

PIERCE COUNTY MEANS BUSINESS

Agriculture Edition

Publication of the PCEDC

A Year in Review



PIERCE COUNTY
— MEANS BUSINESS —
DREAM. GROW. THRIVE.

A New Chapter for Pierce County Economic Development It's been an incredible year since I stepped into the role of Executive Director for the Pierce County Economic Development Corporation (PCEDC). As many of you know, I was hired in 2024 to take the reins from the wonderful Joe Folsom, who retired after years of dedicated service. The past 12 months have been a whirlwind of learning and growth, and I've fallen in love with economic development in a way I never expected.

My background, which includes experience as a business owner and in both government and non-profit roles, has prepared me for the diverse tasks that an economic development director faces every day. When I started, Joe Folsom provided me with an invaluable foundation and a clear understanding of the organization's operations. Even in retirement, Joe continues to be a pivotal figure, offering his guidance and expertise to the PCEDC and remaining an active part of the economic development community.

With any new beginning, there comes a natural shift in focus. With Joe's hard work and the support of SwiftCurrent Connect and Pierce Pepin Cooperative Services, the county's broadband infrastructure has been expanded to a level that far exceeded expectations. This is a tremendous achievement, but it also means it's time for us to turn our attention to new priorities.

This past spring, we held a strategic planning session to better define our path forward. During this process, we finalized our new mission, vision, and values statement, which will serve as our guide and keep us on track.

This year, we have been working diligently to build stronger relationships with our local, regional, and state-level partners. These cooperative efforts allow us to do more with the resources we have, tackling projects that impact not just our county, but our entire region and state. In addition to these internal changes, we are also collaborating with the county on a new tourism initiative and are committed to providing more resources for our small businesses, member investors, and all Pierce County stakeholders.

Looking back on my first year, I am so grateful for the support of our board. They have been amazing, offering their trust and guidance through this period of change. I am incredibly optimistic about the future we are building together. This new era of growth and collaboration is a testament to the strong foundation we share. We are deeply grateful for the continuous support of Pierce County and our investor members; your partnership is essential to our success. Thank you!

Business in Focus

Feature

The Pierce County EDC (Economic Development Corporation) was featured in an article in Business in Focus magazine. You can find the publication on our official Facebook page, which is located at facebook.com/pcedc. Make sure to check us out and don't forget to follow us while you're there!



128 JULY 2025

GROWING CONNECTIVITY COUNTY-WIDE

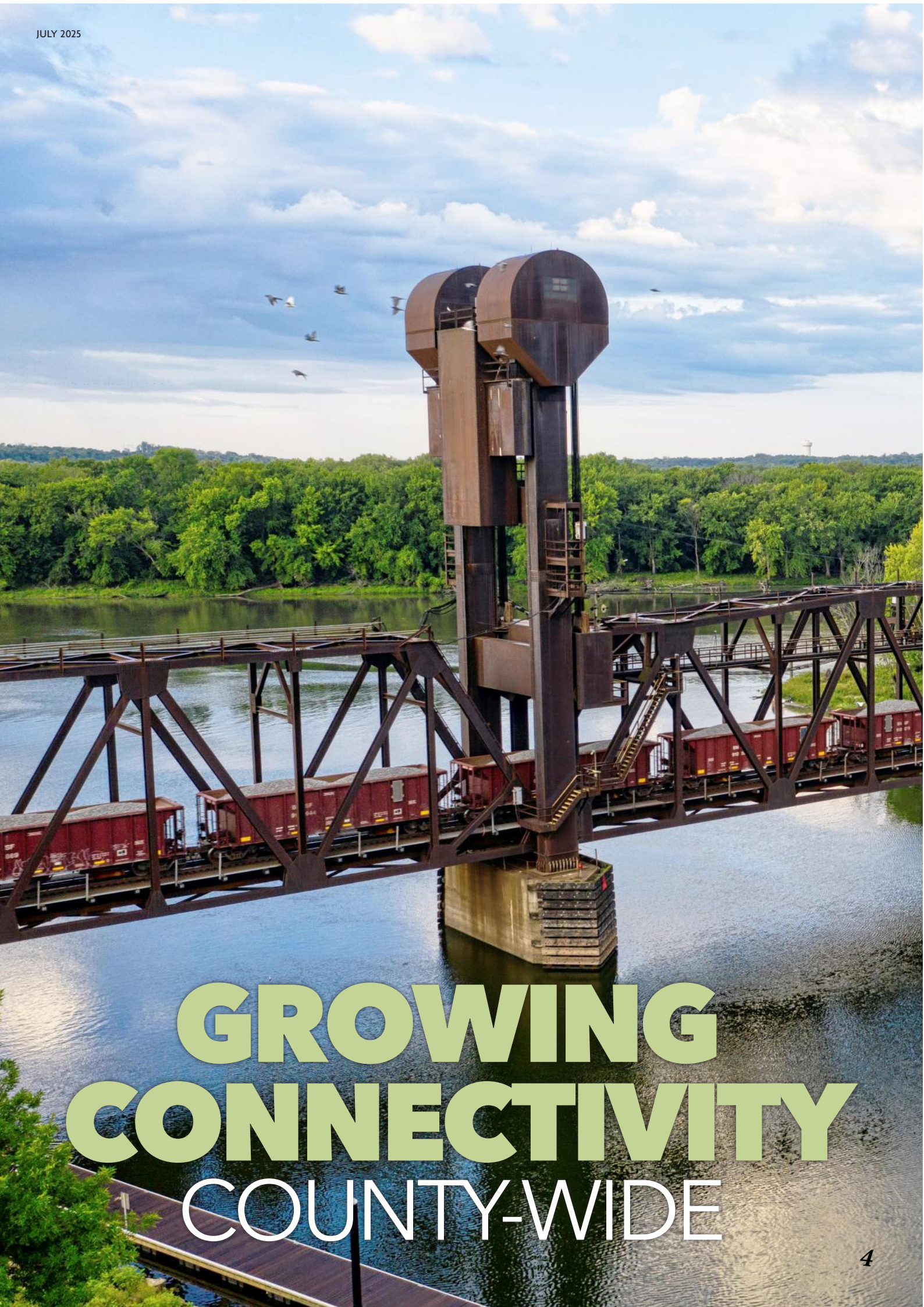
PIERCE COUNTY
— MEANS BUSINESS —
DREAM. GROW. THRIVE

Written by Jessica Ferlaine

For many, Pierce County, Wisconsin is the perfect rural escape from the bustle of the city. Each day, the region attracts visitors from nearby Minneapolis-St. Paul, Madison, Milwaukee, and beyond, who come to share in the fantastic quality of life.

What makes Pierce County attractive is the strong connectivity residents enjoy—a tight-knit community, a local economy where small business thrives, and the infrastructure and resources that tie these together and make it a wonderful place to be. With amenities and attractions that are characteristically unique—including access to Class 1 trout streams and the pristine natural settings they afford—and rich in agriculture and the fruits of that labor, Pierce County has developed a distinct flavor and culture that it loves to share.

Jessica Ferlaine
Executive Director, Pierce County Economic Development Corporation



GROWING CONNECTIVITY COUNTY-WIDE



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Lauren Highfill
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► Collaborative development

Sharing is key to local prosperity in Pierce County, and the Pierce County Economic Development Corporation (PCEDC) plays an important role as a conduit between people, organizations, services, and resources to maximize the impacts and benefits to the community.

The organization's mission statement, "Advancing Pierce County through growth and collaboration," is the driving force behind its efforts to support local businesses through relationship building in the interest of a strong and sustainable economy. While the goals may vary with the ever-changing needs of the county's communities, the PCEDC remains agile, adaptable, and responsive.

"We embrace forward-thinking ideas and creative solutions to foster economic vitality and resilience," says Executive Director Lauren Highfill. "What we truly need is the ability to adapt, which is reflected in our mission statement and overall

strategy. We believe in the power of partnerships: working together with local businesses, community leaders, and regional allies to drive meaningful long-term progress."

Spearheading many of these initiatives, the PCEDC is what former Executive Director Joe Folsom refers to as a "tool and a resource that people can turn to as they pursue their dreams and goals, whether of community development or economic development. That's a key component of both economic and community development; it's being that connector, that resource they can turn to. If we don't know [the answer], we usually know who we can turn to to find the answer," he says.

A community-builder at heart, even though he has formally stepped away from his role as Executive Director, Folsom continues to serve the community, sharing his knowledge and experience to continue building the relationships and connectivity he helped bring to life.





Since



► Supporting small business

Small businesses are the heart of Pierce County's economy, which is why they remain a priority of the PCEDC, which offers resources and support to help these operations find success and scale, where necessary. One such success is Ellsworth Cooperative Creamery, which has been in operation since 1910. The creamery produces over 80 varieties of specialty cheeses under the Ellsworth and Ellsworth Reserve brands, as well as private label offerings that are available worldwide. Supported by 200 patron families who are committed to producing dairy products of the highest quality, the business perfectly represents the agricultural foundation of the community and its economy. Its retail store brings in a quarter of a million visitors each year.

This strong agricultural foundation is turbocharging the growth of agritourism in the region, which includes a growing farm-to-table sector. From unconventional offerings at local farms and orchards to The Chef Shack in Bay City, which is a James Beard-nominated restaurant that brings modern French cuisine to the region, there is truly something for everyone to savor.

It doesn't stop there, either. Behind the scenes, other investments are being made to strengthen the agricultural foundation of the community—once again, through improved connectivity, but in this case, connectivity to markets. An old sand mine in Hagar City has been repurposed by ALCIVIA into a new state-of-the-art rail loading grain terminal that offers a 110-car capacity and 17,000 linear feet of existing track that will be reconfigured to support more agricultural inputs like fertilizers.

The new facility will offer marketing opportunities to grain producers by opening access to domestic and export markets and arbitrage. Equipped with a shuttle loading facility on the BNSF Railway, this now equips ALCIVIA with access to three different Class 1 railways, UP and CPKC included.

Companies like these turn to the PCEDC and its available resources to grow and scale for success. This extends not only to the business supports in place, but also the resources available for those looking to call Pierce County home.



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Creating community

To these ends, the organization has developed a housing toolkit to support homebuyers and help developers navigate regulatory process and financing options and expedite housing developments. Folsom explains, “there’s a section for aspiring homeowners, and that’s the piece that no one has ever pulled together. It’s been distributed across the 10-county region and it will be featured in our regional housing forum coming up in June.”

The organization also helped the Village of Ellsworth establish its Community Development Authority, which is taking the lead in redeveloping the old middle schools into a housing project to meet community housing needs, an effort that originated from a visioning process led by the Chamber, one that will have a lasting impact on the community.

Through the tireless efforts of the PCEDC and its many partners to grow opportunities locally, Pierce County has prioritized quality of life and wellbeing by balancing those needs with future development to foster sustainable economic and community development that preserves the rural charm of the area as it grows.

“As you get deeper into Wisconsin, there’s agritourism everywhere,” Highfill notes, “but I would say what’s specifically

unique about Pierce County is where we’re situated, close to the Twin Cities and other more populated areas while still maintaining that rural identity,” which the community holds so dear.

The goal of the PCEDC moving forward is to continue to adapt its goals and strategic directives to meet the rural needs of Pierce County. The team will be reviewing its progress and adjusting as needed to remain agile and responsive, aligning objectives with the current economic environment.

Noting that the demographics of the county will shift significantly over the next several years, the PCEDC and its partners will continue to utilize relationships and resources to maximize the collective benefit for all, always asking, as Folsom does: “How can we help our communities and businesses achieve their goals and aspirations in a sustainable way that respects the culture and character of the community?”

The answer to that is to continue to bring people, organizations, resources, and ideas together to strengthen the connectivity of the community, keeping the opportunities coming and prosperity flowing. ■

Content Developed by Steve Finn



ALCIVIA

Doing something big for Pierce County



Introducing a Pillar of Our Community: The Story of Alcivia and Its Impact on Pierce County

By Lauren Highfill, Executive Director, Pierce County EDC

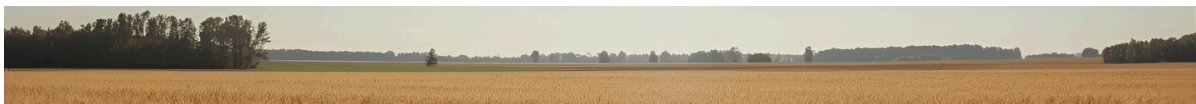
As the Executive Director of the Pierce County Economic Development Corporation, my mission is to highlight the businesses that are not just operating within our borders but are actively investing in our future. It's with this focus that I want to share more about a true leader in our local economy: Alcivia. While you may have seen their facilities or heard their name, I want to take a moment to provide a deeper look at

who they are and the significant role they play. They provide tangible benefits, innovative solutions, and patronage back to their members—our neighbors and friends. This unique structure ensures that Alcivia's success is directly tied to the success of our local agricultural community.

The cooperative provides a comprehensive portfolio of services that are crucial for modern farming. Their four main business lines—agronomy, grain, animal nutrition, and energy—create a one-stop-shop for a farmer's needs. This integrated approach allows them to offer everything from crop nutrients and seed to fuel and animal feed. They also provide valuable services like competitive financing and expert guidance, helping local producers navigate the complexities of today's markets. This commitment to the total well-being of the farm is a clear differentiator and a powerful force for economic stability in our area.

The Hager City Grain Facility

The most visible and impactful example of Alcivia's investment in our community is the new state-of-the-art grain terminal in Hager City. Located on a 40-acre site with direct access to the BNSF railway, this facility is a technological marvel designed to revolutionize grain handling in western



Wisconsin and southeastern Minnesota. It's a project built from the ground up to solve the real-world challenges faced by our producers. One of the most impressive features is its sheer speed and capacity. The facility boasts three dump pits, allowing farmers to unload their grain at a combined rate of 60,000 bushels per hour. This dramatically reduces wait times during the busy harvest season, saving farmers countless hours and thousands of dollars in fuel and labor costs. As one local farmer noted, a trip that used to take an hour and a half now takes just a few minutes, allowing them to get more loads in per day and return home earlier to their families.

Beyond speed, the facility offers a level of market access previously unavailable to our community. With direct access to a Class 1 railroad, Alcivia can ship grain year-round, bypassing the seasonal limitations of the river system. This gives farmers the flexibility to sell their grain at the most opportune times, even during the winter months when the Mississippi River is frozen. The new terminal also includes two powerful grain dryers, ensuring that farmers can deliver their crops at higher moisture levels, which allows them to start harvesting earlier without compromising quality. The Hager City facility isn't just a building; it's a strategic hub. Alcivia has designed it with future growth in mind, with potential plans to add liquid fertilizer and propane services. This forward-thinking approach shows their long-term commitment to our community and their vision of creating a comprehensive agricultural hub that meets the evolving needs of our producers.

The Pierce County EDC was thrilled to recognize Alcivia with the 2025 Pierce County Economic Boost Award. Their investment is a clear signal of their confidence in our agricultural sector and a powerful example of a business that is truly making a difference.

Pierce Counties Economic Development and Entrepreneurial Spirit

The recognition of Udder Hills Meats (Small Entrepreneurial Star), Joe Folsom (EDC

Cornerstone Award), Brandon Clare of JM Watkins (Professional Business Leader Award), and the Great River Road Visitor and Learning Center (Tourism and Hospitality Award) further underscore the vibrant and diverse economic landscape of Pierce County. These awards celebrate the collaborative efforts that drive growth and showcase the region's unique assets, from entrepreneurial spirit to dedicated leadership and exceptional visitor experiences.



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Local

BUSINESS LEADERS

Investing in Ellsworth and Its People

Kaufhold's Kurds isn't just a business; it's a cornerstone of the Ellsworth community. The company's growth is a direct investment in the local economy, and they have worked to ensure their expansion benefits the entire region. Since 2017, they have completed a series of significant expansions.

Their first major expansion began in late 2017 with a new building, which was operational by June 2018. The growth continued with a two-part expansion in 2021 and 2022. Most recently, in July 2024, they purchased an additional 1.2 acres of land. These expansions are a clear signal of the company's commitment to long-term growth and its faith in the Ellsworth community.

This growth directly translates into job creation. With a current staff of approximately 170 people, Kaufhold's Kurds is a major employer in Pierce County. Their goal is to grow their team to over 250 within the next three years. This isn't just about numbers; the company is dedicated to offering ongoing training and education to

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"In Wisconsin they have deep-fried cheese curds, which taste like French Fries and Heaven had a baby"

Jim Gaffigan

help their supervisors and quality assurance staff advance their careers.

A Partnership for a Prosperous Future

The success of a business on this scale requires more than just internal drive; it requires a strong support system. The Pierce County Economic Development is a proud partner of Kaufhold's Kurds'. Through our Business Retention and Expansion program, we are here to support our Pierce County Businesses with operational, expansion and resource needs. Navigating

large scale growth. Kaufhold's Kurds' forward-thinking approach extends beyond their current operations. They are actively planning their next phase of expansion, which will include purchasing additional land and breaking ground on a new facility as early as 2026. This new facility will allow them to diversify their product portfolio, moving beyond their famous cheese curds to include other artisan-crafted appetizers. This innovation ensures their continued relevance and leadership in the food service industry.

The company's target customers are primarily food service distributors, with their end products reaching a diverse range of establishments, from restaurants, bars, and casinos to stadiums, theme parks, and national chain accounts. This broad reach demonstrates their success in scaling their operations while maintaining their core values.

The story of Kaufhold's Kurds is a powerful example of a local business becoming a national leader without compromising its core principles. It's a journey fueled by quality, a commitment to the community, and a clear vision for the future. The Pierce County Economic Development is honored to support their growth and watch this Wisconsin company continue to set the golden standard for excellence.

Kaufhold's Kurds, Family Owned and Operated, Ellsworth, WI

WHY SUPPORT WISCONSIN DAIRIES?

Wisconsin's Dairy, Vital to the Economy.

Wisconsin's Dairy contributes \$45.6 billion annually, which is more than the combined value of Florida citrus and Idaho potatoes. This economic powerhouse also creates 157,000 jobs, supporting families and communities across the state. Wisconsin's dairy industry is a leader in innovation and sustainability, with 95% of its farms being family-owned. These farmers are committed to responsible stewardship of their animals, land, and water, with many participating in farmer-led watershed groups to protect natural

resources for future generations. The state's dairy products are celebrated world wide. From fresh milk and ice cream to the Proudly Produced Wisconsin Cheese® found in 99% of grocery stores nationwide, the state's dairy products are a testament to the hard work and dedication of its farmers.

PROUDLY WISCONSIN
-Cheese Facts-

Cheese is the pride of Wisconsin. In fact, we've been obsessively making cheese since before we were even a state. Check out the facts below to see why Wisconsin is a world of cheese in just one state.

Wisconsin won more awards than any other state or country at the 2025 U.S. Championship Cheese Contest bringing the award count to over

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WISCONSIN HAS THE ONLY MASTER CHEESEMAKER PROGRAM OUTSIDE OF EUROPE
(It's the only state that requires a license to make cheese.)

AND OVER 50 ACTIVE MASTER CHEESEMAKERS

EVERY POUND OF CHEESE CONTRIBUTES \$16.57 TO WISCONSIN'S ECONOMY

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KDairy Farmers of Wisconsin. Promotional Toolkit, www.wisconsin dairies.org/.



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