



# LEGISLATIVE update

## June 2024

Information provided by Jordan Lamb, The Welch Group

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**Divided Government.** The 2023-24 state legislative session began on Jan. 3, 2023, when Democratic Governor Tony Evers was inaugurated for his second term. At the same time, legislative Republicans gained the largest majority in the State Senate since 1969 and came close to a veto proof supermajority in the Assembly, falling just two seats short this session. This set up the dynamic of “divided government” again this session – meaning the Governor and the legislative majorities were from political parties.

**2023-25 Biennial State Budget Adopted.** The biennial state budget process occurs at the beginning of every legislative session and continues for six months. Gov. Evers delivered his budget address at the beginning of Feb. 2023, starting the state budget negotiations between Republicans and Democrats. By July 5, the 2023-25 budget bill, now 2023 Wisconsin Act 19, was signed into law by Gov. Evers after passing through the Joint Finance Committee and both chambers of the legislature. Gov. Evers utilized his veto power, making 51 partial vetoes, including striking out \$3 billion in tax cuts for the middle class, which came as a big surprise to the state’s Republicans. In total, the 2023-25 biennial budget allocated \$97.4 billion to be spent during 2023-2025.

**Supreme Court Balance Shifts.** Also, during this session, there was a shift of power on the Wisconsin State Supreme Court. On Aug. 1, Judge Janet Protasiewicz officially became Justice Protasiewicz, flipping the Wisconsin Supreme Court from a conservative majority to a more liberal majority for the first time in 15 years. Two redistricting lawsuits were filed during the fall of 2023, confirming the legislative Republicans’ fears about the new Justice and the new majority – they were planning to address Wisconsin’s legislative district maps.

**Wisconsin Gets News Legislative Maps for 2024.** On Dec. 22, the Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled the current Wisconsin legislative maps were unconstitutional. Legislative Republicans attempted reconsideration of the decision, but the court denied it. The Legislature then passed legislation adopting maps that were originally proposed by Gov. Evers. These new maps were signed into law on Feb. 19. Under these new maps, Democrats are expected to gain seats in both houses in the 2024 elections.

**The Legislature is Adjourned - Work Continues.** The Assembly adjourned their last legislative floor session on Feb. 22. The Senate adjourned on March 12. The Governor acted on bills through mid-April. The Wisconsin State Legislature currently stands adjourned until Jan. 2025 barring an emergency. Legislative committee work can continue but is unlikely. Work on administrative rules by State Agencies can and will continue.

### HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 2023-24 SESSION

The Wisconsin Cattlemen’s Association worked on multiple issues throughout this session. Below are some of the highlights.

**ENACTED - Agricultural Road Improvement Program (ARIP)** (SB 247 / AB 244 and 2023-25 Biennial Budget). \$150 million in one-time funding to the Department of Transportation to create a grant program for municipalities with posted roads and bridges to provide funding to improve those roads and upgrade them to non-posted construction standards.

**ENACTED - Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Grant Program Extension** (2023-25 Biennial Budget). \$1 million in funding for commercial Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Program (NOPP) research project grants in 2024 and 2025 to enhance the understanding of and refine new methods that optimize commercial nitrogen applied to agricultural fields.

**ENACTED - Cover Crop Insurance Premium Rebates** (2023-25 Biennial Budget). \$800,000 for \$5 per acre rebates (160,000 acres) against farmers’ 2024 crop insurance premiums for acres that were planted with cover crops in 2023 and then planted with an insurable crop the following year.

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**ENACTED - Producer-led Watershed Grant Program** (2023-25 Biennial Budget). \$250,000 in additional funding to reach a total of \$2 million over the biennium for DATCP’s Producer-led Watershed Grant program for nonpoint source pollution abatement projects.

**ENACTED – Farmland Preservation Agreement Update** (2023 Wisconsin Act 42). Wisconsin’s farmland preservation program, administered by the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP), encourages the preservation of land for agricultural use through farmland preservation agreements and tax credits. This legislation decreases the minimum term for farmland preservation agreements from 15 years to 10 years; increases the amounts of the tax credits; and expands eligibility for farmland preservation tax credits.


**VETOED – “Protect Our Farms” Legislation – Preemption of Local Animal Regulations** (AB 957 / SB 892). Representative Pronschinske and Senator Quinn introduced legislation that would have prevented local governments from adopting ordinances that would regulate animal care, restrict medications or vaccinations for animals and prevent governments from restricting the raising of particular species in any area that is zoned agricultural. This legislation was intended to protect livestock farming in agricultural areas and curb local regulations similar to California’s Proposition 12. The bill passed on a voice vote in the Assembly on Feb. 22 and passed in the Senate on a voice vote on March 13. However, animal rights protesters increased their presence in the Capitol after the bill’s passage to urge a veto of this legislation. Despite wide-ranging support from across Wisconsin farm, agribusiness and commodity sectors, Gov. Evers vetoed the bill on March 29, 2024.


**FAILED TO PASS – Farm Bureau Health Plan Legislation** (AB 860 / SB 811). Access to affordable health care is a generational barrier to family farmers and rural agribusiness owners across Wisconsin. Because of the income calculation under the ACA, health insurance coverage is often disproportionately unaffordable for farmers and their families. Representatives Kurtz, Moses and Dittrich and Senator Testin jointly authored legislation that would have authorized the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation to offer a health benefit plan to any Wisconsin Farm Bureau member. This type of plan is currently authorized to be offered by Farm Bureaus in several other states including TN, KS, IN, IA, and TX and has been very successful as another option for farmers in those states. The legislation had a hearing in both houses this session but failed to pass. The farm and commodity groups plan to work to bring this legislation back for consideration during the 2025-26 Wisconsin legislative session.




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