

## Blue Ribbon Commission to Support Rural Prosperity

Written by GOV Press Wisconsin  
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***Panel will hold listening sessions, make recommendations on rural resilience.***

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MADISON – Gov. Tony Evers today named leaders from around the state to the Blue Ribbon Commission on Rural Prosperity. The governor announced the commission during his State of the State speech in January. The commission will be tasked with developing long-term strategies on how Wisconsin can best support the needs of rural Wisconsinites and rural communities.



“Even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Wisconsin’s rural communities were facing challenges to their very survival,” Gov. Evers said. “It is more important than ever to listen to the concerns of our rural residents and support them in finding solutions.”

The commission members include:

- Bob Atwell, President & CEO, Nicolet National Bank, Green Bay
- Thelma Heidel Baker, Owner Bossie Cow Farm, Random Lake
- Brittany Beyer, Executive Director, Grow North, Rhinelander
- Pamela Boivin, Executive Director and Loan Officer, NiiJii Capital Partners, Inc. (NiiCaP), Keshena

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- David Falk, General Manager, ND Paper, Biron
- Tom Landgraf, Principal, Dimension Development, LLC, Madison
- Rachel Sauvola, Agriscience Teacher, New Richmond High School, New Richmond
- Lauren Thompson, Co-President, Wisconsin 4-H Leadership Council, Woodville
- Gina Tomlinson, CEO, Cochrane Co-op Telephone Company, Cochrane
- Susan Townsley, Clinical Social Worker, Stonehouse Counseling, Viroqua
- Jeff Tucker, Vice President of Business Development & Care Innovation, Marshfield Clinic, Eau Claire
- Cheu Vang, Owner, Vang C&C Farms, Jefferson

The commission is expected to hold listening sessions around the state later this summer on the impact of COVID-19 on rural communities and businesses, as well as the challenges and opportunities the pandemic has created. The commission's recommendations will help to form the biennial state budget, which Gov. Evers will introduce early next year.

The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) will provide logistical and administrative support to the commission. In his State of the State address this year, Gov. Evers directed WEDC to create the Office of Rural Prosperity, and the organization recently named Kelliann Blazek as the first director of the office.

"WEDC is committed to helping rural communities and businesses in our state build long-term resilience," said WEDC Secretary and CEO Missy Hughes. "By exploring new economic opportunities and improving the quality of life we can help rural communities weather the current conditions and emerge stronger for future generations."

More information about the commission, its activities, and the Office of Rural Prosperity is available at [wedc.org/rural-prosperity](https://wedc.org/rural-prosperity).