

# CULTIVATING NEW SKILLS

Joe and Nicole Schauer check the family garden plot while the crew weeds a field of garlic. MONICA WALK FOR ACTION REPORTER MEDIA



## Fond du Lac County area farmers named State Leadership Couple

By Monica Walk | Special to Action Reporter Media

**O**AK CENTER—As their roles in their rural Oak Center community continue growing alongside their crops, farmers Nicole and Joe Schauer decided they were ready to cultivate additional skills.

The Schauers applied to the Wisconsin Farmers Union Emerging Leaders Program aimed at nurturing new farmers' personal and professional development with training in public speaking, policy development, public relations and Farmers Union values.

The Schauers were selected as the state's Leadership Couple for 2014-15, and seeded their new venture with an initial Farmers Union gathering in Bayfield on July 23-26.

"Our role in our community is expanding and we want to know how to be more effective leaders," Nicole Schauer said.

The couple established Good Earth Farm CSA 14 miles southwest of Fond du Lac nine years ago, and this season expanded to a weekly stall at the Oshkosh Saturday Farmers Market, where they are the market's only certified organic vendor.

Only a year-and-a-half into Wisconsin Farmers Union membership, the Schauers quickly developed appreciation

for the organization's grassroots advocacy for rural living. Even before submitting the Emerging Leaders application, Joe Schauer stepped into the vice president role for the union's Fond du Lac-Dodge County chapter, and the couple participated in the March Lobby

**GOOD EARTH FARM**  
For more about the Schauers or their CSA, visit <http://goodearth-farm.net/>

See FARMERS, Page A8



**\$1.00 Retail**  
For home delivery pricing, see Reader's Guide.

### INDEX

- Advice - B5
- Classified - B3
- Crossword - B4
- Home - B6
- Horoscopes - B5
- Local - A3
- Lotteries - B2
- Nation - A2
- Obituaries - A6
- Opinion - A7
- Sports - B1
- Weather - A8
- World - A2

### WEATHER

Five-day forecast Page A8

High today	Low tonight	High tomorrow
<b>76</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>77</b>
Patchy fog	Partly cloudy	Mostly sunny



## Farmers

Continued from Page A1

Day in Madison, where they spoke with state representatives about top concerns for Wisconsin farmers.

"We are proud to have them represent our Farmers Union," said Wisconsin Farmers Union Executive Director Tom Quinn. "Our organization values family farming and their joy in farming is wonderful. We are more than happy to provide resources for their growth."

### The program

The Emerging Leaders Program is sponsored by the Wisconsin Farmers Union and Farmers Union Enterprises Inc. with facilitation by the National Farmers Union.

WFU (<http://www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com/>) is an advocate for all aspects of rural living, agriculture, and horticulture, emphasizing legislation, education and cooperation for farmers. FUE is a farm supply and

manufacturing business partnership co-owned by the Farmers Unions in Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Montana.

Annually since 1997, each of the FUE states selects a farming Leadership Couple, and brings the five couples together throughout the year for training, trips and meetings focused on building leadership skills and deeper familiarity with the regional and national Farmers Union organizations. The Leadership Couples represent diverse farming experiences, including grain, cattle, sheep and CSA farms of varying sizes.

The July gathering in Bayfield brought the five couples and families together and featured time to network, as well as sessions on work-life balance, attitude and self-care. The couples will gather again for programs in Montana, Kansas and Washington, D.C., during the coming year.

"Learning how to talk to politicians is already my favorite part," Joe Schauer said. "I can't wait

to go to Washington in September."

"We want to learn more about policy and how to make changes for farmers. Our rural way of life has important effects for urban life," Nicole Schauer said. "We did join with nearly 80 other farmers at the Capitol in Madison in March, and that was great. When we farmers make decisions, we figure the effects on others."

### From garden to farm

The couple wasn't born into farming. Their vocation developed from a lifestyle choice to reside on 20 rural acres of marsh, pond and fields nestled on a gentle curve outside of unincorporated Oak Center.

As their annual garden grew in size, friends began asking to purchase produce. Nicole, home full-time with the couple's three children, then learned about Community Supported Agriculture and felt it was a venture she could begin while home-schooling. She launched the farm in 2006

with 13 paying members.

Nine years later, membership has grown to 275. Produce shares are available in three sizes on a weekly or every-other-week delivery schedule, as well as an option for a late season share and a "Food for Others" share that lets members give money to support farm produce donations to area food pantries. The Schauers also partner with other local food producers to provide shares of bread, mushrooms and seasonal fruit. The farm achieved organic certification in June 2013.

Good Earth Farm has grown into a family farm. Joe left his corporate position to farm full-time with Nicole in 2009. Nicole's father makes the bulk of the weekly deliveries, which includes members as far north as Appleton, as far south as Sussex, and as far west as Beaver Dam. Joe's father continues to provide

building maintenance and expertise as the couple expands their facility.

The Schauer children — Neve, 15; Niah, 14; and John, 11 — help transplant, harvest and pack the crops. CSA members have an opportunity to work for their food: 10 adults currently choose to spend four hours per week in the fields. Some members have selected this "sweat equity" option for several years. Hired staff rounds out the crew: Three full-time and three part-time women, including several who return again and again to work for and learn from the Schauers.

"They lead by example and live the life they promote," said crew leader Kaci Worth, who has worked with the Schauers for four growing seasons.

"They are very active in their mission, and their love and belief in what they do is contagious," said Marian University

nursing student and farm crew member Anna Borson, who also has spent four seasons on the farm.

"They also find many ways to help others live a more sustainable life through their honesty, integrity and transparency. ... I find them to be so incredibly inspirational," Worth said.

The Schauers' initial meeting with other regional Leadership Couples underscored farming's common roots.

"Our farm sizes are so diverse — I joked that we have 20 acres and some of the other farmers need 20 acres just to turn their tractors around," Joe Schauer said. "But we are still on the same page, despite our farm sizes. We're not so different when we talk. I am so glad we are doing this."

"We all have working the land in common," Nicole Schauer said. "It makes me proud to be a farmer."