



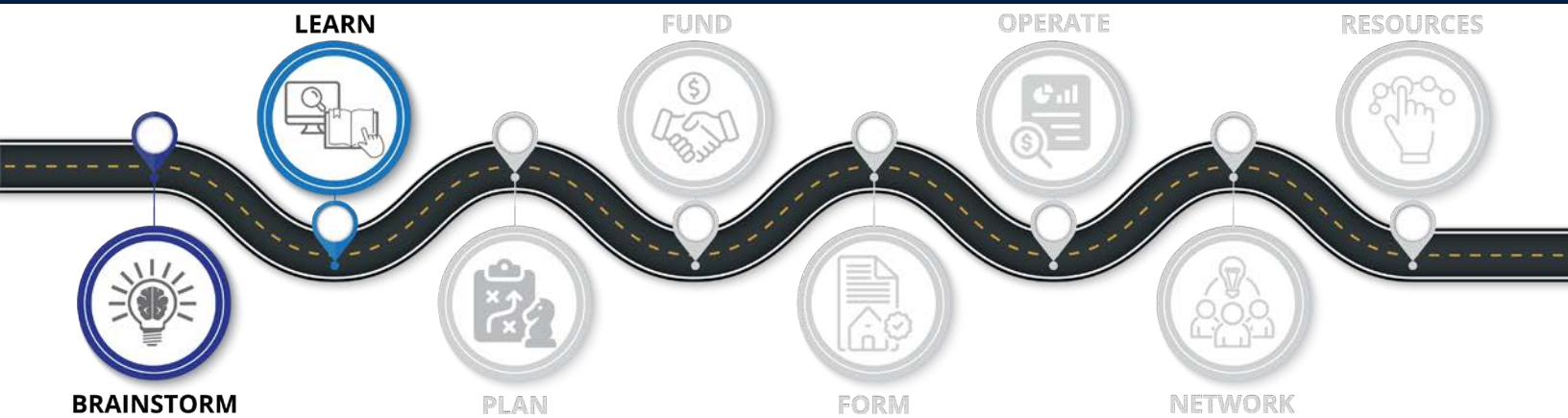
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



# Wisconsin Beginning Farmer Resource Guide



WISCONSIN  
June 2023



**BRAINSTORM**



## Brainstorm

As you begin your farming journey you will start by identifying an idea and vision for your farm business. You should also develop a framework for a value proposition you'll offer customers.

- **UW-Madison Division of Extension Farm Management – Beginning Farm & Enterprise Development**

*Description:* A collection of articles and podcast episodes providing guidance and resources for starting a farm enterprise.

- **UW-Madison Division of Extension – County Offices**

*Description:* Fast access to your county extension office to connect with a local agriculture and/or community development educator to share ideas with.

- **US Department of Agriculture (USDA) – How to Start a Farm**

*Description:* Webpage dedicated to helping beginning farmers and ranchers learn the support that's available to them from USDA.



## Learn

It is critical to educate yourself on your farming enterprise of choice. It is important to research all aspects of producing and marketing the food and fiber products that interest you.

- **University of Wisconsin System**

*Description:* Info on 13 public universities delivering world-class education, research, and outreach. UW-Madison, UW-River Falls, and UW-Platteville are known for agricultural programs.

- **Wisconsin Technical College System**

*Description:* Webpage with info on WI technical schools offering hands-on agriculture education programs. Info and a map of Farm Business and Production Management Programs found [here](#).

- **UW-Madison Division of Extension Farm Management – Farm Pulse Financial Management Program**

*Description:* A self-paced online program for farmers interested in learning how to use farm financials to explore their farm business decisions.

- **UW-Madison Division of Extension Farm Management – Educational Events**

*Description:* A calendar of both virtual and live training educational opportunities.

- **Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) – Outreach Publications**

*Description:* A wide range of informational resources on sustainable agriculture, as well as competitive grants that help farmers innovate. Visit [this page](#) for regional grant program info.

- **Edible-Alpha Learning Center – Food Finance Institute**

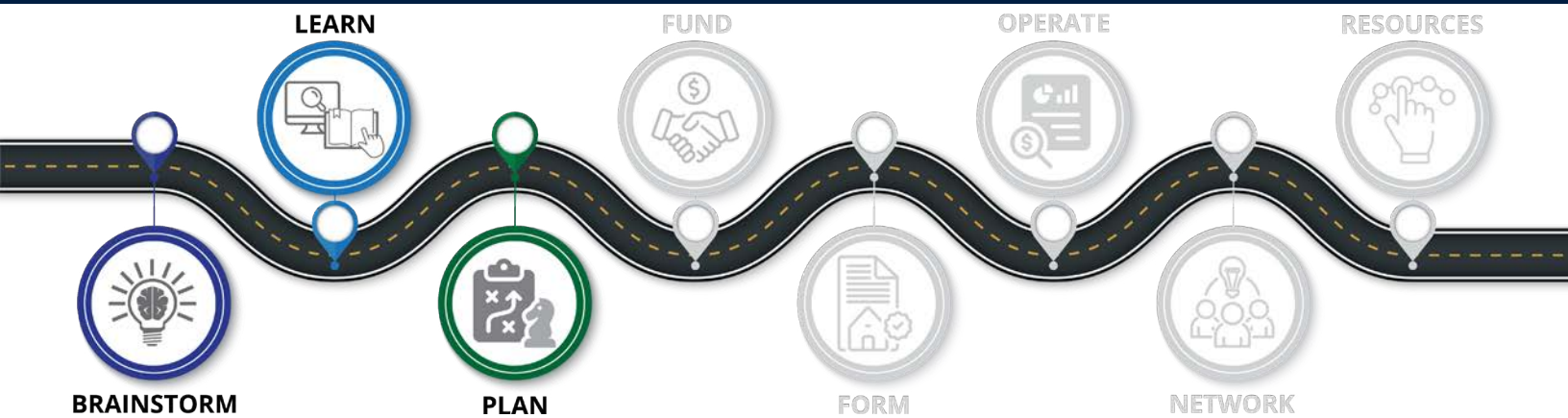
*Description:* Having the right resources, info and benchmarks can be the difference between success and failure. Find help building a profitable and impactful food or farm business.

- **Land Stewardship Project – New Farmers**

*Description:* Works to ensure future generations of stewardship-minded farmers are successfully established. Visit [this page](#) for more info on its "Farm Beginnings Class."

- **Angelic Organics Learning Center – Stateline Farm Beginnings Course**

*Description:* Services Northern Illinois and Southern Wisconsin. Course attracts both rural and urban participants.



## Plan

A solid business plan is a necessary next step. You will need to develop strategy, create a budget, analyze costs of production, and evaluate feasibility under different economic environments.

- **UW-Madison Division of Extension – Business Modeling**

*Description:* Article on using the business model canvas to refine your farm business idea. This simple one-page matrix can be a valuable tool to help farm entrepreneurs test a business idea.

- **Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) – Building a Sustainable Business**

*Description:* A guide to developing a business plan for farms and rural businesses that brings the business planning process alive to help today's sustainable agriculture entrepreneurs.

- **SCORE – The Startup Roadmap**

*Description:* SCORE is a nonprofit organization and a resource partner of the U.S. Small Business Administration. The Startup Roadmap is a step-by-step, how-to guide for starting a business.

- **SCORE – Help for Farmers and Ranchers**

*Description:* SCORE is proud to partner with the USDA to provide free business mentorship to help farmers and ranchers succeed. Its website can assist in finding a business mentor near you.

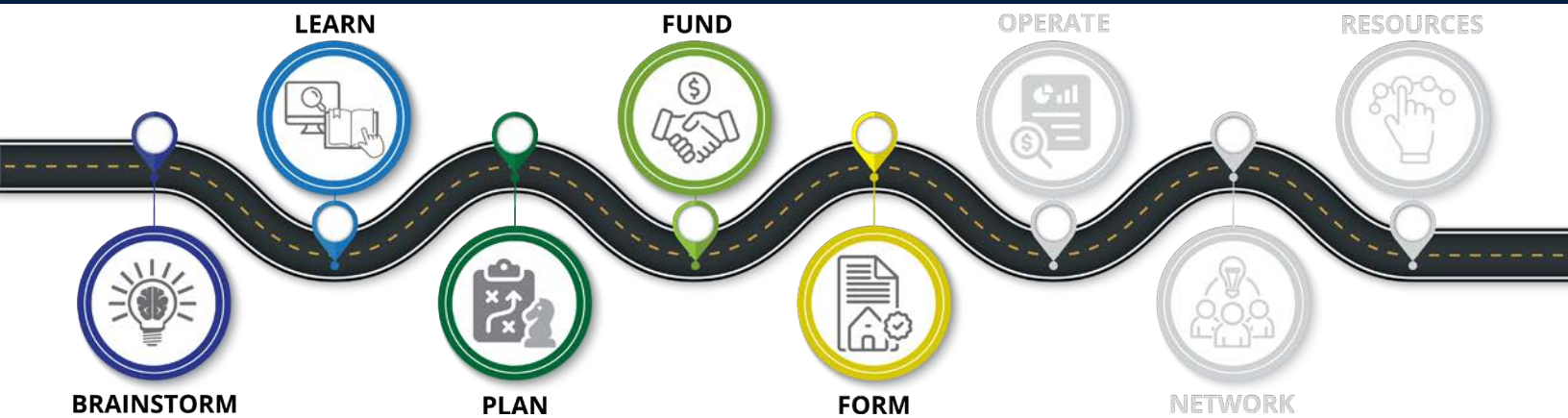
- **Wisconsin Small Business Development Center (SBDC)**

*Description:* The WI SBDC offers consulting, education, referrals, sophisticated tools and resources, whether you're just getting started or looking for ways to improve your business.

- **AgPlan – 75,000+ business plans have been created using AgPlan**

*Description:* Free online tool which can be used to help develop your business plan. Includes tips and tricks, sample plans, and can be printed and downloaded for work with your own reviewers.





## Fund

With your business plan in hand you will begin to identify and seek out sources of capital to purchase business assets to put to work on your new farming venture.

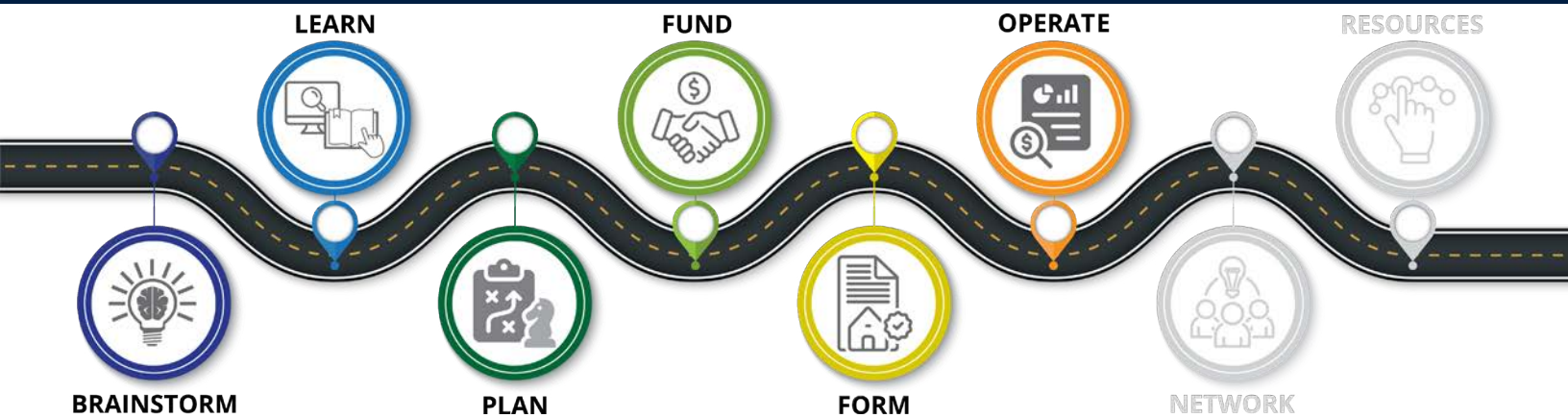
- US Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency (FSA) – Farm Loan Programs**  
*Description:* FSA offers loans to help farmers and ranchers get the financing they need to start, expand or maintain a family farm. Visit [this page](#) for more farm loan info, options, and tools.
- Farm Credit – Wisconsin**  
*Description:* Provides loans to farmers and ranchers and supports rural communities and agriculture with reliable, consistent credit and financial services, today and tomorrow.
- Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) – Economic Development & Innovation Center**  
*Description:* Supports the growth and success of local and regional food systems through business, farm, and rural development. Visit [this page](#) for DATCP grant opportunities.



## Form

Once you have your business plan and funding in place it is time to think about choosing an appropriate business entity and securing the requisite licenses, permits, and registrations to operate.

- Farm Commons – Choosing a Business Structure**  
*Description:* Article and webpage of helpful resources farmers can use to help determine where to start when deciding which business structure is the right one for their farm or ranch.
- UW-Madison – Law & Entrepreneurship Clinic**  
*Description:* Free legal advice for new farmers and value-added agriculture. Assists clients determine the type of legal entity that best suits their goals, assistance with purchase of farms and businesses, writing contracts, and understanding regulations.
- Department of Financial Institutions – Business Entity Frequently Asked Questions**  
*Description:* Links to information and online forms for choosing an entity type.
- Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection – Food, Dairy, and Retail Food Licenses**  
*Description:* Webpage for fees, resources, and contact info on food licensing and permitting.
- Call your local Health Department before starting any food business!**
- Wisconsin Livestock Identification Consortium (WLIC) – Register Your Premises**  
*Description:* Premise registration allows for much faster traces when there is an outbreak of an animal disease. Registering your premises is mandatory in WI, but there is no cost associated.
- Department of Revenue – Sales and Use Tax Exemptions**  
*Description:* Info on how to claim an exemption from WI State, county, local exposition, and premier resort sales or use taxes on eligible farm purchases.



## Operate

With your business plan officially in motion you can focus energy on optimization. You will need to be monitoring your balance sheet, evaluating earnings, and utilizing risk management strategy.

- Wisconsin Office of the Commissioner of Insurance – Farms**

*Description:* Website including info on the unique insurance needs for farmers and farm families, insurance tips for farm owners, and more.
- US Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency (FSA) – Price Support Programs**

*Description:* Webpage including info on a variety of price support initiatives, loan, and market loss assistance programs available from FSA.
- US Department of Agriculture Risk Management Agency (RMA)**

*Description:* Website including info about crop insurance for American farmers and ranchers. Visit [here](#) for regional office info, or [here](#) for an agent locator tool to find a provider near you.
- Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection – WI Farm Center**

*Description:* Free and confidential services include financial and transition planning, conflict mediation, veteran farmer assistance, veterinary analysis, and a Farmer Wellness Program.
- US Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) – State Programs and Initiatives**

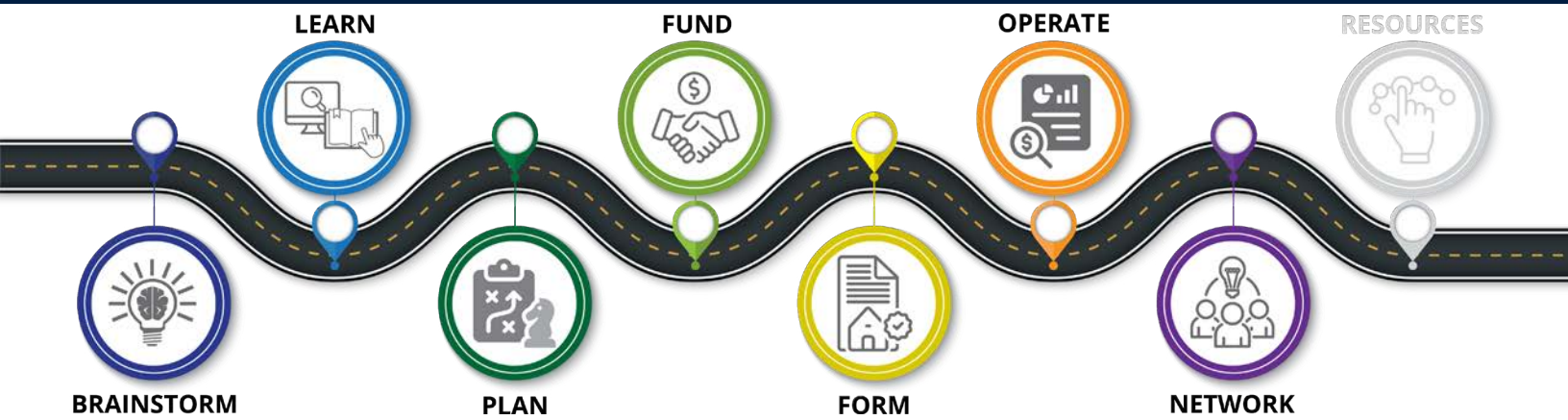
*Description:* NRCS offers voluntary programs to eligible landowners and agricultural producers to provide financial and technical assistance to help manage natural resources sustainably.
- UW-Madison Division of Extension – Becoming the Employer of Choice**

*Description:* A human resource management curriculum geared at current and future dairy farm managers/owners looking to improve their human resource management skills.
- UW-Madison Division of Extension – Human Resources**

*Description:* A collection of articles to help participants acquire the knowledge and skills needed to recruit, motivate, and retain quality people.
- Taxes and USDA Programs – Farmers.gov**

*Description:* Info and resources related to USDA program payments, asset protection, and the important relationships between federal income taxes and USDA farm programs.





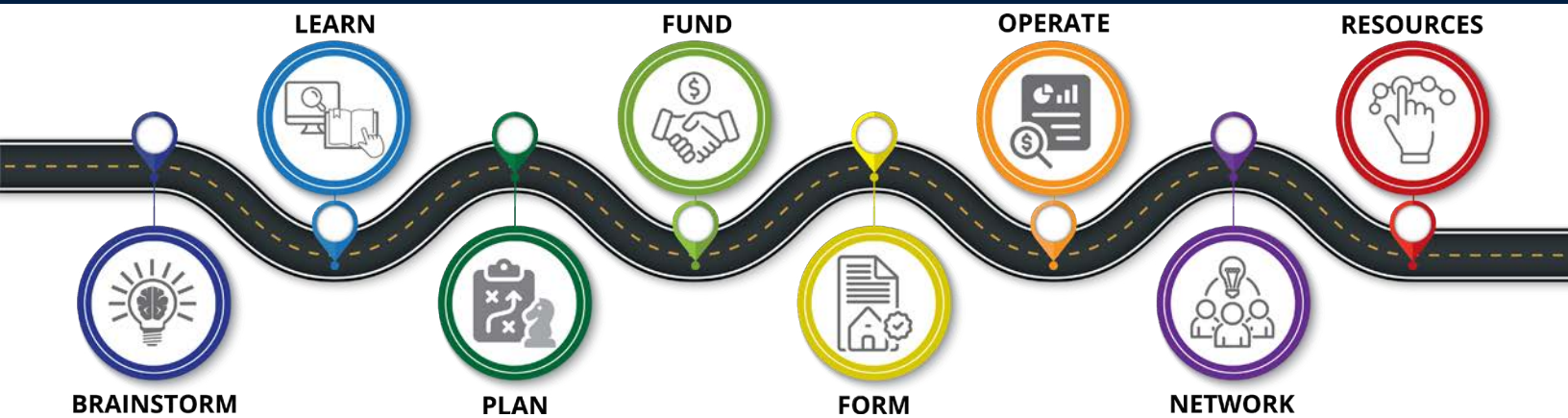
## Network

The value of peer support and industry professionals cannot be overstated. Many of the most successful farm businesses prioritize producer groups and membership in industry organizations.

Below are some general examples with active memberships. However, there are many others tailored to specific farming enterprises and agriculture products. It is key to seek groups you share interests with.

- Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation (WFBF)**  
*Description:* As the largest general farm organization in the state, WFBF serves as a voice for farmers via legislative representation, education, public relations and leadership development.
- Wisconsin Farmers Union**  
*Description:* A grassroots membership organization committed to enhancing the quality of life for family farmers, rural communities, and all people through education, cooperative endeavors, and civic engagement.
- National Young Farmers Coalition**  
*Description:* An intersectional coalition working for justice and collective liberation of our food and farm systems. Work for a future in which people, land, and relationships are respected.
- Marbleseed – Farmer-Led and Rooted in Organic**  
*Description:* Have worked in community with the Midwest’s regenerative and organic farmers for over 30 years by focusing on continuing to grow region’s organic farming movement.
- Ag Solidarity Network**  
*Description:* Connects a diverse network of farmers, farmer-workers, homesteaders, and food system professionals who are collectively growing the organic movement.
- Soil Sisters**  
*Description:* Offers resources, inspiration and networking and connection opportunities that supports women wanting to start farms or other rural-based enterprises.
- Wisconsin Women in Conservation**  
*Description:* Here to connect, empower, educate, and inspire women for the sake of the land, and also because of the great satisfaction and healing experienced through stewardship.
- Farmer Veteran Coalition**  
*Description:* Supports service members and veterans moving into careers in agriculture or starting farms. Cultivating a new generation of farmers through collaborating with farming and military communities. Visit [fvcwisconsin.org](http://fvcwisconsin.org) for WI Chapter.

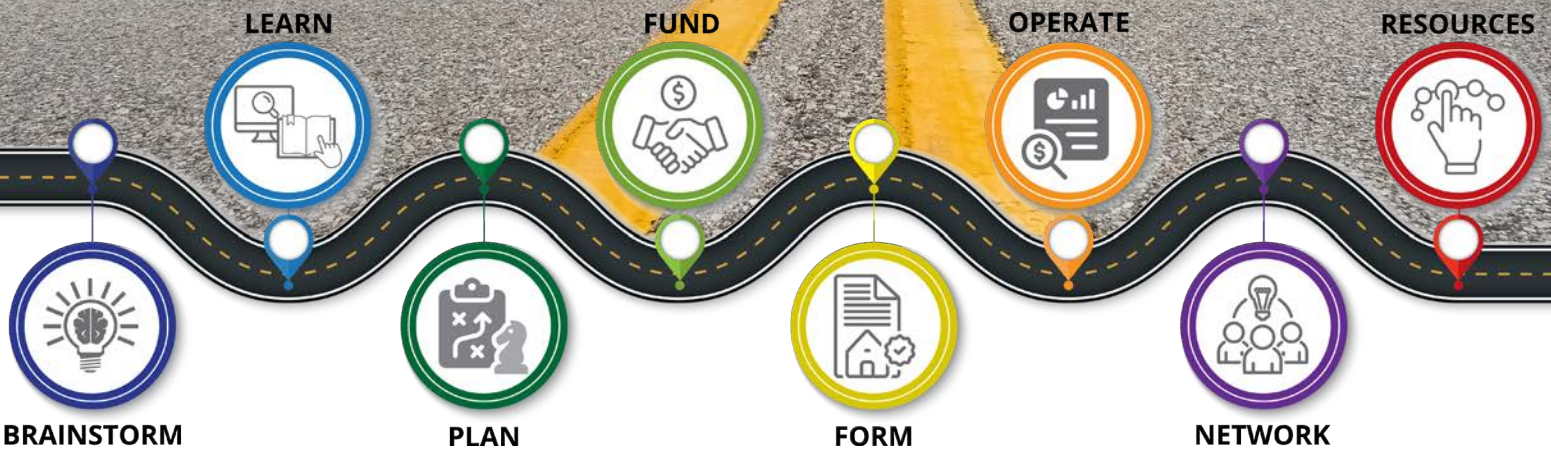




## Other Resources

- American Farmland Trust**  
*Description:* Backers of conservational agricultural movement with three priorities: protecting farmland, promoting environmentally sound farming, and keeping farmers on the land.
- Beginning Farmers**  
*Description:* Offers info on how to start a farm, plan a new farm, funding resources and finding land. Cover all areas of farming. Internships and employment opportunities posted regularly.
- Cornell Small Farms Program**  
*Description:* Support farmers at all phases of small farm business development. Website contains info about project opportunities, courses and resources that help small farms succeed.
- Farm Answers**  
*Description:* The USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture beginning farmer and rancher clearinghouse, providing resources and tools to help you get started and succeed in farming.
- Food Finance Institute**  
*Description:* Focused on making sophisticated financial technical assistance available to every growing food, beverage, and value-added farm enterprise.
- Renewing the Countryside – Farmland Access Hub**  
*Description:* A large network of agricultural organizations, policymakers, advocates, and service providers who are working together to solve the issue of land access.
- US Department of Agriculture – Create Your H-2A Visa Checklist**  
*Description:* The H-2A temporary agricultural workers program – often called the H-2A Visa Program – helps American farmers fill employment gaps by hiring workers from other countries.
- UW-Madison Division of Extension – Food Business Development**  
*Description:* Research-based training and resources for small-scale food and farm entrepreneurs on topics such as food safety and licensing.
- Wisconsin Office of Rural Prosperity – Resource Directory**  
*Description:* Whether you’re an individual, a business or a community organization, you can use this online directory to search a library of resources, tools and services for rural communities.
- Wisconsin Women’s Business Initiative Corporation (WWBIC)**  
*Description:* Provides direct lending and access to fair and responsible capital, quality business training, and one-on-one technical business assistance and coaching to increase financial wellness to individuals interested in starting or expanding a business.





[farmers.gov](https://farmers.gov)



[datcp.wi.gov](https://datcp.wi.gov)



**Extension**  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON  
[farms.extension.wisc.edu](https://farms.extension.wisc.edu)

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