

Sheila Harsdorf: Eat nutritious and delicious dairy to support farmers

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June Dairy Month is a great time to celebrate the dairy industry in America's Dairyland, and enjoy the many delicious and nutritious dairy products produced right here in Wisconsin. Including dairy in your daily diet is a healthy choice for you and your family, and good news for dairy farmers.

Each day we are faced with many beverage choices at restaurants, grocery stores, work and school. Milk is filled with nine essential nutrients, including calcium, protein and Vitamin D. U.S. per capita consumption of dairy products, including cheese, yogurt and butter, has continued to rise.

In Wisconsin, there are plenty of cheeses to choose from as the state's 1,200 cheesemakers produce more than 600 varieties. These include originals invented right here in Wisconsin like Colby and Brick, to specialty cheeses like Blue, Feta and Havarti. About 90% of Wisconsin milk is turned into cheese, and about 90% of Wisconsin cheese is sold outside the state.

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Last year, Wisconsin produced 3.37 billion pounds of cheese. That is 27% of the cheese in the United States. If Wisconsin were a country, it would rank fourth in world cheese production, behind only the United States, Germany and France. Wisconsin cheeses are the best of the best. At the 2017 U.S. Championship Cheese Contest, Wisconsin won more than 60% of the awards given.

As a former dairy farmer, I am proud of our Wisconsin farm families. Wisconsin has more dairy farms than any other state with 96% being family-owned. These farms

are diverse with varying types and sizes. Wisconsin leads the nation in the number of organic dairy farms, producing 10% of the country's organic cow's milk.

As a leading dairy state the industry benefits all of us, contributing more than \$43 billion annually to the state economy. That means the dairy industry fuels the state economy at more than \$82,500 per minute. Wisconsin is also home to advanced education programs at our colleges and universities, preparing young people for jobs in agriculture. The dairy industry itself employs nearly 80,000 people in the state in diverse careers, including animal nutrition, genetics, equipment engineering, marketing, finance, as well as farming.

Dairy products from Wisconsin reach consumers around the world. In 2017, the state's exports of dairy-related products were valued at nearly \$300 million, an increase of almost 20% over the year before. The top export markets for Wisconsin dairy products are Canada, Mexico and China. Maintaining our current trading partners and developing new and expanded markets is a top priority as we work to grow exports. Research, at facilities such as the Wisconsin Center for Dairy Research, is key to new product development to meet the needs of our customers worldwide.

Many consumers are becoming farther removed from a parent or grandparent that is actively involved in production agriculture. June Dairy Month breakfasts and events, a Wisconsin tradition for nearly 50 years, provide a great opportunity to get back on the farm. While each event is unique, many offer the opportunity to enjoy a delicious meal with a variety of dairy products, visit with friends, family and neighbors, and tour a farm.

The Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin make it easy to find a farm breakfast or event near you at <https://hooraywisconsindairy.com/>. Search by date, keyword or location. The site also includes recipes for every occasion and videos featuring stories of Wisconsin farm families.

Please join me in celebrating our dairy industry this June and throughout the coming year. You can truly make the difference to thousands of Wisconsin farm families by eating, sharing and promoting dairy.

— *Harsdorf is secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection.*

