

FARM BUREAU® Connection

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Gather Together for Wisconsin Agriculture

By Kevin Krentz, Wisconsin Farm Bureau President



Agriculture is more than farming; it's how we feed our families, use our natural resources and our way of life. As a farmer myself, I want you to have confidence in the food you are purchasing, preparing and serving your family.

Wisconsin Farm Bureau is excited to unveil a new, statewide resource called Gather Wisconsin, a website focused on connecting you with the farmers growing and raising your family's food through

education, valuable resources and sustainable ideas.

Regardless of where we make our food purchases, Wisconsin agriculture has an impact on us all. From delectable recipes to on-farm agritourism experiences, the goal at Gather Wisconsin is to provide meaningful opportunities to connect with your food and the farmers behind it.

Gather Wisconsin is a source for understanding food labels, sourcing quality ingredients and learning more about farming in Wisconsin. Visit the site for the opportunity to hear from Wisconsin farmers and



agriculture experts on topics influencing food, farming and families.

Information housed on the site falls into three main categories: food, farming and family.

The food section focuses on valuable information for selecting and preparing food, understanding food labels, and mouthwatering recipes to share with your family.

In the farming section, you have the opportunity to ask questions and receive answers directly from farmers themselves. The section also details supporting roles in agriculture, life on the farm and environmental practices farmers utilize across the state.

Finally, check out the family section for nutrition tips, agritourism experiences in Wisconsin and sustainable swaps to reduce your carbon footprint at home.

This is a space where food, farming and families gather. Visit Gather Wisconsin now at gatherwisconsin.com. Be sure to follow along on Facebook (@gatherwisconsin) and on Instagram (@gather.wi) so you never miss an update.

Thank you for your continued support of Wisconsin agriculture.

SUSTAINABILITY

Field of Dreams: If you build [biodiversity], they will come

Have you seen the movie "Field of Dreams"? In the movie, Iowa farmer Ray Kinsella is inspired by a voice to build a "totally illogical" baseball field where his corn field used to be.

You might remember the iconic "if you build it, they will come" line. Ray decides to listen to the voice and he created a place where dreams come true.

Farmers create their own 'Field of Dreams' by following soil health principles.

Farmers know that if they build biodiversity in and around their farm fields, beneficial insects and microbiology will come. Building soil biodiversity turns ordinary soil into an active, living organism.

Planting cover crops builds soil biodiversity by providing fuel for the soil in dormant periods before planting and after harvest. Cover crops are plants that are used to slow erosion, improve soil health, enhance the availability of water, and control weeds, pests and diseases while building soil biodiversity.

Minimizing soil disturbance helps to protect the existing biodiversity. Regular plowing can exhaust valuable soil organic matter and release the carbon stored in the soil. Disturbing the soil less leads to greater protection against erosion, keeping the beneficial biology of the soil in place and available for plants to use.

Crop rotation is another form of adding biodiversity to the soil.

Each crop has its own nutrient demands, but also leaves its own footprint on the soil. For example, a farmer might plant soybeans that leave nitrogen in the soil one year and corn that needs nitrogen to grow the next.

A final step to increasing soil biodiversity is **introducing livestock**. Livestock can be integrated through grazing practices or seasonal manure application. A benefit of grazing is the cows spread their own manure, but a farmer can also apply manure precisely and appropriately to give the soil similar benefits of livestock integration.

'Field of Dreams' reminds us that sometimes when you believe the impossible, the incredible comes true. Farmers often approach their work with the same concept at heart. Farmers are eager to try new things and develop new technologies to enhance production methods and produce safe, sustainable food.

Just like players on the baseball field, diverse plants and organisms work together as a team to build biodiversity. As you plan your landscaping and gardens this spring, you can build biodiversity by introducing native species and planting a variety of plants to support all forms of life.

If you build biodiversity, soil health will come.

Opening a (Farm) of Worms:

Lush Farms Builds Soil Health with Vermicompost

By Rachel Gerbitz

Have you ever heard the expressions “the early bird gets the worm” or “you’re opening a can of worms”? Worms tend to come up in conversation with little thought. A worm farmer might tell you that there is merit behind these commonly used phrases and the science behind a worm’s behavior.

Anthony Arubcias always wanted to be a farmer. He aspired to own a business that offered a product or service that made a positive impact on society. In 2019, Anthony purchased a nine-acre property in Dodge County and began an unlikely endeavor – he became a worm farmer.

Anthony’s goal was to create a product to improve soil and plant health through naturally occurring microbiology. The product is worm castings, or vermicompost, an organic fertilizer made from the excrement of earthworms.

“Has anyone ever told you that when you have worms in your garden you have healthy soil?” shared Anthony. “That is the business Lush Farms is in – putting those nutrients in the soil without the worms.”

Anthony worked with a business partner to convert a dairy barn into a worm farm. As a start-up, he had to get creative in building his business infrastructure.

“Some of the equipment we bought new, some we bought used and some of it we just made and that’s been a real joy for me – the skills I’ve had to learn,” said Anthony.

The worms are housed in large stainless-steel bins called worm beds that are filled with soil materials for the worms to live in. The base of the worm bed is rich, environmentally neutral black peat moss. The peat moss base is added to a repurposed feed mixer to be mixed with a grain-based nutritional supplement from the local cooperative. The supplement is carefully balanced to provide vitamins, amino acids and grit for the worms.

“We’ve all heard the expression ‘the early bird gets the worm,’” shared Anthony. “We leave the lights on in the worm room 24/7 so the worms think it’s daytime and stay burrowed underground.”



The “Castings Crew” at Lush Farms.

Quality control is key to a consistent product. Lush Farms raises African Nightcrawlers, a species of worms that is particularly susceptible to temperature changes and external pressures. Therefore, moisture and temperature are monitored daily. Worms are counted manually before they are placed in a bin. Counting the worms is an important step of the process to ensure the worms are getting the proper amount of food. Anthony can accurately predict how much a bin of worms will

produce based on the count. Worm beds are lab tested to ensure the inputs are compliant with organic standards.

“We try to be very disciplined in everything about this,” said Anthony.

At peak production, the worms spend two weeks in the bin before the castings are ready to be harvested. When it is time to harvest, the bins are flipped onto a conveyor system. A large trommel with a series of screens then separates the castings from the undigested worm bedding. The moist worms ride up the bell and fall into a bin to be counted and returned to a new bin to continue the production cycle. The undigested worm bedding is collected and used in gardens as a rich topsoil. Finally, the fine castings are collected in a shipping tote and prepared for distribution.

Captions:

1. Lush Farms is home to approximately 2 million worms.
2. Flowers before adding worm castings. (Submitted photo)
3. Flowers after adding worm castings. (Submitted photo)
4. The small orbs are worm eggs ready to hatch. Raising their own worm hatch is integral to the success of Lush Farms.

To read the full story, visit wfbf.com/member-profiles/opening-a-farm-of-worms-lush-farms-builds-soil-health-with-vermicompost.



Spring Yardwork Safety Tips



Spring is in the air, which means snow and ice are finally melting and grass, flowers, and trees are beginning to bloom. Bidding farewell to the winter woes is something many Wisconsinites look forward to, but now that the ground is looking a

bit greener, yardwork is being added back to the to-do lists.

As with any household chore, performing yard maintenance safely can prevent accidents. According to Consumer Reports, more than 100 people die each year while performing yardwork. In addition, around 143,000 people end up in the emergency room as the result of yardwork-related injuries.

Use the Proper Tools and Equipment

Lawnmowers, trimmers, rakes, shovels, shears, and hoses are essential lawncare tools. However, older equipment is more prone to breaking down or not working as effectively. Make sure machinery is maintained regularly or replaced when necessary, and tools meet ergonomic standards. For example, a rake with a worn-out handle can break or cause splinters. Items such as frayed cords and defective outlets are major electrical hazards.

Power equipment such as pressure washers, generators and chainsaws should always be used with caution while following instructions in the owners manual. When doing yardwork that involves being on a ladder, be sure to follow proper safety protocols such as maintaining 3-point

contact, keep weight balanced in the middle, and ensure the ground surface is stable. Falls from ladders make up an alarming number of accidents.

Storing tools and equipment, weed killer, fertilizer, and other chemicals in a safe, enclosed place prevents children, pets, and other vulnerable visitors from accessing them.

Wear Protective Equipment

When the temps are warm, it can be quite tempting to slip on a pair of sandals or other casual shoes. However, operating equipment and sharp tools without the proper footwear can lead to severe injury. Imagine dropping sharp pruning shears on your bare foot. Wear comfortable, close-toed boots or sneakers with tightly tied laces.

In addition to taking care of your feet during yard duty, your eyes, ears, and hands should also be covered. Always wear safety glasses or sunglasses to shield your eyes from flying objects, and ear protection to reduce loud noises that can cause hearing loss. Thick gloves help mitigate cuts, burns, and irritation.

Apply Sunscreen

Even when the sky is cloudy, wearing sunblock helps shield your skin from harmful ultraviolet rays, which can lead to sunburn and skin cancer. SPF sunscreen creates a barrier that leaves skin comfortable year-round. If you plan to be outside for a long time, reapply sunscreen every two hours for consistent protection.

With the right home insurance, your property is protected — including your yard you've worked hard to nurture and maintain. To learn more about the home coverage Rural Mutual offers, contact your local agent.

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Wells Farms GATHER AROUND THE TABLE



Recipes and photos courtesy of Wells Farms. This family farm is located outside Madison and is owned and operated by Kenny and Sarah Wells and their daughters. They are passionate about promoting and involving their community in agriculture. On their farm in Rio, the Wells Family raises Angus and Angus-cross bred cattle and Heritage Pork. To learn more about their farm and enjoy more recipes, visit wellsfarmsbeef.com.



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For this and other recipes,
visit gatherwisconsin.com.

Beef Pot Pie

Ingredients

- 3 Wells Farms beef shanks
- 1 pkt. Lipton Beefy Onion Soup Mix
- ½ c. water
- 1 tsp. thyme
- ½ tsp. rosemary
- 1 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
- 2 Tbsp. butter
- 2 Tbsp. flour
- 1 glove garlic
- 1 onion, diced
- 1 bag frozen peas and carrots
- 1 box refrigerated pie crusts (2 crusts)

Directions

1. Place beef shanks in a slow cooker. Pour ½ c. water over shanks and sprinkle with packet of soup mix.
2. Set slow cooker on low for 8 hours.
3. After shanks are cooked, remove bones and any large chunks of fat from slow cooker. Shred meat with a fork.
4. In a Dutch oven or stock pot, add 1 Tbsp. olive oil.
5. Add diced onions and garlic to pot and cook until onions are soft.
6. While the onions are cooking, preheat the oven to 425 degrees.
7. Unroll one pie crust into the bottom of pie pan and set aside.
8. After onions are cooked, add 3 Tbsp. butter to pot and melt.
9. Add 3 Tbsp. flour to the pot. Stir and cook for about 1 minute.
10. Add shredded meat and juices from the slow cooker to the pot and stir together.
11. Add thyme, rosemary and Worcestershire sauce. Cook, stirring periodically until sauce thickens.
12. Stir in the bag of peas and carrots and cook a few more minutes.
13. Place the meat mixture into the pie pan lined with the pie crust.
14. Roll out the other pie crust on top of the meat mixture. Pinch the edges together and cut a slit in the middle of the pie.
15. Put the pie in the oven and bake 30-40 minutes or until the crust is a golden brown. You may want to cover the edges with strips of foil during the last 15-20 minutes to prevent the edges from getting too brown.
16. Let stand about 5 minutes before serving



Mongolian Beef

Ingredients

- 1 Wells Farms skirt steak
- ⅔ c. corn starch
- ½ c. soy sauce
- ½ c. water
- ½ c. packed brown sugar
- 1 Tbsp. olive oil
- 3 tsp. garlic, minced
- 2 tsp. ginger, finely chopped
- ½ c. vegetable oil
- 1 bunch green onions
- chili flakes, to taste
- white rice

Directions

1. In a large bowl, add corn starch.
2. Thinly slice skirt steak into strips and add to corn starch. Toss to coat. Let rest about 10 minutes.
3. In a saucepan, add 1 Tbsp. olive oil. Add garlic and ginger, stir. Cook for one minute.
4. Add soy sauce, water and brown sugar to garlic and ginger. Stir and bring to boil. Turn to a simmer and cook until it begins to thicken.
5. In a skillet, add ½ c. oil or enough to fry the meat strips.
6. Working in batches, add meat and fry until crispy, just a couple minutes. With a slotted spoon, remove to a paper towel lined plate. Add the next batch.
7. Carefully discard oil or use a new pan and add meat back in. Pour sauce over top. Toss to coat. Add sliced green onions and chili flakes to taste.

