

DBA: Opens door for members to connect with lawmakers

Posted on Wednesday, Jan 22, 2020

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

Contact: Jamie Mara
(920) 209-3990 | jmara@dairyforward.com

Dairy Day offers opportunity for legislative involvement

MADISON, Wis. — Empowering members to get directly involved in the legislative process is a top goal of the Dairy Business Association. The association's Dairy Day at the Capitol 2020 on Jan. 21 was the perfect opportunity.

“Our goal is to get members to feel comfortable here at the Capitol and see what we do here so they can also play a role in it,” said John Holevoet, director of government affairs for DBA, Wisconsin's largest dairy lobbying group.

That's just what happened when dozens of members — representing farms of all sizes and various dairy-related businesses — heard about key state issues and visited the offices of more than 40 lawmakers to share their perspectives on policies.

State Department of Natural Resources Secretary Preston Cole spoke to the group about his agency's goals, and Reps. Todd Novak and Katrina Shankland gave an update on water quality initiatives spurred by a state task force.

Steve Schalla, a DBA member and farmer from Hammond, Wis., had a clear purpose for participating in the event.

“Our goal is to communicate with our legislators and remind them that the dairy industry wants to continue to be a leader because it has been for many years,” Schalla said. “There are always challenges that come up and we want to be part of

the solutions, and together we can keep Wisconsin a great place to milk cows.”

Taking a personal approach to affecting change for — and with — her dairy farmer members is something DBA Vice President Amy Penterman feels is crucial, both for the farmers and for legislators. This is a powerful tool that can encourage farmers and legislators to connect faces with names when it comes to working together, she said.

“We’re busy every day on the farm so we don’t always take time to see how the government is working, so while here, we’re able to see the faces that are making decisions, and just see how and why they operate this way,” said Penterman, who farms with her family in Thorp.

“Not only are we here to see what they’re doing, but they can also see us,” she said. “This is the face and the diversity of the farmer. I think this is about being here to let our voices be heard in order to make change.”

Holevoet, who along with others on his DBA lobbying team spend numerous hours interacting with lawmakers and their staffs, understands how intimidating this can be for some members. But it’s important.

“The reality is we are in lawmakers’ offices all the time, but they really do want to hear from constituents — the farmers and processors who are living it day in and day out,” Holevoet said. “It is different and more impactful when it comes directly from a constituent who’s actually living it.”

Holevoet hopes that by encouraging those members through an event like Dairy Day at the Capitol, they are then motivated to stay involved.

Lafayette County farmer and DBA member Jim Winn has done so over the years.

“I think the legislators always want to hear directly from the farmers and this is an efficient way to do it,” he said about Dairy Day. “There are lots of things going on at my dairy today, but I’m making the time to be here because I feel it’s very, very important.”