



NANCY VANDERMEER

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 70TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

June 10, 2020

Happy June Dairy Month

National Dairy Month started out as National Milk Month in 1937 as a way to promote drinking milk. It was initially created to stabilize the dairy demand when production was at a surplus, but has now developed into an annual tradition that celebrates the contributions the dairy industry has made to the world. Even before the national celebratory month was established, Wisconsin was officially named 'America's Dairyland.'

According to updated statistics from the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP), the dairy industry alone contributes \$45.6 billion to Wisconsin's economy each year. Wisconsin is home to more than 7,000 dairy farms, more than any other state, and 1.28 million cows. Additionally, the nearly 1,200 licensed cheesemakers in the state produce over 600 types, styles and varieties of cheese, which is nearly double the number of any other state. Wisconsin cheesemakers make 26% of the nation's cheese and produced 3.36 billion pounds in 2019. The dairy industry and the entire \$104.8 billion agriculture industry has a tremendous positive impact in our state. 1

This year, unfortunately, June Dairy Month will look and feel quite a bit different for many of us for a variety of reasons, namely, the lack of in-person dairy breakfasts and county fairs throughout the state due to Coronavirus precautionary measures. That's disappointing. County fair and dairy breakfast boards work tirelessly all year in preparation for these community based, family friendly events.

It's especially discouraging because after a tough couple of years, this year was looking pretty promising for a number of farmers prior to the COVID-19 public health emergency that has really disrupted supply and demand distribution chains across the globe. You might even know someone that was forced to dump their milk recently due to supply chain chaos as a result of the public health emergency. Despite those very visible, impactful struggles, I know firsthand that dairy farmers are resilient in their efforts and have an uncanny ability to persevere against the most difficult of circumstances. Looking forward, many of the dairy farmers I regularly hear from and speak with are cautiously optimistic about the future as we all look to get back to normal.

There are still a number of ways you and your family can recognize Dairy Month and support the Dairy Industry in our state. The Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin (fka The Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board) is a farmer-owned and farmer-directed non-profit organization created to increase the sale and consumption of Wisconsin milk and dairy products. They have an entire website with information on the dairy industry, dairy farms, and dairy farmers in Wisconsin.

On top of that, they have a wide array of information specifically related to promoting dairy this month, focusing on this year's National Dairy Month campaign's tagline "Celebrate Wisconsin Dairy Farmers." The key focus of the campaign is telling farmer stories to help Wisconsin residents connect with farmers and build trust. At <https://www.wisconsinmilk.org/Promote-Dairy/dairy-month-promo>, you'll find everything from dairy trivia, to tasty recipes, to social media resources for promoting dairy, to



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community support resources like organizing donations to the Hunger Task Force or the Wisconsin Food and Farm Support Fund to keep milk flowing in Wisconsin and help those experiencing food insecurity. All that said, one of the best and easiest ways I've heard to help Wisconsin dairy farmers this month comes from my friend and Monroe County Farm Bureau President Jack Herricks, who when recently interviewed for a news story, said that something as simple as picking up and drinking an extra gallon of milk helps. I checked with him, and he says that picking up and eating an extra pail of ice cream or making an additional trip to Culvers helps too.

Legislatively, we achieved a significant accomplishment this session by securing \$8.8 million for a newly created Dairy Innovation Hub at UW-Madison, UW-Platteville, and UW-River Falls to re-prioritize and restore focus on dairy innovation in Wisconsin. The universities will use the funds for faculty positions, postdoctoral fellows, research farms, labs and equipment. We recently received a progress update on the innovation hub and they're off and running, both with securing needed personnel and launching new, innovative research projects to benefit the industry. For more information on the Dairy Innovation Hub and to stay updated with it's progress, you can follow online at: <https://dairyinnovationhub.wisc.edu/>.

Additionally, I'm really proud of a piece of legislation that I was able to author, pass and get signed into law by the governor in early March. That bill, now [2019 Wisconsin Act 174](#), removes burdensome hurdles for milk and commodity haulers in the state by extending the "agricultural commodity" exception year round as it relates to hours of service and electronic logging device (ELD) requirements for farm supplies or commodities traveling within 150 miles of the source. This allows our state to join at least twenty other states, including Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, North Dakota, and South Dakota, that have established a year-round planting and harvesting period exception. The proposal was a recommendation of the Dairy Task Force 2.0 and was supported by the Wisconsin Milk Haulers Association, the Wisconsin Motor Carriers Association, and the Wisconsin Farm Bureau.

Please don't hesitate to contact me for inquiries related to state or federal agriculture industry assistance and response programs.

Nancy VanderMeer represents the 70th Wisconsin State Assembly District, which includes portions of Monroe, Jackson, Portage and Wood counties and serves as the Chairperson of the Assembly Committee on Rural Development and Vice-Chairperson of the Assembly Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs.

¹ <https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Publications/WIAgStatistics.aspx>