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WEDC's Sam Rikkers Keynotes at 2025 Food Finance Forum & Expo

Tours, Panels, Expo Celebrated Wisconsin Food, Farm, and Beverage Sector

(Madison, WI, Sept. 22, 2025) – The future of Wisconsin's food and farm business sector took center stage at Garver Feed Mill in Madison, WI, Sept. 16-18, during the fourth annual [Food Finance Forum and Expo](#). The event, hosted by the Food Finance Institute (FFI) at the Universities of Wisconsin, brought together more than 100 innovative food, beverage, and farm entrepreneurs and experts to celebrate and replicate food business growth strategies. Their delicious products were featured at an expo highlighting dozens of food businesses from our region. The event featured a keynote by Sam Rikkers, deputy secretary and COO for Wisconsin Economic Development Corp. (WEDC).

"The food and beverage industry fuels our Wisconsin economy and the communities we live in," said Rikkers. "We're investing in and supporting small businesses because they are net new job creators. We've been so proud to partner with FFI on the Fellows Program, which produces amazing ROI."

WEDC supports FFI's Fellows Program, a four-month accelerator that has helped more than 250 local food, beverage, technology, value-added agriculture, and processing businesses grow and thrive.

The Food Finance Forum and Expo also featured expert panels, a four-stop food and farm business tour, and an exhibitors' expo. Throughout the event, attendees heard program participants share their stories and insights.

FFI Fellows Program participant Hannah Kopplin, co-owner of Tots on the Street, located in St. Francis, WI, recently got her company's gourmet tater tots placed in Roundy's, Piggly Wiggly, and Woodman's grocery stores. "The people, opportunities, and resources of the FFI Fellows program really helped us grow," said Kopplin. "We know we're not alone, and we feel much more confident knowing we're avoiding mistakes in this process."

"The Food Finance Forum and Expo was an incredible opportunity to connect the ecosystem of food businesses, service providers, and consumers in our state and region all in one place," reported Sarah Larson, director, FFI. "In addition to hearing success stories from inspiring entrepreneurs, we focused attention on innovative strategies for raising equity in food and farm businesses, and on the evolving retail landscape."

The event followed a 2-day Raising Equity training by FFI Innovative Finance Expert Tera Johnson. Plus, a happy hour brought together members and friends of Naturally Wisconsin, a project of FFI and a Naturally Network chapter.

Read more details about the speakers, exhibitors, food tours, and agenda at foodfinanceinstitute.org/forum.

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The mission of the Food Finance Institute (foodfinanceinstitute.org) is to help food and farm businesses thrive at every stage through finance-forward training, coaching, and consulting.

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