



July 21, 2016

Jeff Schuler
Portage County Planning and Zoning
1462 Strongs Avenue
Stevens Point, WI 54481

Dear Jeff,

The Stevens Point Area Convention and Visitors Bureau is ecstatic about agritourism in Portage County. With over 1,000 farms and more than 280,000 acres in agricultural production, it is no wonder why agriculture contributes nearly \$340 million to the county's income and provides over 5,500 jobs county-wide. From a visitor perspective, things from corn mazes, pick-your-own farms, farmers markets, culinary arts, craft beverage tourism and more provide a wide-variety of agritourism activities in the region. In addition, processing facilities and research stations offer another level of activities for people interested in learning more about where their food comes from and the science behind it. Additionally, the Central Rivers Farmshed, and their Fresh Farm Atlas offer a great resource for people looking to make that connection.

Today less than one percent of our nation's consumers live on farms, with many being four to five generations removed from even knowing anyone that farmed. We are raising a generation of children who do not know how apples grow on trees, or how a gallon of milk gets into the grocer's cooler.

Agritourism has been of key interest to the Group Tour market and travel writers, wanting a behind the scenes peek from harvesting to processing. Circle Wisconsin, an organization that promotes heavily to group tour operators throughout the Midwest, featured agritourism in their 2015 Tour Planner, including several mentions in our region (see attached).

Below are just a few of the ways the Stevens Point Area Convention and Visitors Bureau (SPACVB) has been promoting agritourism in Portage County:

- Members of the WI Ag Tourism Association (WATA). Through our membership with WATA we are listed as the main point of contact for agritourism related questions in Portage County. Our membership also allows us to post events to their statewide calendar and to stay current on agritourism related legislation and issues.
- Our organization was immersed in the planning and execution of Wisconsin Farm Technology Days held in Portage County in 2014. As we prepared to host the event we met many folks from throughout Portage County that are absorbed in the local ag scene. Those relationships have spurred conversations and raised awareness about the diverse ag sector we have in Portage County. Now that our office staff is better informed we can informatively speak about the importance of agriculture and its role in Portage County.



- In 2008 the SPACVB in collaboration with our peers at the WI Rapids and Marshfield CVBs planned and hosted our first ever Spud, Berry & Dairy Tour in the region. This tour was created to inform and educate consumers. The tour took participants behind the scenes so they could learn more about the growing, harvesting, storing and processing of our vegetable and potato production here in Portage County. This tour has been instrumental in developing relationships with folks like Wysocki Family of Companies, Heartland Farms, Hancock Ag Research Station, WI Potato & Vegetable Growers Association, etc. Eight years later we still promote the Spud, Berry and Dairy Tour and it is the #1 requested theme tour we plan (see attached brochure).
- Our office has had a couple of conversations with John Eron regarding the Eron's Event Barn. We are looking forward to promoting that non-traditional venue moving forward. We believe this facility has great agritourism potential in Central Wisconsin.
- Recently we expanded our Board of Directors to include Layne Cozzolino with the Central Rivers Farmshed. Our relationship with Layne has been instrumental in learning more about the farm to table efforts and events taking place throughout the region.
- Through storytelling on our social media, website, blogs, visitors guide, and editorial we continue to promote agritourism assets like the Farmers Market, Mullins, Altenburg's, Casey's Orchard, Chet's Blueberries, Treb Corn Maze, Chef on the Square, Central Rivers Farmshed workshops and events, Market on Strongs, Whitefeather Organics, etc. As agritourism continues to grow we are excited learn about the Feltz Family Farm expanding their operation and opening a store next year. This will give us yet another avenue to promote agritourism in Portage County.
- Culinary and craft beverage (beer, wine and spirits) tourism is a huge tourism driver in Portage County. These sectors drive the leisure travel market here in Portage County and have a direct correlation with the local ag scene.

Thank you for bringing agritourism to the spotlight at your next meeting. I would like to discuss this in further detail when appropriate. Please feel free to give me a call or send me an email should you have any immediate questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sara', is written over a light blue circular watermark or background element.

Sara Brish
Executive Director