

Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association: Applauds Senate committee approval of food labeling bills

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MADISON, WI – The Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association (WCMA) applauds members of the Wisconsin State Senate Committee on Agriculture, Revenue and Financial Institutions who today approved two bills to protect consumers from misleading labels on imitation “dairy” products.

“Our dairy processor members are deeply gratified that our state leaders recognize the basic unfairness of competing beverages and food companies brazenly taking and using timeless dairy terms like milk and cheese,” said John Umhoefer, WCMA Executive Director.

Authored by State Senator Howard Marklein (R-Spring Green), Senate Bill 463 bans the labeling of foods as dairy products or dairy ingredients if the food is not made from the milk of a cow, sheep, goat or camelid mammal. Senate Bill 466, also from Marklein, applies the same connection for use of the word milk, assuring that milk is produced from a mammalian source. Due to interstate commerce law, these proposals would only take effect if at least ten other states pass similar legislation.

A recent consumer study, sponsored in part by WCMA, showed that one-quarter of people believe real milk is present in plant-based foods that mimic cheese. One-third of those studied think plant-based mimics contain protein, though imitators have little to no protein. One-quarter think plant-based mimics are lower in calories or fat, and have fewer additives, but neither perception is true.

“Consumers deserve clarity on what they’re actually purchasing,” said Umhoefer. “We’re grateful to lawmakers who have made dairy labeling a priority, and we urge leaders to act quickly to advance this legislation.”

The Wisconsin State Assembly Committee on Agriculture held a public hearing on companion legislation, Assembly Bills 515 and 516, on November 6.