

Recommendation #6

Sub-committee: Education and Workforce

Submitted by: Krista Knigge and Mark Stephenson

Problem Statement: The Wisconsin Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (WDVR) created a policy in 2016 which significantly reduced the number of farmers with disabilities that WDVR serves. The “Existing Business Policy” requires farmers/consumers who own an existing business and want assistance from WDVR to provide three prior years of taxes to demonstrate both profitability and that the farmer/business owner earned minimum wage or above for hours worked for each of those three years. Most farmers/small business owners cannot meet this stringent Wisconsin-created policy. This policy has dramatically reduced the number of farmers with disabilities WDVR served from 80-100 farmers per year to approximately five per year since 2016.

Recommended Solution:

1. **Retire the current Existing Business policy.**
2. **Update and reinstate the “Toolkit for Existing Farms”.** The Toolkit for Existing Farms process permitted the WDVR to provide services to approximately 80-100 farmers with disabilities each year. With this WDVR assistance, 95% of those farmers were able to continue farming for at least five or more years.
3. **Add a fee schedule to the Toolkit for Existing Farms** that would assure the WDVR that the historical \$1-\$1.5 million expenditure for farmers per federal fiscal year would again be the norm.
 - a. The 2014 \$9.4 million cited by WDVR as the amount that they spent on 164 farmers with disabilities was one of the reasons for creating the Existing Business policy. The \$9.4 million expenditure was due to a 100% increase in the number of farmers with disabilities DVR typically serves. This surge in numbers was due to WDVR activating individuals from a wait list including farmers with disabilities.
 - b. In an analysis of 177 farm cases, the WDVR's average farmer case service expenditure was approximately \$36,000.
 - c. A fee schedule where WDVR covers 100% of the costs up to \$36,000.00 and a 50/50 cost share between WDVR and the farmer for costs over \$36,000 would align to a similar fee schedule in WDVR's Self-Employment Start-up Toolkit.

Recommendation #17**Sub-committee:** Education and Workforce**Submitted by:** Paul Scharfman

Problem Statement: There is a “hidden workforce” in rural Wisconsin. These are people who want to work but who cannot overcome the barriers to work on their own. A survey conducted by the UW-Population Health Institute (<https://uwphi.pophealth.wisc.edu/>) identified transportation to work, access to health insurance, and childcare as the most limiting barriers. Freeing them to join the workforce would benefit the worker, their community’s businesses and their community.

Recommended Solution:

1. **The State of Wisconsin financially assist rural businesses who pursue healthy workplace practices.**
 - a) Access the UW-Population Health Institute to conduct a study identifying the potential workforce by county across the state.
 - b) Partially cost offset rideshare-type programs to get people to work.
 - c) Partially cost offset access to health insurance.
 - d) Partially cost offset access to childcare.
 - e) Stipulate that all funding comes with the requirement that participating businesses must adhere to the principals of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of non-discrimination in hiring or pay level on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, age, equal pay, disability, genetic information, or criminal background.
 - f) Stipulate that all funding comes with the requirement that participating businesses must train their management and supervisors in the “soft skills” of managing a diverse workforce (such training will be partially funded by the State).
 - g) Help fund social media campaign and/or articles that explain the program to the public.
 - h) Promote the program and also look for additional funding support through the Department of Workforce Development.

Recommendation #24

Sub-committee: Education and Workforce

Submitted by: Rene Johnson, John Schmidt

Problem Statement: Many students do not perceive agriculture as a career option.

Recommended Solution:

Develop a Dairy Internship Program to attract university and technical college students to production agriculture. The internship program will be offered through universities and technical colleges with agricultural programs across the state of Wisconsin. University and colleges will assist hosting businesses in outlining a project, creating a list of responsibilities, wage and work schedule. The Dairy Task Force is requesting state funding for this project. Internship guidelines include:

1. A host business comes forward with the desire to have an intern.
2. The educator helps the dairy outline an internship project, job duties and expectations. In addition, a work schedule and time frame for the internship are outlined. At this time the hosting business is learning things that will assist them with the intern and also with basic employee management. Specifically focusing on:
 - **Soft Skills** – basic management practices to encourage a positive work environment. How to interact with employees in a constructive manner and ways to encourage development within your company and the agriculture industry. Develop a productive, kind, patient and safe work environment. Establish real tools for the employer to work with to encourage positive relationships with their employees and family members.
3. The internship is posted at university and technical colleges looking for applicants. The local educators can help screen potential candidates for the host business and screen a smaller group for interviews.
4. The host business interviews and offers the internship to potential candidate.
5. During the internship the educator will check in monthly with the intern and host business to evaluate progress.
6. At the end of the internship the intern will present their learning and findings on the project to the host business and educator.

We would like a three-year commitment for this program and our goal is the development of ten internships per year.

The annual funding requested is:

\$2000 per internship x 10 interns from the State of Wisconsin: \$20,000

Marketing of the program through Technical College in-kind budget: \$2,000

Total: \$22,000 per year

The \$2,000 per intern would be given to the university or technical college to provide direction, support and guidance to the host farm and intern – the farm is responsible for paying the labor cost of the intern.