



Column by Rep. Steve Doyle

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## Dairy Month in Wisconsin

As some of you know, I raise alpacas. They come with me to visit senior centers, roll around in the mud, and never march with me in parades. For the life of me, although I've been raising them for over 10 years, I still don't understand the economics of alpacas. You don't eat them like a pig, milk them like a cow, ride them like a horse or teach them to do tricks like a dog. They produce about a hundred dollars or so of fiber a year, which probably almost covers the vet bills. Fiber, which I'm told, can be made into some very soft scarves. And an adult female alpaca will produce just one offspring a year. However, a decent quality female alpaca sells for anywhere from \$5,000 to \$25,000. Go figure. An average male, on the other hand, goes for about 500 bucks. Twenty five thousand for a female versus five hundred for a male. My wife says that makes perfect sense to her.

Luckily for our economy, my alpacas are only a very small part of a much larger agriculture infrastructure that continues to move our state forward. All you have to do to understand the importance of agriculture in Wisconsin is look at our flag. Right there on the shield is a plow to symbolize agriculture and near the bottom right is a cornucopia full of some of the things we produce. And by simply looking at the numbers, it is pretty clear to see just how important dairy operations are to sustaining our economy.

Did you know that the average dairy cow generates \$3242 per year in direct milk sales and \$20,000 a year in economic activity? We have 12,167 dairy herds in Wisconsin which equals about 1.3 million dairy cows. We also have 134 cheese plants in Wisconsin, one of the highest in the nation. Here in La Crosse County, milk production generates \$33.7 million in business sales, and if you add in milk processing you get another \$601.7 million.

The dairy industry also creates jobs. Again, in La Crosse County, there are nearly 4100 agricultural jobs, which is about 5% of our workforce. We generate about \$1.4 billion in business sales from agriculture, which is approximately 14% of our county economic activity. And agriculture contributes about \$257 million to our county income and pays about \$49 million in taxes. There is absolutely no way that my alpacas could ever dream of having that kind of an impact.

But the importance of dairy to Wisconsin goes beyond just looking at the numbers. Generations of families continue to run family farms. High school students participate in Future Farmers of America and often come down to visit my offices in Madison. Young children participate in 4-H just as my daughters did and learn about hard work and dedication as they care for their animals.



STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
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And from Western Wisconsin all the way to Door County, you can see fields and barns, reminding us of our heritage.

June is Dairy Month here in Wisconsin. There will be dairy breakfasts at local farms, parades, festivals, fairs, food samplings, dances and concerts, all showcasing Wisconsin's dairy industry. It is a great time for friends and family to come together to enjoy the quality products of our farmers and to learn a little bit more about the vital role they play in our state.

So this month as we celebrate dairy and its continuing impact on our Wisconsin way of life, take a moment to think about how agriculture is working to improve your quality of life. Whether it is through fresh milk at the grocery store, a 4-H club for your children or simply a pillar of our economy, the dairy industry touches our lives every day. And that is something we can all be thankful for.

For more information, visit [www.dairydaysofsummer.com](http://www.dairydaysofsummer.com).