) will impact fellow WATA Members as written. WATA opposes AB 304 & SB 332 as written. Amendments are needed. Remove all venue language from these bills and move the bill forward in the best interest of Wineries, Breweries and Distillers as well as for all those members who currently sell alcohol - that are required to have liquor licenses.

80% of these bills are good for WATA Members who are a Winery operators. They will be able to remain open until midnight. Brew Pubs will be able to operate stand-alone retail stores. The Department of Revenue will be able to add a new division to oversee and enforce liquor laws and will create a new statewide bar-tender license.

To show more support, please email your Senator by scanning the QR code, or by using the following link: <https://instituteforjustice.quorum.us/campaign/49206/>

A sample email to send your Senator is provided below, but be sure to let your senator know why supporting small farms is important to you, your family, and your community. Thank you to The Institute for Justice, a national nonprofit law firm.

Dear Lawmakers:

There is a renewed effort underway to curtail the Agricultural Event Venue (“AEV”) industry, commonly referred to as “wedding barns.” This proposed change in liquor licensing laws—which has been rejected repeatedly in recent years—would infringe upon a farmer’s freedom to rent out their barn to brides and grooms, devastating Wisconsin’s proud tradition of wedding barns. **As a complete affront to economic freedom and limited government, this change should be rejected.**

Wisconsin law requires a liquor license in two instances: (1) for the sale of alcohol (Wis. Stat. § 125.04(1)) and (2) for the consumption of alcohol in a “public place” (Wis. Stat. § 125.09(1)). For years, farmers have legally rented out their barns to wedding parties—allowing the newlyweds to bring their own alcohol and serve it to their guests if they so choose—because neither of these circumstances apply to wedding barns, which are not “public places.”

Weddings are purely private events. Only personally invited guests can attend. Wedding barns do not become “public places” under the liquor licensing law simply because they are available to rent, just as an apartment or vacation rental home does not become a “public place” simply because members of the public rent it. In both cases, premises are being leased for the exclusive use of the lessee. Unlike a bar or a restaurant, an apartment or a vacation home—or a wedding barn—is not open to the general public. **But most importantly, the barn owner does not sell alcohol -- any alcohol that is served is purchased elsewhere by the lessee and distributed by the lessee at their discretion.**

A wedding barn is nothing like a tavern. But special interests do not like even the slightest competition and they have been more than willing to enlist the government’s help in protecting them from new ideas and competitors. In recent years, there have been several attempts to amend the liquor license law to expand who needs a license, or to change the definition of “public place.” Fortunately, to date those efforts have all failed.

This latest attempt, introduced as AB 304/SB 332, once again attempts to expand the definition of “public place” to cover wedding barns and other private event venues. In so doing, the proposal leaves barn owners one of two choices. They could become taverns, obtaining the same licenses as taverns. Or, if they wish to try to continue operating as they have been for years, they would need to obtain a new “no-sale event venue permit.” That permit, which would be newly created by the bill, limits wedding barns (and other private event venues) to operate no more than six days per year, and a maximum of one day per month. No person could consume spirits at the venue either—so newlyweds would be prohibited by law from sharing a toast with brandy old-fashioneded on their wedding day.

Supporters argue that this proposal will have little impact on barns because under the bill they can simply obtain liquor licenses and operate as taverns do. But that argument is disconnected from reality. This proposal would essentially render many wedding barns inoperable, since in the real world many obstacles could keep them from being able to acquire the necessary Class-B license that’s required to operate. This could be due to zoning restrictions that prevent them from functioning as taverns, limited resources that hinder their ability to make the required investments to qualify as taverns, or the fact that they cannot operate profitably as “no-sale event venues” with a maximum of six events per year and only one event per month. Indeed, how can any business operate if the government tells them they are limited to only being open six days per year and one day per month?

Moreover, there is no assurance that wedding barn event venues will receive a Class-B license from communities. In fact, numerous communities have “abandonment” clauses incorporated into their ordinances. These clauses mandate that Class-B license holders must keep their venues operational for a specific number of days each year, or else they face the possibility of license revocation. Given that many wedding barns operate seasonally, this requirement can pose a significant threat to their survival.

This proposal would not just impact wedding barns, either. If your family rents out a vacation rental home and wants to host a dinner party—that rental is considered a “public place” unless there are “sufficient beds for all adult guests to sleep.” So, if you decide to have friends over to your vacation rental, AB 304/SB 332 empowers revenue agents to count the number of beds to limit the number of attendees. Imagine renting a lake house for your family reunion only to have law enforcement show up and tell you that you need a liquor license before you can open a beer. Government does not need to regulate the daily lives of Wisconsinites in this extreme manner.

In closing, we note that AB 304/SB 332 contains a number of other changes to Wisconsin’s three tier alcohol regulation system. The rest of the legislation is by no means perfect, but our opposition here is focused on the event venue changes. Lawmakers should simply remove the wedding barn regulatory changes, which after all are little more than an attempt to put entrepreneurial farmers out of business and protect special interests. Do not use the heavy hand of government to destroy an entire industry in Wisconsin.

Join these Fellow Associations in Opposing these Proposed Bills



Mark Your Calendar...

~Listen in. Radio Interviews:

~Friday, September 15. WCLO Big Radio 9:15 a.m.

WATA and Members; Busy Barns Adventure Farm & Wisolina Alpaca Farm

~Saturday, September 16, Deep Roots Radio WPCA Radio 93.1 FM. 9 a.m.

WATA and Members; Mommsen's Pumpkin Patch & Produce Farm & The Happy Earth Orchard

~**Wisconsin Agricultural Tourism Week September 21, 2023 - October 2, 2023**

On Farm Visits - Celebrations

~Thursday, September 21, 2023 "Breakfast on the Farm" 7:30 a.m. - 9 a.m.

The Future of Agriculture; Wegmueller Dairy Farm, Monroe, WI

~Friday, September 22, 2023 Luke Bryan Tour - Watch for Wisconsin Limited Liability Signs on the property

~Monday, September 25, 2023 NET Mobil Bus Tour: Old Homestead Orchard, The Flower Bee Farm, Spirits of Norway Vineyard, and Jerry Smith's Produce & Pumpkin Farm

~Tuesday, October 3, 2023 Ag-Ventures Bus Tour: World Dairy Expo, Hinchley's Dairy Farm, and Schuster's Farm

~Thursday, October 5, 2023 Ag-Ventures Bus Tour: Kelley's Farmstead, Kelley's Country Creamery, LaClare Creamery, and Four Winds Farm Fitchburg

~Saturday, October 28—WFBF Leadership Boot Camp. [Details](#).

~2023 WATA will be represented at:

~National Extension Tourism Conference Milwaukee September 25 & 26

~Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation Annual Meeting December 2 & 3

~Wisconsin Farmers Union Annual Summit December 9 & 10

~2024 WATA will be represented at:

~Wisconsin Association of Fairs - January 8 & 9

~WFFV Conference - "Grow Wisconsin". January 28-30

~Governor's Conference on Tourism March 10-12



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