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Why Ag launch set for Feb. 22-24 in Madison

Groundbreaking new statewide initiative highlights availability of agricultural jobs by leveraging existing talents and expertise.

MADISON, Wis. [February 15, 2012] – The Why Ag Initiative is a groundbreaking statewide initiative that will be launched during the 2012 Wisconsin School Counselor Association (WSCA) Conference, Feb. 22-24, 2012 at the Monona Terrace Convention Center in Madison, Wis.

The goal of this new program, initially funded through the Workforce Investment Act and the Workforce Development Board of South Central Wisconsin, is to connect students and non-agricultural workers with the emerging job opportunities in Wisconsin's \$59 billion agriculture, food and natural resources industry.

"Why Ag serves as a springboard for employment opportunities in agriculture throughout the state," says Paul Larson, member of the Wisconsin Agricultural Education and Workforce Development Council (WAEWDC) and agriculture educator at Freedom High School in Outagamie County.

Larson, who worked with WAEWDC to create Why Ag, indicates that agriculture has the power to minimize a mounting statewide unemployment rate – most recently estimated at 7.3 percent by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in November 2011.

"Agriculture is one of the few industries that continues to present new job opportunities in several of its sectors," he says. "A rising global population will magnify the demand for food, fiber and fuel which means that the scope of agricultural jobs will continue to grow."

In recent years, increased global agricultural demand has been met with technological progress and production advancements, transforming the type work performed behind the products.

"The jobs available in agriculture today vary significantly from agricultural jobs of the past," Larson says. "There are diverse opportunities currently available in the field; Why Ag demonstrates these prospects by illustrating the variety of positions and tasks offered in the agricultural workforce."

The WAEWDC group illustrates the diversity of agricultural jobs from engineering to biosecurity and communications to natural resource management at www.WhyAg.com.

As the core portal of the Why Ag initiative, the interactive website connects students, displaced workers and those looking for increased employment opportunities with educational and employment advice. The tools demonstrate that many skillsets are transferrable between non-agriculture and agriculturally-

focused jobs.

“The primary component of the website allows interested persons the chance to discover an agricultural job that is right for them based on their existing expertise and interests,” says Jack Ourada, executive director of WAEWDC. “The Skills-to-Jobs Matrix matches individual skills to position descriptions from the fields of agriculture, biotechnology and life sciences so website visitors can explore new career opportunities.”

Natalie Killion, professional school counselor at Green Bay Preble High School in Green Bay, Wis., and other members of WAEWDC will discuss www.WhyAg.com and what it can offer to Wisconsin at the 2012 Wisconsin School Counselor Association Conference. The program will be presented during the breakout session titled “Making the Career Connection: Are Students Ready for Work in the 21st Century.” The session will be held from 12:15 p.m. to 1:15 p.m. on Feb. 23 in Ballroom D at the Monona Terrace Convention Center in Madison.

This interactive seminar will highlight a 2011 Harvard University study, *Pathways to Prosperity*, which identifies concerns with the career preparedness of U.S. youth. Killion will also share how she has addressed these issues at Green Bay Preble High School, highlighting a 4-year plan she developed for use with students to make the essential career connections the Harvard study recommends.

After an overview of the Why Ag website by Pam Jahnke, farm director at the Wisconsin Farm Report, **Randy Zogbaum**, education director for the Wisconsin Technical College System Agriculture and Natural Resources programs, and **Ferron Havens**, president and CEO at the Wisconsin Agribusiness Council, Inc., will join Jahnke to discuss their careers in agriculture and their perspectives on employment opportunities in the agricultural field.

The official launch of Why Ag will continue throughout the conference where attendees can visit a hands-on display to see how agricultural careers can best fit their students’ career goals. Experts will be on hand to demonstrate how Why Ag can be utilized as an advising tool in classrooms.

For more information on the Why Ag Initiative, visit www.WhyAg.com or contact Ourada at 608-235-7148 or jack.ourada@wisconsin.gov.

The Wisconsin Agricultural Education and Workforce Development Council was created by Wisconsin Act 223. The group works to grow Wisconsin’s ability to compete by creating a stronger and sustainable workforce for the agriculture, food and natural resources industry. WAEWDC recommends policies and initiatives, encourages youth to pursue related careers, facilitates public and private partnerships, recruits qualified workers and offers professional development throughout the state of Wisconsin.

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Editor’s note: Media are invited to attend the Wisconsin School Counselor Association Conference Feb. 23 breakout session from 12:15-1:15 p.m. Attendees can also speak with members of the Wisconsin Agriculture Educators Workforce Development Council at the Why Ag booth during the following times: Feb. 22: 4 p.m.-6 p.m., Feb. 23: 8 a.m.-6 p.m., Feb. 24: 8 a.m.-11 p.m. Please RSVP to Rochelle Ripp at 608-310-5335, ext. 29 or rocheller@filamentmarketing.com by Feb. 20 if planning to attend.

To download images, go to: <http://bit.ly/xd4gtx>

WhyAg_logo.jpg

The Why Ag Initiative will officially be launched as part of the 2012 Wisconsin School Counselor Association (WSCA) Conference, Feb. 22-24, 2012 at the Monona Terrace Convention Center in Madison, Wis. The program's objective is to highlight the availability of agricultural employment opportunities throughout Wisconsin.

WhyAg_screenshot.jpg

The core tool of the Why Ag Initiative is an interactive website. Accessible free of charge, www.WhyAg.com offers educational and employment resources including a Skills-to-Job Matrix which matches an individual's existing skills to position descriptions from the fields of agriculture, biotechnology and life sciences.