



# FFTF Breaks Ground on Food + Farm Exploration Center

Ag industry, business leaders, and key legislators attend innovative agricultural center groundbreaking

It was a cool day in more ways than one, April 29. The rains held off and there was an air of excitement when Farming for the Future Foundation (FFTF) broke ground on the Food + Farm Exploration Center in Plover, Wisconsin.

With the FFTF focus being to reconnect people to agriculture and the food they eat, the Food + Farm Exploration Center will be a state-of-the-art educational manifestation of the foundation's mission.

The Farm + Food Exploration Center, slated to open in summer 2023, will be a place for people to gather on a journey into the world of modern agriculture, meet people behind the food they eat, build their science and engineering skills, and connect, play, and learn.

It will be a teaching farm, a children's

museum, science center and community workshop all rolled into a tantalizing celebration of food and farming.

The Farm + Food Exploration Center will also be a place to educate current and future generations about agricultural innovation and sustainability.

In short, it will be a place where everyone has a seat at the table.

The land upon which the Farm + Food Exploration Center is being constructed was generously donated to the project by the Worzella family, one of Central Wisconsin's multi-generational farmers and longtime members of the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association.

The center will be located just west of Interstate 39, in Plover, east of Hoover Road and to the immediate

south of Lake Pacawa Park.

Candise Miller, executive director of the foundation, said the center will operate as the common ground for the public to explore the innovative nature of agriculture and become inspired by it.

**Above:** A rendering of the Food + Farm Exploration Center and sign announcing its anticipated completion in 2023 helped communicate the Farming for the Future Foundation's vision during a groundbreaking ceremony, April 29, in Plover, Wisconsin.

**BRIDGING THE DIVIDE**

“There is a gap where many people just aren’t connected to the food they eat on a personal level anymore,” Miller said at the groundbreaking ceremony. “We are working to bridge that divide, bringing people back to the table to have conversations about where their food comes from.”

With kids today being roughly four or five generations away from agriculture, the connections are largely considered to be lost.

“Fostering a greater understanding of production agriculture is essential if we are to proactively address the challenges of feeding a growing world with fewer resources,” Miller said.

There are a lot of components involved regarding the Food + Farm Exploration Center, which will be a hands-on experience with a mix of interactive programs such as cooking and horticulture classes that highlight the FTTFF mission.



Farming for the Future Foundation board members, along with Wisconsin Secretary of Agriculture Randy Romanski and Chris Roth, president and CEO of Reinke Manufacturing Company, broke ground on the Food + Farm Exploration Center, April 29, in Plover, Wisconsin. From left to right are Paul Palmbly; Richard Okray; Tamas Houlihan; Les Dobbe; Andy Diercks; Jordan Lamb; Richard Pavelski; Michelle Peariso; Alicia Pavelski; Roth; Sec. Romanski; Candise Miller; and Gregg Hansel.

The center’s programming will have a strong focus on workforce development. Richard Jaworski, director of the Food + Farm Exploration Center, said he sees the

center as a place for engagement and learning through the various programming and practical hands-on training to be offered.

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Farming for the Future Foundation Executive Director Candise Miller said the Food + Farm Exploration Center will operate as a common ground for people to explore the innovative nature of agriculture and become inspired by it.

“I look forward to it being a leading agritourism destination that promotes STEM careers in agricultural sustainability and innovation through exciting and engaging programs and exhibits,” Jaworski said.

“We need a generation that’s relevant, and now we have the opportunity to encourage young people to go into STEM-related fields,” he added.

The FFTFF has also piloted curriculum that meets school state standards and has teachers and fourth-grade students involved in the process.

**OUT IN FORCE**

In addition to growers, ag industry representatives and business leaders, several key Wisconsin legislators and government officials attended the groundbreaking ceremony.

They include Rep. Patrick Snyder; Rep. Nancy VenderMeer; Rep. Katrina Shankland; Sen. Patrick Testin; Secretary of Agriculture Randy Romanski; Gregg Wavrunek, Sen. Tammy Baldwin’s regional representative for Portage County; Amy Resop, Sen. Ron Johnson’s



Co-chairs of the Cultivating Connections Campaign Cabinet are, from left to right, Richard Pavelski of Heartland Farms, Inc., Richard Okray, Okray Family Farms, and Les Dobbe of Lineage Logistics. Pavelski is the director and founder of the Farming for the Future Foundation. As of the groundbreaking ceremony, the Foundation had raised \$20,288,717 to bring the Food + Farm Exploration Center closer to life. The Cultivating Connections Campaign expects to continue fundraising throughout the next year.

state legislative liaison; and Drew Nussbaum, regional tourism specialist with the Wisconsin Department of Tourism.

As of the groundbreaking, the Foundation had raised \$20,288,717 to bring the center closer to life.

The Cultivating Connections Campaign expects to continue

fundraising throughout the next year, bringing together those who care most about production agriculture, including but not limited to multi-generational farmers, aligned industry, friends, and neighbors.

Richard Pavelski, a founding board member of the foundation, announced on Friday, April 29, that



Wisconsin’s elected officials helping break ground on the Food + Farm Exploration Center are, from left to right, Rep. Katrina Shankland; Rep. Nancy VenderMeer; Rep. Patrick Snyder; Sen. Patrick Testin; Al Haga, chairman of the Portage County Board; Tom Davies, Plover Village Board president; and Amy Resop, Sen. Ron Johnson’s state legislative liaison.

he would match up to \$1 million raised through May 31.

#### NEVER A GREATER NEED

“There has never been a greater need for people to understand where their food comes from,” Pavelski said. “The center is critical to ensuring we can meet the growing demands of the industry, and that is why my family initiated this match program.”

“We hope to inspire others to donate by maximizing their gifts,” Pavelski concluded.

“Every project like the Food + Farm Exploration Center needs visionaries,” Miller reasoned. “Thank you to the Pavelski family. Richard and Barbara announced this past winter a \$2 million fundraising match, and now they’re announcing a matching gift of \$1 million.”

Perhaps Richard Okray of Okray Family Farms summed it up best when he noted, “Our industry, and not just farmers, is being called upon

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*– Richard Jaworski, director of the Food + Farm Exploration Center*

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to feed the growing world, and to do it with less resources.”

“Two of the most important ingredients are a trained workforce and the nurturing of relationships. This center will be a gathering place for agriculture to promote collaboration. The journey of a thousand steps,” he said, “begins with one.”

For more information, contact

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**About Farming for the Future Foundation**  
Farming for the Future Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to educating current and future generations about agricultural innovation and sustainability. Farming for the Future Foundation was born in 2018 from the profound need to reconnect people to agriculture and their food.

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