

# Budget/ Most towns don't collectively bargain

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Family Farm Defenders also has weighed in on the legislative gridlock in Madison. "Farmers need to stand behind workers and their freedom to collectively bargain. All farmer cooperatives depend upon the same principle, so any attempt to take away that right needs to be challenged," Joel Greeno, the group's vice president and a Kendall dairy farmer, said in a news release. "Just because farmers are going bankrupt due to unfair prices does not mean workers should lose living wages too. There is no way to repair the budget until we restore fairness to the whole economic system," Greeno said. The Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation said it wouldn't comment on the issue until after the governor's 2011-13 budget is introduced. Walker was expected to present his budget proposal March 1.

## UW-Extension

John Shutske, a top UW-Extension official, said one recent indicator tells him the agency's programs have value. "Even with the difficult economy, when we've recently had open agriculture positions out in counties, the counties have really, really pushed us to move quickly and get positions filled," Shutske said. "When we have openings, they really do miss their county agent, and that's a really positive sign." Still, with the governor's budget repair bill, dwindling budgets and volatility in government jobs, Shutske said he's concerned about retaining talented employees. Shutske, program director for agriculture and natural resources at UW-Extension, said a crops agent and a dairy/livestock agent recently resigned from UW-Extension to take agribusiness jobs. "One of the things we see in agriculture is we have competi-

tion with the private sector, and in recent months we have seen a couple good people leave, some really good young people in our organization, and it's something we're really concerned about," Shutske said. Overall, though, the agency has committed employees, he said. "We have many Extension people that have been in Extension for 10, 15, 20, some even as long as 30 years. They're often members of the community and they're very well connected to all the networks that exist locally," Shutske said. He said he's not sure how their workplace will look if the budget repair bill passes, but he said he's optimistic about UW-Extension's future. "In the long term I am confident we will be the preferred provider of new knowledge and education. I'm very confident that we'll come through. We may be a different organization. Until we know more specifics on

the budget, we just won't know until a few months have passed," Shutske said.

## Wisconsin's townships

Rick Stadelman, executive director of the Wisconsin Towns Association, said his organization isn't issuing an opinion on the budget repair bill. "We will be watching the state budget bill and how cuts are made and formulas. We recognize the state's got to balance its budget, and there will be cuts. Fairness is the question we'll have," he said. The governor's proposals in the budget repair bill wouldn't have much effect on town employees, Stadelman said. Few towns have collective bargaining agreements, and only 170 of the state's 1,200 towns participate in

the state retirement program. "When we were briefed by the governor on this over a week ago he made it very clear that he knew that a lot of towns and small villages weren't going to benefit by these changes and there were going to be cuts in shared revenue, but he was going to provide some additional flexibility and mandate relief for small communities in the state budget, so we'll have to wait to see what that is," he said. Stadelman said he's concerned about cutbacks and whether towns can keep up with construction and maintenance, specifically of roads. "If you don't keep up a certain number of miles of road every year, you fall behind, and then it costs more in the end to do those. How we maintain the roads will depend a lot on what's in that state budget," he said. "Our rural roads are facing greater and greater demands, as agriculture has changed with larger farms and more truck traffic."

# Organic/ Nebraska farm given award

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Sligh said organic farmers aren't the only people who should be concerned about GMOs and their effect on agriculture. "This is not a fight between farmers or between farmers and environmentalists," he said. "This is an issue for everyone. The problem is not having federal oversight and market clarity in order for this to be fair." Sligh proposed that responsibility for GMO contamination cases be linked to patent holders.

## Farmer of the year

The Vetter family of The Grain Place in Marquette,

Neb., was presented with the 2011 MOSES Organic Farmer of the Year award Feb. 25 at the conference. The honor was first given in 2003 and recognizes farmers who practice outstanding land stewardship, innovation and outreach. Jones described the Vettters as a "maverick family." "They were organic when organic wasn't cool," she said. David Vetter, whose family began organically farming in 1953, accepted the award. "I say I was raised on an organic farm, though at that time there weren't organic standards," he said. Vetter's father, Don Vetter, began implement-

## Top organic farmers

- Previous Organic Farmer of the Year winners were:
- 2003: Linda Halley and Richard deWilde, Harmony Valley Farm, Viroqua, Wis.
  - 2004: Martin and Atina Diffley, Gardens of Eagan, Farmington, Minn.
  - 2005: Carmen and Sally Fernholz, A Frame Farm, Madison, Minn.
  - 2006: Stan Shutte, Triple "S" Farms, Stewardson, Ill.
  - 2007: Florence and Dave Minar, Cedar Summit Farm, New Prague, Minn.
  - 2008: Gary, Nicholas and Rosie Zimmer, Otter Creek Organic Dairy, Avoca, Wis.
  - 2009: Tom and Irene Frantzen, New Hampton, Iowa.
  - 2010: John, Jane and Janaki Fisher-Merritt, The Food Farm, Wrenshall, Minn.

ing organic practices after World War II, when he questioned the science and ethics of the post-war chemical boom. After college Vetter returned to the farm and organized the farm's organic certification in 1978. In 1979, the farm became The Grain Place, and an on-farm processing plant, Grain Place Foods, was built in 1980. Developing the infrastructure for an organic grains market required taking risks, including almost losing the farm, Vetter said. "We learned through mistakes," he said. Grain Place Foods was one of the first plants of its kind in the Midwest and today processes organic popcorn — more than 3 million pounds in 2010 — cereal grains and specialty pet foods.

The Vettters implement windbreaks and diverse crops and rotations. Edible soybeans and dry beans, blue and white corn, popcorn, heirloom barley, flax, amaranth, lupines and sunflowers all have been grown on the farm, and fruit and nut trees are being planted in buffer areas to increase biodiversity and add additional income. Creating smaller fields separated by buffer areas has allowed the family to protect soil quality, a factor Vetter said is vital for organic operations. The family also raises a grass-fed cow-calf beef herd and uses rotational grazing for weed control. Nominations for the 2012 Organic Farmer of the Year will be accepted until Sept. 15. Applications are available by calling 715-778-5775 or online at [www.mosesorganic.org/foy.html](http://www.mosesorganic.org/foy.html).



Submitted photo  
Becky Rochester worked as a cellar hand at wineries in California, New Zealand and Australia before being hired in January as grape marketing coordinator for the Wisconsin Grape Growers Association. Here Rochester is pictured inoculating yeast in Sauvignon Blanc must at Deleat's Oyster Bay in Marlborough, New Zealand.

# Grapes/ Coordinator will research varieties

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Most recently Rochester worked as direct sales manager for Willamette Valley Vineyards in Turner, Ore. Rochester said she was excited to see a job open up in the Midwest wine industry. "I'd always hoped the industry in Wisconsin would grow to where it needed a position like this one," she said. Rochester will work with the WGGa to research the state's grape and wine industry. "The goal is to see where we are and set a benchmark so we can plan for growth and help the industry as a whole," she said. There are more than 70 bonded wineries and 200 vineyards in Wisconsin, Rochester said. Her job will include reaching out to growers, researching the types and quality of vines grown in the state, and identifying demand for different varieties. "We want to make sure that I'm finding out what the wineries are looking for in the future so when we have new growers, we're able to help them plant the right varieties," she said. Rochester also will work with wineries to track the retail value and number of accredited Wisconsin wines. She also plans to bridge the gap between vineyards with grapes for sale and potential grape buyers and nurture other industry relationships. "A big part of what I'll be trying to do is qualify people for our Wisconsin Wine Accreditation Program," Rochester said. Wineries producing one or more Wisconsin wine with at least 75 percent fruit grown in the state are eligible for the promotional program. WGGa Executive Director Anna Maenner said Rochester has been doing an exceptional job "A main part of her job is to be a liaison between growers and wineries, so she's been doing a lot of surveying of growers and wineries and

finding out where they are right now in terms of making wines from Wisconsin grapes and buying grapes from Wisconsin growers," Maenner said. Rochester's diverse experiences made her stand out as a candidate, Maenner said. "Becky's worked in vineyards, she's worked in wineries, she's worked with sales of wines, distribution of wines," Maenner said. "She really had all the pieces of the puzzle for what we want her to do, which is to try to get these sales channels working in Wisconsin." Rochester will continue to live and work from her home in Oregon. However, she plans to return to Wisconsin this month for the WGGa Spring Vineyard School on March 24 at Wollersheim Winery in Prairie Du Sac. She also hopes to coordinate promotions at the Wisconsin State Fair this summer and attend the association's fall walk. Rochester is optimistic about the future for Wisconsin winemakers. "There are a lot of up-and-coming wineries," she said. "Even this year we're looking at two to five that will be opening up or getting started." Interest in grape production is rising in the Midwest, perhaps because of fresh varieties that are hitting the market, Rochester said. "There are some new varieties, including the Marquette grape developed by the University of Minnesota, that people are excited about," she said. "When people planted five years ago they were told to plant certain things just because that's what was around, but now we're seeing a lot more to choose from." Rochester's zeal for the industry is apparent. "It's an industry I don't think I could ever get bored in," she said. "There's just always something going on, whether it's laws that are changing or just things going on with the vineyard and winemaking and marketing." Danielle Endvick can be reached at 800-236-4004, ext. 3827 or [danielle.endvick@ecpc.com](mailto:danielle.endvick@ecpc.com).

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