

cattleTRAILS

.....December 2025

To promote the Wisconsin beef business through advocacy, leadership, and education.



WISCONSIN
CATTLEMEN'S
ASSOCIATION



President's Path

Tressa Lacy, WCA President



Wisconsin winter has arrived bold and unapologetic, bringing cold and wet days. Seeing cows graze peacefully on snow-dusted cornstalks reminds me to slow down and appreciate life's simple gifts. Soon, the first calves will arrive—a quiet promise of hope for the year ahead.

This time of year is not only about enduring the elements—it's about embracing the traditions and resilience that define us as cattle producers. It's a season to pause, reflect, and celebrate the strength of our community. This past year has reminded us that resilience isn't just a word—it's the lifeblood of our industry. From record-high cattle prices to the smallest herd in decades, producers have faced challenges that tested every ounce of grit. Persistent drought across key regions tightened forage supplies, forcing tough decisions and slowing herd rebuilding efforts. At the same time, strong consumer demand kept beef at the center of America's table, even as retail prices climbed to historic levels. Policy changes, including The One Big Beautiful Bill, awarded beef producers a long-awaited victory. Foreign disease threats at our borders, coupled with global pressures—from trade uncertainty to inflation—have added layers of complexity. Yet, our industry has remained steadfast, communicating

"Resilience isn't just a word—it's the lifeblood of our industry."

clearly and fairly with government about what we need to keep moving forward. Proving once again that cattle producers know how to weather storms. As we look ahead, the road to rebuilding our herd numbers will be at a 2-year life cycle pace, but I believe it's paved with opportunity.

This message also marks my final President's Path. Serving as WCA President has been an honor and an enlightening opportunity. I am deeply grateful for the mentorship, camaraderie, and support I've received along the way. I am proud of our organization and of every member who understands the importance of having producers' voices heard directly in Madison through our dedicated lobbyist. Your commitment to WCA ensures that the beef producer's perspective gets the opportunity to shape the future of our industry. Thank you for allowing me to serve. Here's to a bright future for Wisconsin cattle producers.

On behalf of the Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association, I wish you and your families a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year. May the coming months bring health, success, and continued pride in the work we do together.

-Tressa Lacy

2025 WCA President

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Connecting Legislators to Farms: Reflections from the Wisconsin Beef Leadership Institute

Abigail George, Beef Leadership Institute Member



On Tuesday, November 11th, members of the Wisconsin Beef Leadership Institute (WBLI) and WCA's Legislative Committee headed to the State Capitol to meet with our policy makers and discuss important topics for our producers and industry.

As part of the Wisconsin Beef Leadership Institute (WBLI), I had the privilege of participating in these legislative visits. The experience offered valuable insight into the legislative process and the critical role producer voices play in shaping policies that affect Wisconsin's beef industry.

The day began with a briefing led by Jordan Lamb, WCA's lobbyist with The Welch Group, who provided an in-depth overview of the state's legislative and lobbying process. She discussed a few of the topic issues WCA is lobbying for and how we can best share that message and help in her efforts. These topics included opposing livestock fee increases, and support for lab-grown meat labeling, veterinary student loan assistance, and beginning farmer land assistance.

In the afternoon, we headed to our policy makers offices to discuss these topics and more that are vital to Wisconsin's cattle producers. These meetings provided an opportunity to share personal experiences from the farm and emphasize how proposed legislation directly impacts producers and their operations.

Engaging with policymakers face-to-face highlighted the importance of building relationships and maintaining open lines of communication between agriculture and government. What stood out most to me was how open legislators and their staff were to listening and learning. Many appreciated hearing firsthand how policy decisions affect our own family farms and many others across Wisconsin.

By participating in discussions at the Capitol, we helped strengthen the connection between Wisconsin's beef producers and our elected officials, ensuring that the needs and perspectives of farmers remain part of the legislative conversation. This experience reaffirmed the importance of leadership and advocacy within our industry. By coming together to share our stories, we helped strengthen the collective voice of Wisconsin's beef producers.

-Abigail George

Upcoming Events:

Beef Roundup Webinar Series

Dec. 11, Jan. 15, Feb. 19, March 19
Online

Driftless Region Beef Conference

Jan. 22-23
Dubuque, IA

Cattle Industry Convention

Feb. 3-5
Nashville, TN

Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association Winter Conference

Feb. 28
Mauston, WI

Regional Direct Marketing Workshops

February 25 – Plum City
March 6 – Viroqua
March 11 – Kaukauna
March 17 – Clinton

Call 1-800-728-2333 to register

CHECK OUR WEBSITE FOR
THE LATEST EVENTS
AND INFORMATION

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wisconsincattlemen.com

State Legislative Update

Jordan Lamb

WCA Legislative Counsel

The Welch Group

The Wisconsin State Legislature is currently “in session.” The State Senate met on November 18, followed by the Assembly on November 19. Neither chamber is scheduled to convene on the floor in December. However, both houses are expected to return for one day each in January and February 2026, with the possibility of an additional day in March.



On November 11, participants in the Wisconsin Cattlemen’s Association (WCA) Beef Leadership Institute spent a full day at the Wisconsin State Capitol meeting with legislators to advocate on key issues affecting Wisconsin’s beef industry.

Livestock Fee Increases (ATCP 10 and ATCP 12)

A top priority during these meetings was the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection’s (DATCP’s) proposed revisions to the administrative rules that regulate Animal Disease and Movement and Animal Markets, Dealers, and Truckers. DATCP’s original draft included fee increases of nearly 1,700%, a level that would have imposed severe financial strain on markets, dealers, and truckers and increase costs that would ultimately fall on farmers.

Thanks to significant public engagement, including more than 500 comments submitted in opposition, DATCP released a revised proposal. The current version reflects increases closer to an inflationary adjustment. WCA is reviewing these revisions closely. It remains essential that Wisconsin continue to

fund its animal health programs through meaningful state support, as neighboring states do. These programs protect public health and livestock health statewide, and WCA firmly believes that shifting their full cost onto farmers is neither reasonable nor sustainable.

Rural Veterinary Shortage: AB 505 / SB 501

The WCA Beef Leadership Institute also urged legislators to support **Assembly Bill 505 / Senate Bill 501**, which would create a rural veterinary loan repayment program. Wisconsin faces a critical shortage of large-animal veterinarians, putting animal health and farm operations at risk. This legislation establishes a grant program offering up to \$25,000 per year for four years to veterinarians who practice in rural areas and devote at least 25% of their time to livestock care.

With veterinary education costs often exceeding \$150,000, many new graduates cannot afford to enter large-animal practice in rural areas. By incentivizing service in rural communities, this bill will strengthen animal health, reduce farm costs associated with delayed or unavailable veterinary care, and support the long-term vitality of Wisconsin’s livestock sector. WCA strongly supports this investment in Wisconsin’s agricultural future.

Agricultural Road Improvement Program (ARIP)

Finally, WCA extended its sincere appreciation to the Legislature and Governor Evers for renewing the **Agricultural Road Improvement Program (ARIP)** in the 2025–27 state budget, adding another **\$150 million** for municipal grants to improve agricultural roads. Reliable rural infrastructure is essential for moving Wisconsin-raised cattle, feed, and meat products to processing facilities and markets across the state, the nation, and the world. Reinvesting in these roads ensures that Wisconsin agriculture remains competitive and resilient.

You are invited!

Wisconsin Cattlemen’s Association 2026 Winter Conference

February 28th, 2026

WCA Annual Meeting
The Lodge at Mauston

Cost of Attendance:

Single Registration: \$40 per
Groups of 3 or More: \$30 per
Youth (Students): \$20 per

**Cost Includes: Lunch, Door Prizes,
and more!**

2026 Presenters:

Keynote Speaker: Tucker Brown
Brazy Zuck, Zinpro
Cody Quam, Marda Angus Farm
Dr. Amy Radunz, Purina Animal Health
Tressa Lacy, TransOva Genetics

And more!

Scan the QR Code to Register Today or Visit
www.wisconsincattlemen.com/events/winter-conference



Steak Trailer Update

Brady Zuck & Jared Geiser, WCA Steak Trailer Co-Chairs



The WCA Steak Trailer wrapped up the 2025 season with a very successful World Dairy Expo. The first week in October featured beautiful weather, drawing a large crowd to the show. We did make some adjustments to the burger patties that we are serving, with a very positive response. A big thank you goes out to the companies who partnered with us for customer coupons, including Diamond V, Natural Biologics, Arm & Hammer, Vita Plus, and Zinpro. We would also like to recognize Emerald Clovers, Western Technical College Professional Agriculture Students, Jena Swanson, and Pam for volunteering as Group Labor.

In November, the WCA Steak Trailer served a Customer Appreciation Lunch at Premier Livestock in Withee, WI. With our new cooking trailer, we can handle these medium-sized events much better. In the future, we would like to do more of these events, as Dave and Carrie's schedules allow.

We would like to recognize Dave and Carrie Goss for an extremely successful fourth year of operating the Steak Trailer. Their focus on efficient operations, quality products, and excellent customer service continue

to make the Steak Trailer a go to destination at each event. We are currently evaluating the repairs and improvements needed to equipment and will complete that work over the winter months. We look forward to having the Goss' continue their management in 2026.

2026 Event Schedule

- WPS Farm Show- Oshkosh – March 24-26
- Midwest Horse Show- Madison - April 17-19
- WI Farm Technology Days – July 14-16
- Wisconsin State Fair- Milwaukee – August 6-16
- World Dairy Expo – September 29 – October 2

Additionally, we are already gearing up for next year's events. If you know of a local 4-H/FFA/youth group looking for a fundraising opportunity, consider the Steak Trailer! Please contact Carrie Goss (608-606-2356, wcasteaktrailer@gmail.com) to secure your group's time at an upcoming event for the 2026 season.

We want to thank you all for the support in 2025 and look forward to another successful year in 2026!

-Brady Zuck & Jared Geiser

Cattle Trails Advertising

Half-page advertisements are available for placement in the upcoming issue of the Cattle Trails newsletter for \$50 per issue. Ad spaces for the March issue must be claimed by February 15, 2026.

Contact the WCA office for advertising details.
Phone: (608) 228-1457 | Email: kaitlyn@wisconsincattlemen.com

The third trimester- getting ready for successful calving

Bill Halfman, Beth McIlquham, UW-Madison Extension Beef Outreach Specialist, and Regional Livestock Educator



Management of the cow herd during the third trimester has implications for both the cow and the calf. When done correctly, it sets cows and calves up for success. On the other hand, there are consequences for poor management. Let's start by taking a look at some of the challenges, potential negative outcomes, and importance of good management during this time.

During the third trimester, energy and protein needs increase as 75 percent of calf growth occurs during this time with about 60 percent occurring the last 60 days before birth. Final development of organs and tissue is also taking place. Failure to meet nutritional needs during this time has been shown to negatively impact weaning weights, steer offspring feedlot and carcass performance, and negatively impact heifer offspring reproductive performance. Cows will utilize fat reserves and atrophy muscle tissue to try to meet needs at the expense of their body condition during the third trimester if nutritional requirements are not met.

Colostrum production begins during the third trimester. Both quality and quantity of colostrum can be negatively affected by poor management. This in turn negatively impacts passive transfer of immunity and getting the calf off to a good start. Odde reported increased calf blood serum IgG levels as body condition increased, topping out at cow body condition score (BCS) of 5.

The third trimester is the last chance to add body condition before calving if cows are thin. Cows should have a (BCS) of 5, and heifers should have a BCS of 6 at calving. Houghton et.al reported longer post partem interval, and Kunkle et.al. reported longer calving intervals returning to lower pregnancy rates, lower rates of gain and weaning weights for cows with BCS of less than 5.

Let's look at best management practices to help cows successfully navigate the third trimester and be set up for successful calving and re-breeding:

- Body condition score the herd at the beginning of the third trimester to determine the overall herd status. Identify underconditioned and over conditioned cows and consider separating them from the rest of the herd. Score the first and second calf cows separately as they are still growing themselves and have greater needs. Ideally, they are in their own group already to allow them to get what they need nutritionally while keeping costs low. Continue to monitor body condition score of the herd during third trimester to

head off problems early.

- Test forages, if you have not already done so, to match forage and feed resources to the herd's needs. Some of the forage inventory may meet cow needs without additional protein or energy supplementation. Don't overlook vitamins (A and E in particular) and minerals. Use a reputable product, monitor consumption, and adjust as necessary to ensure sufficiency. Whether you formulate your own rations or work with a nutritionist, knowing what you have is necessary to meet cow needs and control costs.
- Make sure there is enough bunk space, so all cows can get to the feed. This is especially important if limit feeding supplemental protein or energy. If bunk space is lacking, cows that need it the most are most likely the ones being shorted.
- Pay attention to adverse weather conditions and adjust energy as necessary. Third trimester and cold wet conditions coincide for spring calving herds. An occasional day of adverse weather poses relatively low risk, but extended periods of adverse weather will take a toll. Shelter from the wind will also be beneficial.

In summary, implementing a plan to help the herd successfully navigate the third trimester sets the cows up for successful calving and rebreeding, and starts the calves off on the right foot. Not doing so negatively impacts the cow and calf performance both short and long term.

References:

- Houghton, P & Lemenager, Ronald & Horstman, LA & Hendrix, Karrington & Moss, G. (1990). Effects of body composition, pre-and postpartum energy level and early weaning on reproductive performance of beef cows and preweaning calf gain. *Journal of animal science*. 68. 1438-46. 10.2527/1990.6851438x.
- Kunkle, W.E., R.S Sand, D.O. Rae, Effect of Body Condition on Productivity in Beef Cattle, Chapter in Book by Fields, M.J., & Sand, R.S. (Eds.). (1993). *Factors Affecting Calf Crop* (1st ed.). CRC Press. <https://doi.org/10.1201/9781003069119>
- Odde, K.C., Survival of the Neonatal Calf, *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Food Animal Practice*, Volume 4, Issue 3, 1988, Pages 501-508, ISSN 0749-0720, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-0720\(15\)31027-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-0720(15)31027-6).
- Reviewed by: Adam Hartfiel, Ryan Sterry, Kim Kester, UW Madison Extension Regional Livestock Educators and Dairy and Livestock Program Manager

Application Period for Crop Insurance Premium Rebates for Planting Cover Crops Open

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) opened the application period for crop insurance premium rebates for planting cover crops at on December 1, 2025. DATCP administers this program in partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Risk Management Agency.

There is \$800,000, or 160,000 acres of coverage, to be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. Recipients will receive a \$5 per acre rebate on their summer 2026 crop insurance premium for acres planted with cover crops in 2025, then planted to an insurable crop the following year.

Producers who received state or federal cost-sharing to plant cover crops in 2025 are not eligible for this year's program. Applicants should use their FSA-578 form to complete the application, and there is no limit on acres

an applicant can apply for. Applicants should keep seed receipts and planting records, as DATCP will conduct audits to ensure cover crops were planted.

The web-based rebate application, information about eligibility, and FAQs will be made available on covercropsrebate.wi.gov. The application will remain open until 12 p.m. on January 30, 2026 or until program funding is exhausted. A copy of the application questions and instructions will be available for reference on covercropsrebate.wi.gov. Questions should be directed to DATCPCC@wisconsin.gov.

In the 2025-2027 Executive Budget, Governor Evers and the state legislature reached a bipartisan agreement to include continued funding of \$800,000 annually for the Crop Insurance Premium Rebates for Planting Cover Crops Program.

Beef Roundup Webinar Series begins in December

Beef producers are invited to attend a series of free educational webinars this winter. The Beef Roundup Webinar Series will be hosted by the University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension featuring Extension specialists and industry experts from across the country covering timely topics relevant to today's beef producers.

- **December 11th, 2025:** Handling Facilities with Dr. Ron Gill, Texas A&M Extension Livestock Specialist
- **January 15th, 2026:** Unlocking the Full Potential of Growth-Enhancing Technologies with Dr. Jessica Sperber, University of Nebraska- Lincoln Extension Feedlot Specialist

- **February 19th, 2026:** Asian Longhorned Tick, Dr. Cassandra Olds, Kansas State, Extension Entomologist
- **March 19th, 2026:** Key Considerations for Rebuilding Your Cow Herd with Dr. Randie Culbertson, Iowa State, Extension Cow-calf Specialist

All webinars will be held from 7-8pm CST.

Don't miss out on this opportunity to connect with other producers and professionals in the beef industry.

To register for this free webinar series, please visit this link: <https://go.wisc.edu/BeefReg>

Driftless Region Beef Conference

The university extension services in Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin are offering the Driftless Region Beef Conference to educate beef producers Jan. 22-23, 2026, at the Grand River Convention Center in Dubuque. Past participants in this conference have said the program would increase their economic return by more than \$10 per animal managed, testifying to the value of attending the conference.

Cattle prices have been at record highs year after year, but producers still need to focus on the basics to remain profitable. Four keynote speakers will be featured the first afternoon. From the health perspective Dr. Mark Hilton from Midwest Beef Cattle Consultants will discuss the role and value of basic biosecurity, and Dr.

Teresa Steckler from the University of Illinois will share information on the movement of ticks into the upper Midwest and their impact on cattle herds. Dr. Matt Spangler from the University of Nebraska Lincoln will discuss genetic selection tips and the role it plays in cow longevity. Dr. Kellie Curry-Raper from Oklahoma State University will share some of her research looking at what practices add value to feeder calves and how to implement them in the cow herd.

The early registration fee of \$120 per person must be received prior to midnight, Jan. 7. After that date, it increases to \$145. More information on topics, speakers and lodging is available at <https://www.regcytes.extension.iastate.edu/beef/>.

Beef Checkoff's Steady Beat

Tammy Vaassen
Executive Director
Wisconsin Beef Council

Your industry has frequently been in the news over the last few months – beef prices, imports, demand, supply, etc. The resulting volatility has no doubt been challenging to manage. As we begin to prepare for the holiday season, I want you – the investors into the Beef Checkoff – to know that we are thankful for all that you do to raise high quality beef for consumers. In addition, I hope you also know that the Beef Checkoff is focused on ensuring that consumers keep beef on their plates – regardless of the noise in the media, our detractors, and others with agendas that would like to challenge the long term viability of this industry.



Wisconsin Beef Council invests 50 cents of the \$1/head Beef Checkoff in projects that are reviewed, ranked and approved by our 22-member board. Our board members are Checkoff investors like you, who take proposals from our staff and outside contractors into consideration to set the course of action for the coming year. We continue to reach diverse audiences to promote and educate about beef – at the store level, in restaurants, to healthcare providers, and directly to the consumer. Two examples of programs implemented this year:

- Kwik Trip campaign – the WBC team created digital ads for fuel dispensers and in-store screens that showcased beautiful beef cuts while highlighting the powerful nutrition beef provides. The result: 251,511 packages of fresh beef sold with Kwik Rewards – an 80% increase from the previous year – and the ads were played 3 million times.
- Prime Rib Trail – launching this fall, this trail features 16 restaurants nominated by beef lovers across the state. Featured in Gather Wisconsin's annual magazine and promoted heavily online, the trail quickly captured attention: in the first month the page on beeftips.com earned more than 24,000 views, had more than 200,000 social media views, and media stories resulted in reach of over 125 million.

The other 50 cents of your \$1/head investment goes to the Cattlemen's Beef Board and is invested in national

and international programs to grow beef demand, through contractors. Those contractors must annually submit program proposals, which are also evaluated and funded by your farmer and rancher peers. Two examples of projects implemented this past year, that the WBC also extended in our state:

- NCBA, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff, directly engages with doctors and their patients with educational materials highlighting beef's role in health. That includes creation of toolkits that are sent directly to doctors' offices to empower medical health professionals to confidently recommend beef. Post-program evaluations consistently indicate that doctors are more likely to recommend beef after receiving toolkits. WBC invested additional dollars into this project, helping to get more toolkits out across our state.
- Another Beef Checkoff contractor is the U.S. Meat Export Federation. USMEF increases market access for U.S. beef worldwide, develops demand among new and existing buyers overseas and increases the value of the entire carcass through export support. In September, WBC partnered with USMEF to host a trade team from Central America and the Dominican Republic to tour Wisconsin farms, packing plants and other businesses. The goal is to help importers and retail/foodservice businesses in these countries understand the dedication to animal care, environmental stewardship, and the production of high quality and safe beef available for them to purchase. Within one week of the tour, orders for beef products originating from Wisconsin were already in the works. A portion of this project was funded through a grant WBC received from the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection.



It is the continuous messaging at the state, national and international levels that create a steady reminder of beef throughout the supply chain to grow demand. I am grateful for the producer leaders who serve on our board, those who represent you nationally, and for the opportunity to work in an industry that is dedicated to continuous improvement. May your holidays be blessed with family memories and delicious beef – make sure you check out our website at <https://www.beeftips.com/> for new appetizer, prime rib and other beefy ideas for your festive dinner table.

-Tammy Vaassen



Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association

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