

**Diversity and Challenge:**  
**Southwestern Wisconsin's Role**  
**in the New Economy**

Prepared by  
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## **Introduction: Diversity and Challenge**

The southwest region of Wisconsin is one of the most, if not the most, economically diverse regions in the state. The region encompasses Dane, Rock, Grant, Crawford, Walworth, Green, Richland, Iowa, Lafayette, and part of Jefferson counties. The economy runs the gamut from heavy industry to information technology and biotechnology research to traditional farming.

The diversity is most startling in a triangle running from Madison to Janesville/Beloit to Platteville. Madison's economy is almost an anomaly compared to the rest of the region because of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and State government. The University and State employ thousands of workers and pour hundreds of millions dollars into Madison's economy each year. An example is the University Research Park on Madison's west end. The Park contains eighty-eight companies, employing over twenty-five hundred people. A conservative estimate of the annual Park salaries runs in excess of \$120,000,000. The Park pays 1.8 million dollars in property taxes. Add in the rest of the University and the State and Dane County's economy seems flush. Dane County's unemployment rate, 1.2%, is well below the state and national averages and Dane is considered one of the most prosperous counties in the nation.

Rock County, on the other hand, relies heavily on manufactured goods and is subject to fluctuations in the market. While the regional economy continues to be strong, the recent loss of several key local employers – Gillette (Parker Pen) and Beloit Corporation among them – due to changes in world markets, does present some cause for concern. While Janesville/Beloit's employment grew 21% from 1991 to 1995, this pattern did not hold in the second half of the 1990's, during which time the region experienced a net decline of 970 manufacturing jobs. Modest gains in other sectors resulted in a net increase in employment of 3% from 1995 to 1999.

Rock County continues to be heavily reliant on the automotive industry for employment. Out of the estimated labor force of 74,050, about 14,439 (19.5%) are employed in durable goods manufacturing. Of this total, at least 8,300 (57% of durable goods employment) is directly related to the automotive industry. Most of this total is tied directly or indirectly to General Motors.

The General Motors Assembly Plant overshadows Janesville's economy and any downturn in the auto industry creates a ripple effect in Janesville and Rock County. The Janesville General Motors Plant currently produces GMC and Chevrolet Suburban, Yukon, and Tahoe trucks and generates a local payroll in excess of \$1 million per day. While, production of these new SUV products is anticipated until 2005 or 2006, there has been no announcement made regarding future product designs beyond those years. In addition, production on the medium duty truck line (about 1,000 employees) will move to Flint, Michigan in 2002.

Beloit presents a unique problem, in that, it is located immediately adjacent to a competing community located in a different state that provides more competitive economic incentive packages while sharing the same workforce and population pool. Most other municipalities, in Wisconsin, do not share Beloit's level of distress in regard to high unemployment rates (9%), low per capita and household income, low valuation of single-family homes and a high percentage of single-family rental units. Consequently, Beloit currently receives very sizable direct state financial aid that comprises in excess of 60% of its general fund budget. The challenges in the Beloit area are significant because for so long the economy was tied to "heavy industry," with little diversification effort within the community.

The other end of the triangle, Grant and Lafayette counties face an all too familiar challenge. These counties rely heavily on agriculture and the downturn in the agricultural economy has had a tremendous negative effect in their economies. In Lafayette County, 33% of their land is taxed as agricultural, so that the economic downturn has had a significant effect on their tax base. Additionally, 35% of their workforce "out migrates" daily to other counties, and states, for employment, and the county loses important revenue sources when these workers shop in their "work" communities, not their "home" communities. Grant County faces a similar problem, but they have a unique problem all their own, loss of graduates from the University of Wisconsin-Platteville. UW-Platteville fills an important niche in the UW System and one of their strengths is their Engineering program. However, few of their students stay within the region following graduation. In fact, most Engineering students do their internships outside the region. Economics is the factor in the out migration. Other parts of Wisconsin, and other states, offer these graduates better salaries and potential for growth than Grant County or any of the surrounding area. Other disciplines at UW-Platteville face the same loss of students for the same reason, better economic opportunities elsewhere.

A challenge facing the southwestern region, and the entire state, is the question of viable energy sources for the "New Economy." As technology progresses so does the need for reliable, renewable energy. When we address infrastructure needs for the future, energy must be at the forefront.

With this great diversity in the economic structure of the region one has to ask the question, how do you identify the needs and challenges facing the region? The answer is simple to identify, but difficult to accomplish. Gather input from all the diverse sectors of the region and identify common, and unique, challenges and suggest solutions for these challenges.

## **Gathering Information: Listening**

This “White Paper” comes from the efforts of a group of dedicated individuals from the Public and Private sectors. Concerned people from Higher Education, Business, and State Government came together to address, and try to find solutions to, the region’s economic challenges.

The Southwest Regional Steering Committee organized a series of “Listening Sessions” to gather citizen input about Wisconsin’s economic challenges and future. To facilitate maximum input the Steering Committee scheduled listening sessions throughout the region, rather than in one location. Fitchburg, Janesville, and Platteville were the sites chosen and the attendance at each site was indicative of the challenges facing these sections of the region.

The first session, Fitchburg (Madison area) was the most lightly attended, though heavily publicized. An air of complacency seems to pervade this area since Dane County’s economy is so strong. The second session in Janesville was a different matter altogether. Sixty-two people attended the session at UW-Rock County, led by Forward Janesville. This session included the communities of Janesville, Whitewater, and Beloit. Each of these communities addressed their economic challenges and presented possible solutions. These solutions will be discussed later in the white paper. This strong turnout was encouraging and the presenters were well prepared and presented their needs in a clear and concise manner. The final session at UW-Platteville was the strongest of all. This session drew 105 individuals and so many people wished to speak that we ran a half-hour longer than usual. The area was well represented by members of the Grant and Lafayette counties’ economic development and business communities. The Executive Director of the Prairie de Chien Chamber of Commerce made an excellent presentation on the unique problems of being a rural, border community.

Each session painted a picture of the area’s particular challenges, strengths, and weaknesses, but certain themes pervaded all the sessions. Keeping our young people in Wisconsin; better paying jobs; and improved transportation systems were a common thread that ran through all the sessions. This paper will address the challenges to the region’s economy and attempt to present possible solutions to each of these challenges. One thing that became quite apparent from the beginning was that there are no simple solutions to any of the challenges, and that only a concerted effort by all areas of the economy will succeed.

## **Challenges: Maintaining & Improving**

As previously stated certain themes wove themselves through each listening session and became a common regional thread. Additionally, a group of challenges encompassing the entire region also became apparent. The six challenges, common to the region, are:

1. Unequal growth and prosperity.
2. Shortage of a skilled workforce.
3. Urban sprawl and land use planning.
4. Transportation – road, rail, air
5. Over reliance on one segment of the economy.
6. Depressed farm economy

The region also has some quite unique challenges. Maintaining the “flag ship” status of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and its preeminence as a nationally renowned science and research institution is vital to Wisconsin’s future. UW-Madison is one of Wisconsin’s greatest resources. Another challenge is how to share UW-Madison’s success with other institutions and the state as a whole. Beloit poses a difficult challenge in how to move from an economy totally depended on heavy industry to a diversified economy. Their “border city” situation only exacerbates an already difficult problem.

We will now address each individual challenge, examining the diversity and complexity of each, and finally offer some possible solutions. We must remember that these are only possible solutions, nothing is “carved in stone,” if there is a better solution, bring it up for discussion.

### **Challenge 1 – Unequal growth and prosperity**

This is possibly the most difficult challenge to address, let alone solve. The diversity in the southwestern region’s economies is extreme and there is no “one” solution.

As previously mentioned, Dane County’s prosperity is anomalous to the region, and possibly the state, and creates a stilted picture of the region as a whole.

State Government and the University will always be with us, so they must be factored into the equation. However, for planning purposes the region must be

viewed, not as a whole, but by the unique characteristics of each community and area. To lump the southwestern region together is unrealistic and counter-productive in economic planning.

While Wisconsin's economy continues to expand at a record pace, for thousands of Wisconsin families, economic prospects look far less promising. These families live in sub-standard housing. In the midst of plenty, their children are often under-nourished and under-educated. They face a lifetime of health problems and infrequent health care. And jobs, when they can be found, often don't pay enough to cover all the bills. These families are White; Hispanic, Asian and American Indian, but a disproportionate number of them are African American (Black). Wisconsin's African American residents, (300,000), and all other minority residents are living in these challenging and frustrating circumstances.

It is important that this perspective be incorporated into any strategy advanced by the Wisconsin Economic Summit. Statistics documenting school dropout, unemployment, incarceration and a host of other indicators underscore the urgent need to do so. Wisconsin unemployment data illustrates why: While the state's overall unemployment rate is about 3.5% compares favorably with the national average rate in the 4% range, the state's unemployment rate among Blacks is closer to 9%.

## Challenge 2 – Shortage of a skilled workforce

Sustaining and increasing a skilled workforce is vital to all segments of the economy. However, our region faces some difficult challenges in this area.

Retaining our young workforce is difficult for a number of reasons, not all economic. As the Dean of the Engineering Department at UW-Platteville, Richard Shultz stated, "Most of our graduates stay in Wisconsin, but not the southwestern region." He went on to say that, "When a graduate starts at \$40,000 per year in other parts of the state, and in other states, why should they stay here." Salary, however, is not always the major factor in why our youth leaves the region. Quality of life is a much greater factor. The lure of the "Big City" and its diverse lifestyle is a powerful draw and difficult to overcome. The "Big City" is a relative concept. A young person from Darlington sees Madison as the big city, while a Madison youth sees Chicago as the big city.

It is especially difficult to attract and retain "professional" level workers to small communities. These workers demand some "amenities" to sustain their lifestyle. Recreation, the arts, quality schools, etc. are high on the list of needs for many people, and if you can not provide them, these workers will look elsewhere.

Maintaining a skilled workforce is not sufficient for real economic growth, since the overall unemployment rate is low. For businesses to expand in the region, and state, they will have to attract skilled workers for other areas. But what kind of incentives will attract people to Wisconsin? We all know that Wisconsin's lifestyle and recreation opportunities are a great draw, but are they enough? Why should a worker from Chicago or Detroit relocate to Janesville or Platteville, or for that matter, to Madison? Besides an improved lifestyle what can a community, or a state, offer to potential emigrant workers?

On another level, how can we attract new companies to the region? When a company plans an expansion into a new area one factor they must address is, can the area provide a comfortable lifestyle for our workers? Companies look at the same issues individual do and if they are not addressed and provided, the company will look elsewhere. Tax incentives and a favorable business climate may not be enough. Quality of life issues must be identified and addressed. This probably the greatest challenge facing a rural state, like Wisconsin, and especially the southwestern region.

Finally, a segment of the population being ignored in this equation is our senior citizens. Our business society, like our society in general, tends to be youth oriented, relegating older workers to marginal positions or retirement. Many of these workers still want to be productive and have a wealth of knowledge and experience to share. Wal-Mart Corporation has a great commercial that shows two senior citizens acting as greeters and the line, "Retirement is for the birds, I want to work," has a ring of truth that should not be ignored. Re-energizing our older workforce could be an answer that has not been fully realized.

Clearly, the southwest region, and the state, has a challenge securing an adequate skilled workforce and this is probably the most significant threat to the long-term growth and success of Wisconsin's economy.

### Challenge 3 – Land Use and Urban Sprawl

Some areas in the region, specifically Dane County, have experienced an explosive growth spurt, which has imposed significant challenges to existing land resources and infrastructure. Conversely, other areas are becoming "land poor" because of the difficulties in the agricultural economy.

Urban planners spend innumerable hours studying and preparing long-range plans to prevent urban sprawl, which can damage fragile ecological resources and overburden a community's infrastructure. In many instances these carefully

devised plans are ignored and sprawl occurs creating confrontation between developers, planners, and citizens.

Farmers, struggling to try and earn a living, are caught between powerful economic and social forces. Do you sell the farm, which may have been in the family for generations, or wait for it to be taken? No one should have to face this situation, but farmers in southwestern Wisconsin are dealing with this every day. The demise of the small, family farm is not just a Wisconsin problem, every state is facing this economic reality and it may take a national effort to address and deal with the issue.

Many communities in southwestern Wisconsin have plans in place to grasp the new opportunities out there, but do not have the financial capability to provide infrastructure upgrades needed to realize these opportunities. Can the state aid these communities, who have the vision, but not the resources to make that vision a reality?

Effective land use is, and will probably always be, an issue and challenge for municipalities, counties, and states.

#### Challenge 4 – Transportation

This is the one challenge that resounded throughout out the listening sessions. Whether it is better air service in Madison; an upgraded Interstate system in Janesville; or a much-needed upgrade of U.S. 151 from Dubuque to Dodgeville, transportation was in everyone's mind and in everyone's presentation.

The explosive regional growth, especially in Dane County, has increased pressure on an already overburdened transportation system. Statements such as, "Madison will never be a 'world class' scientific research center without significant improvement to the area's aviation resources," may seem inflammatory, but true. In our fast paced age people do not want to drive to a meeting in Chicago or Minneapolis, they want to fly. So efficient and reliable air service is in high demand and areas that can not provide this type of service will lose out to those who can.

Janesville, a community with an efficient road and rail system in place, still views improvement as the key to long-term growth. They have a multi-model system with direct interstate access, the third busiest airport in the state, and both passenger and freight rail service, but for the future this may not be enough. They hope to attract both traditional and "New Economy" firms by improving the existing transportation network and creating new transportation infrastructure.

At the other end of our study triangle, Grant and Lafayette counties, transportation improvement isn't just desirable, it's critical. The "U.S. Highway 151 Corridor," between Madison and Dubuque, Iowa is the major route for commerce in southwestern Wisconsin. From Madison to Dodgeville and from Dickeyville to Dubuque the road is a four-lane divided highway with good visibility and in good repair. From Dodgeville to Dickeyville, however, the route is a two-lane, narrow, poorly maintained road, which winds through numerous hills and valleys. The deteriorating condition of the road is directly related to the amount of commercial traffic using the route daily. Heavy trucks travel the Madison/Dubuque route and the 39 miles between Dodgeville and Dickeyville is congested at best and dangerous at worst.

Tourism is a major economic factor in this part of Wisconsin, with State Historical sites at Mineral Point (Pendarvis), Belmont (First Capital), and numerous county historical sites in Grant and Lafayette counties. Heavy truck traffic stifles the growth of tourism and deprives the area of an important revenue source.

Attracting new business to this region will be difficult, if not impossible, as long as this route remains in its present condition. Plans are in process to upgrade U.S. 151 between Dodgeville and Dickeyville, with completion set for 2005. However, construction has not begun and until it does this area will remain economically disadvantaged.

Long term growth and prosperity in southwestern Wisconsin is tied directly to improvements in the region's transportation infrastructure.

#### Challenge 5 – Over reliance on one segment of the economy

Reliance on one segment of the economic landscape to sustain an area's economy is problematic and potentially destructive. For decades communities in southwestern Wisconsin relied either on durable goods/heavy industry manufacturing or agricultural as its life-blood. Realignment, downsizing, and closures hit unprepared communities extremely hard. Some even blame the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) for the downturn in manufacturing. Whatever the reason, if a company, or community, was not following the ever shifting trends in the market, and adjusting accordingly, they were probably stunned by the changes.

In Rock County, Beloit and Janesville were models of success in durable goods and heavy industry however; this success created a false sense of security, which inhibited alternative planning. When the markets turned these communities were unprepared and temporarily floundered. Lack of continuous planning retards

recovery and in many cases forces communities into a retrenchment that is difficult to overcome.

#### Challenge 6 – Depressed farm economy

The agriculturally heavy counties of southwestern Wisconsin, tied to a tenuous and volatile market, did little planning and are now faced with dire consequences. Farming has always been a gamble and farmers usually planned their recovery through government assistance, but today old ideas bring ruin, not recovery. Government programs aren't as plentiful or reliable as in past years and government attitudes towards farmers has become more business-like and less paternalistic.

Some areas, especially the extreme southwest corner of the state, were harder hit than others and face a more difficult recovery process, but they can recover.

Farmers, in some areas, have been forced off the land to support their families. They “out-migrate” daily to jobs in surrounding communities to support their families and the farm. Farm wives have also taken jobs off the farm to supplement family income.

The almost mythic idea of the “Family Farm” is a thing of the past, so that, for a farmer to be successful he must approach his profession in a calculating, business-like manner.

#### **Solutions: Proposals and Suggestions**

Any potential solution proposed here must be weighed and evaluated carefully before being implemented. Nothing is “carved in stone” and what is proposed here may work in one area, and fail in another. Careful study and planning is the key to successful economic development or economic recovery.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison has begun a program to maintain its margin of excellence as one of the nation's best public research universities. The Madison Initiative is a two-phase program rooted in the university's Vision for the Future.

The first phase, now underway, focuses on:

- Strategic hiring and retention of key faculty and academic staff.
- Improved academics, including enhanced teaching and learning with technology and expanded research opportunities for undergraduates.

- Improved financial assistance for students in need.
- Renovation and repair of aging buildings.

The second phase of the initiative – with additional funding proposed in the state’s 2001-2003 budget and increases private giving – would expand on the first phase by:

- Broadening student learning opportunities.
- Enhancing Wisconsin’s economic development.
- Maintaining affordability for students through increased financial aid.
- Continuing the strategic hiring program.

### Solution 1 – Unequal growth and prosperity

A way to assist the farm economy would be to create an Agricultural Research Park, dedicated exclusively to agricultural research and development, utilizing the resources of Wisconsin’s overall vibrant agricultural economy.

Encourage development and job growth in southwestern Wisconsin through partnerships and mentoring with successful models from other parts of the state.

Create an Agricultural Policy Research Center at UW-Platteville to gather data, analyze, and make recommendations to state and national leaders on agricultural programs and policies.

Create a statewide study and planning group to address the ever changing and volatile agricultural economy.

Existing state economic development programs must be enhanced or reformed to focus on the unique needs of southwestern Wisconsin. Incentives are needed for businesses to locate and expand in the region. This could be in the form of incentives available exclusively to the region or additional investment in small business and cottage industries.

Minority, especially Black, unemployment rates offer a discouraging picture, but in a state where labor supply has emerged as a major impediment to continued economic expansion, this finding also holds some positive news. The relatively high unemployment rate among Blacks, in Madison and Beloit, suggests a potential strategy to bridge the state’s chronic worker shortage by bringing more Blacks into the workforce. This strategy should be an aggressive outreach investment in skill and technical training and continue support for the UW-Madison diversity programs. Additionally, the whole minority unemployment, and under-employment question needs to be addressed for Wisconsin’s sake.

## Solution 2 – Shortage of a skilled workforce

A continued investment in secondary and higher education is the most effective way to address this challenge.

The state should emphasize training in information technology by partnerships with K-12 school systems, technical colleges, and colleges and universities throughout the state and by outreach efforts across the region.

Emphasize science and technology in the K-12 curriculum or encourage local school districts to create “Science Techs” in their local areas.

Create Information Technology Incubators to help foster growth and research in this field. UW-Madison is already studying the creation of an IT Incubator.

Address the challenge of recruiting and retaining the “best and brightest” students through a student loan waiver program. This type of program should require participants to remain in Wisconsin for a set period following graduation.

Create an emigrant program to encourage students and skilled workers to relocate to Wisconsin. For students, use student loan waivers, and pre-assigned internships as the lure. Use strategic upgrade training to encourage skilled out of state workers to relocate to Wisconsin for “New Economy” jobs.

Continued investment by the state in UW-Madison incubators to assure the quality of the state’s “Flagship University.”

## Solution 3 – Urban sprawl and land use planning

The region needs a comprehensive land use strategy that addresses and resolves the challenges created by the dynamic growth in southwestern Wisconsin. This could be accomplished with the creation of a multi-county regional planning commission.

It is suggested that a regional planning effort, incorporating the needs of the particular areas, under the directions of the counties, strategically address the future growth patterns of southwestern Wisconsin.

#### Solution 4 – Transportation

To address the diverse transportation needs of the southwest region a comprehensive regional transportation plan should be initiated drawing on the expertise of the entire region.

The “U.S. 151 Corridor,” must become a focal point for future planning and management. Interstate 90 through Rock County should be enlarged to six lanes to the Illinois border. This area is the “Gateway to Wisconsin” from Illinois.

Economical rail service to rural areas should be studied as an alternative to creating new road networks.

Improved air service to Madison is vital for regional growth. Passenger and freight service upgrades must be addressed if the southwest region is to prosper. Capital infrastructure investments must be made.

The “New Economy” may be driven by electronic means, but the delivery system still needs modern road, rail, and air networks.

#### Solution 5 – Over reliance on one segment of the economy

The transition of existing manufacturing into new technologies and the incorporation of e-commerce must occur for the region to become competitive. The upgrading of current information technology infrastructure is essential, especially in the more rural sections of the region.

The state and the university system can assist the region with these efforts by:

- Providing research and analytical assistance.
- Directing the region to appropriate industry-related organizations and professional associations that research, track and benchmark.
- Creating training curriculum to develop the skills/knowledge necessary to utilize new technology.
- Offering incentives and/or financial assistance for the investment in new technology.
- Providing less restrictive financial assistance for workforce training programs.

Strengthen the linkage between the UW-Madison and UW-Milwaukee by a partnership, which establishes a high-tech, jointly owned, incubator in Waukesha County. Utilize the Biosciences resources of Madison and the medical instrumentation and information technology strengths of the Milwaukee area.

Additionally, the expertise and experience of the Milwaukee School of Engineering, Medical College of Wisconsin, and area technical colleges should be part of this plan.

Consult with and assist UW-Rock County in the creation of an incubator to overcome the potential impact of the General Motors plant closing. Build on the area's strength in the applied technology.

#### Solution 6 – Depressed farm economy

The most difficult challenge facing this, or any other region. Regional resources can not directly address this challenge. Many factors can only be dealt with at the state and national levels. An alternative is to move away from traditional farm crops to alternative, or specialty crops.

Diversification in the agricultural economy may be one of the initial steps, but it is not the only solution.

#### **Conclusions: What will work and how do we get there?**

There is no simple solution or quick fix for the complex and diverse challenges facing Wisconsin's southwest region. The extreme diversity of the region's economy alone precludes creating one, all-encompassing plan.

During our listening sessions we received input on Wisconsin's economic future that ranged from the hard-nose practical to the esoteric. One thing became abundantly clear from all the information we gathered and that was, there are many great ideas out there. The challenge and opportunity is bringing these great ideas together to "road map" Wisconsin's economic future.

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Since the fall of 1999, Mark has served as the Director of the University Research Park, a 250-acre research park owned and operated by the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Mark has placed special emphasis on planning future needs and expansion of the Research Park as a place to facilitate Faculty startup companies. As the Director, he serves on the Council for technology Transfer, which facilitates the movement of technologies from campus to the private sector.

Before coming to the University Research Park, Mark served as Governor Tommy G. Thompson's Secretary of the Department of Administration (DOA) from 1996-1999. As Thompson's top Cabinet Member, Mark was the chief architect of the \$41 billion biennial state budget, which established the fiscal and program priorities for all state government.

Prior to his DOA appointment, Mark served as Secretary of the state Department of Revenue (DOR) beginning in 1988. Before joining the Thompson Administration, Mark was home secretary for U.S. Congressman Steven C. Gunderson in Wisconsin's Third Congressional District. He also served in various local government capacities in Eau Claire County, including election for three terms on the Eau Claire County Board of Supervisors. His professional experience includes real estate brokerage, management and development in the Eau Claire area.

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Tom joined the University Research Park staff in July 2000 in the newly created Communication Specialist position. His duties include acting as the Park's media contact, marketing specialist, and events coordinator. He develops the Park's newsletter and provides staff support the University Research Park Tenant Advisory Council and University Research Park Design Review Board. Since arriving in July, Tom has spend a significant portion of his time working with foreign delegations visiting the Park and working on the planning team for the Wisconsin Economic Summit

Previous professional experiences include a twenty-year career in the United States Air Force. He worked for the city of Grand Forks, North Dakota, organizing and managing a public information center for the city following the Red River Valley Flood of 1997. Tom received a Doctor of Arts degree in History from the University of North Dakota in 1999.

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