

Wisconsin Corn: From Field To Product

MIDDLE SCHOOL | GRADES 6–8 | ONE-PAGE FACT SHEET

Corn is a monocot grass that uses C4 photosynthesis — an efficient system that lets it produce a lot of biomass in a short Wisconsin growing season. Each corn plant produces both male flowers (the tassel on top) and female flowers (the silks on the ear), and wind carries pollen from one to the other.

THE WISCONSIN NUMBERS (2025 CROP YEAR, USDA NASS)

Acres of corn planted statewide	4.15 million
Acres harvested for grain	3.22 million
Grain production	605 million bushels
Average yield (state record)	188 bu/acre
U.S. average yield for comparison	186.5 bu/acre
Corn silage harvested	885,000 acres / 19.5 million tons
Wisconsin dairy cows fed by that crop	1.29 million head

WHERE A WISCONSIN KERNEL GOES AFTER HARVEST

- **Livestock feed** — grain and silage go to dairy and beef cattle, hogs, and poultry. Wisconsin ranks #1 nationally in corn for silage.
- **Ethanol production** — roughly a third of Wisconsin's corn crop is processed into fuel ethanol at plants across the state.
- **Wet and dry milling** — corn is separated into starch, oil, protein, and fiber for food and industrial uses.
- **Export markets** — grain moves by truck, rail, and Great Lakes shipping to customers overseas.

FOOD, FIBER & FUEL

FOOD	FIBER	FUEL
Cornstarch, corn syrup, corn oil, cornmeal, and masa. Indirectly: the milk, cheese, beef, and pork produced by corn-fed Wisconsin livestock.	Corn-based bioplastics (PLA), adhesives, textile sizing, packaging, and biodegradable products. Corn stover is studied as a raw material for cellulosic products.	Ethanol blended at E10, E15/Unleaded 88, and E85. Corn oil is a feedstock for biodiesel and is being studied for sustainable aviation fuel.

DO THE MATH

1. One bushel of corn yields about 2.8 gallons of ethanol. If a Wisconsin ethanol plant processes 40 million bushels a year, how many gallons does it make?
2. A bushel weighs 56 pounds. How many pounds of corn did Wisconsin harvest in 2025? Convert to tons.
3. Wisconsin's yield rose from 174 bu/acre in 2024 to 188 in 2025. What is the percent increase? What might explain it?

WISCONSIN AGRICULTURE AT A GLANCE

Wisconsin agriculture and food processing generate roughly \$116 billion in economic activity — more than 14% of the state economy.

Wisconsin leads the nation in cheese, cranberries, ginseng, snap beans, corn silage, and milk goats.

Wisconsin has about 58,500 farms; the large majority are family owned.