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Dairy Business Association: Wisconsin farm groups see Dairy Innovation Hub as vital to future

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State bill would boost investment in world-class research

MADISON, Wis. — Calling the need for next-generation dairy research critical, five Wisconsin farm groups today urged state lawmakers to increase investment in scientists and supporting facilities at the state's agricultural colleges.

The endorsement came as lawmakers introduced Senate Bill 186, which would create a Dairy Innovation Hub in the University of Wisconsin System. The bill calls for adding researchers to focus on land and water use, human health and nutrition, animal health and welfare, and farm businesses and rural communities.

The Dairy Business Association, Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association, Wisconsin Farm Bureau, Wisconsin Farmers Union and Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin said the proposal is vital to ensuring a robust future for the state's dairy community while maintaining UW's prominence in dairy research around the world.

"The hub strategy will build a world-class team of creative problem-solvers who can provide interdisciplinary solutions to the complex challenges before us," the groups said in a joint statement after a press conference at the Capitol.

The bill makes a $7.9 million annual investment to be used at UW-Madison, UW-Platteville and UW-River Falls. The funding amounts to about 0.02 percent of the $43 billion the dairy community generates each year for the Wisconsin economy.

The bill was introduced by Sen. Howard Marklein, R-Spring Green, and Reps. Gary Tauchen, R-Bonduel; Rob Summerfield, R-Bloomer; Travis Tranel, R-Cuba City; and Shannon Zimmerman, R-River Falls.

"We applaud the authors of this bill for championing such an important initiative," the groups said.

The bill was the subject of a public hearing today of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Revenue and Financial Institutions.

The following are quotes from leaders of the individual farm groups:

"As a global leader in dairy research, the University of Wisconsin System has long pointed the way toward innovative solutions that kept America's Dairyland thriving. Today, the challenges facing our farmers, processors and others are increasingly complex and the stakes could not be higher. It's critical that we remain at the forefront through next-generation research that would come from the Dairy Innovation Hub."

-- Tom Crave, president of the Dairy Business Association

"Increased investments in the University of Wisconsin System's dairy initiatives will provide a much-needed boost to an industry challenged by international trade conflicts and a severe workforce shortage. As faculty researches new value-added products and trains the next generation of farmers and cheesemakers via the Dairy Innovation Hub, they will truly be working to ensure Wisconsin retains its title as America's Dairyland for decades to come."

-- ***John Umhoefer, executive director of the Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association***

"Our state is America's Dairyland because we are a leader for the dairy industry. In order for Wisconsin's $43.4 billion industry to continue to be a world leader we must enhance our research capabilities. The UW Dairy Innovation Hub would build upon our existing dairy data but specialize on the issues that farmers face today. This would help our dairy farmers stay competitive in the future."

-- Jim Holte, president of the Wisconsin Farm Bureau

"Wisconsin's dairy industry blossomed in the late 19th century because of forward-thinking research and outreach from the University of Wisconsin. Now in the 21st century, dairy farmers face new challenges and will benefit from focused investments by University of Wisconsin to help farmers steward land and water resources, enrich human health and nutrition, ensure animal health and welfare, and build farm businesses and rural communities."

-- Darin Von Ruden, president of Wisconsin Farmers Union

"The entire world looks to Wisconsin as the dairy industry's leader. However, America's Dairyland is at the brink of crisis and we need help if we're going to continue to lead the world in important research and relevant discoveries. The dairy and food world is moving so fast – we're in dire need of researchers at the UW level to answer not only the questions of today but also to solve tomorrow's issues. The time is now to invest in the Dairy Innovation Hub."

-- Shelly Mayer, executive director of the Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin

MORE INFORMATION

Click below for videos from UW-Platteville explaining the Dairy Innovation Hub:

Video 1

Video 2

Click here to read testimony in support of the legislation from UW-Madison faculty members.

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