

Brad Pfaff: Dairy Task Force 2.0 highlights the need to build connections

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Our state's license plates proudly read "America's Dairyland". Football fans often wear foam cheese heads at Green Bay Packer games. Wisconsin is known for its dairy and cheese around the world, but are especially important to residents of our state. The 31 members of the Dairy Task Force 2.0 considered this topic and recommended several ways to strengthen connections between farmers and consumers, processors, rural communities, and residents in our state's urban and suburban areas.

From the very beginning, the Dairy Task Force 2.0 recognized that a viable and profitable dairy industry is directly connected to the vitality of our rural communities. To strengthen those communities and improve the quality of life for rural residents, members of the Task Force recommended investing in local road infrastructure as well as supporting broadband internet services, both items receiving substantial investment in Governor Evers' budget. The need for rural families to connect via broadband is imperative to farmers to invest in technology, residents to work remotely, and children to access educational resources.

To strengthen the bond between dairy farmers and milk buyers, Dairy Task Force 2.0 members also recommended both parties maintain current, clear agreements with each other. Such an agreement will provide greater certainty between the milk producer and the milk buyer. It is important that the connection between the milk

produced on the farm and the processor that transforms that milk into value-added products that consumers enjoy around the world remains strong. The Dairy Task Force 2.0 also recommended that dairy farmers connect with educational resources to better understand how their milk is priced.

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Consumers want a connection to their food, and to the farmer who grew or harvested it. The Dairy Task Force 2.0 recommended that farmers and dairy industry associates have access to a cohesive, consistent message about dairy through resources such as a one-page reference sheet or an app. Helping to inform consumers about the pride, craftsmanship, and hard work that is done in an effort to produce high-quality, nutritious dairy products is important. The group stressed the importance of the industry being connected and speaking with a united voice. The group also asked for support of the development and marketing of agritourism opportunities, allowing consumers to connect directly with farmers on the farm.

With farmers making up less than 2% of the U.S. population, the Dairy Task Force 2.0 recognized the importance of farmers sharing their story and connecting on policy development. Dairy Task Force 2.0 members unanimously passed a recommendation encouraging dairy producers to run for local offices and commissions. The group also unanimously agreed that the dairy industry needs to engage more with state and federal government leaders to enhance their communication and education efforts about agriculture.

When the Dairy Task Force 2.0 completes its work, a final report will be available summarizing all 51 recommendations developed by the group. I hope that people from across the state will make an effort to connect with a member of the Dairy Task Force 2.0 to have a discussion and ask questions about their work. These recommendations will help guide Wisconsin's dairy industry for years to come.

— Pfaff is the secretary of the state Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection.