

Wisconsin Farmers Union: Canadian dairy farmer to share perspective at Dairy Together events

Posted on Monday, Mar 5, 2018

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CHIPPEWA FALLS – Dairy Farmers of Ontario Chair Ralph Deitrich will visit Wisconsin March 13-15 to share his perspective on pros and cons of the Canadian dairy supply management program. Five forums being held around the state will highlight pros and cons of supply management and address whether elements of the Canadian system could be incorporated into the U.S. dairy industry to balance milk supply and demand.

The events are being organized by Wisconsin Farmers Union. Deitrich will cover topics like how new farmers get started in a quota-based system, how processors participate and what impact inventory management has had on Canadian dairy prices.

“Clearly, the dairy pricing structure we have here in the United States is not serving family farmers well,” said WFU President Darin Von Ruden, a Vernon County dairy farmer. “These meetings will offer a chance to hear how the Canadian system helps keep dairy prices paid to farmers stable, as opposed to the wild swings and crushingly low prices that have been putting U.S. dairy farmers out of business.”

There will be five meetings around the state for dairy farmers to attend:

- **Northwest Wisconsin:** Tues., March 13, 11:30am-2:30pm, 29 Pines/Sleep Inn

& Suites Conference Center, 5872 33rd Ave., Eau Claire.

- **Central Wisconsin:** Tues., March 13, 7:30pm-9:30pm, Korner Kitchen, W4890 Cty. Rd. H, Edgar.
- **Eastern Wisconsin:** Wed., March 14, 11:30am-2:30pm, Holiday Inn Conference Center, 625 Rolling Meadows Dr., Fond du Lac.
- **South Central Wisconsin:** Thurs., March 15, 11:30am-2:30pm, Dodger Bowl Banquet Center, 318 King St., Dodgeville.
- **Southwest Wisconsin:** Thurs., March 15, 7:30pm-9:30pm, Nordic Lanes, 511 N. Main St., Westby.

Over 1,000 dairy farmers provided information on the direness of the situation in our dairy industry in WFU's Dairy Producer Survey in 2016. The majority of respondents were receiving a pay price that was below the cost of production. Many of the farmers who responded were interested in big-picture solutions to improve the economics for their own farm and for future generations. Farmers expressed concern that the continuing push for very large dairy expansion was undermining market and price stability. Many were interested in learning more about how supply management would work, but were skeptical that a government-administered program is the right way to go. There was clear interest in a farmer-controlled mechanism.

"The stress and difficulty of current dairy economics is considerable, and this pressure is growing," Von Ruden said. "This will again be a very difficult year for Wisconsin farmers."

The March Class I (fluid milk) price is \$13.36, down 89 cents from last month and down \$3.54 from this time last year. According to National Agricultural Statistics Service records, Wisconsin had 8,719 dairy herds as of March 1, down from 9,261 in March of 2017.

"We've lost roughly 500 dairy farms each year in Wisconsin for the past several years," Von Ruden said. "You need look no further than the local newspaper auction ads to see the severity of what is happening across the countryside."

Over the past year, WFU has shared results of the Dairy Producer Survey with other farmers, community leaders, and legislators. "We've communicated specifically with bankers about the dangers posed by oversupply and encouraged them to be part of the solution rather than encouraging even greater dairy expansion," Von Ruden said.

WFU has also developed a model contract that, if adopted, would provide basic stability and protections to both farmers and processors.

“The survey also showed that farmers share a deep concern about the future of their farms and a belief that we are all better off when we have more farms rather than fewer,” Von Ruden added. “That starts with working together to assure that our current dairy farms have a fair opportunity to survive and thrive ... We think that the future of the Wisconsin dairy way of life is a future worth fighting for.”

Each of the Dairy Together events are free to attend and include a free meal. RSVP to Wisconsin Farmers Union by calling [715-723-5561](tel:715-723-5561) or by clicking on the corresponding event at www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com/upcoming-events.

Wisconsin Farmers Union, a member-driven organization, is committed to enhancing the quality of life for family farmers, rural communities, and all people through educational opportunities, cooperative endeavors, and civic engagement. For more information visit www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com.