

Gov. Evers: Even during COVID-19, America's Dairyland celebrates June dairy month

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It's June in Wisconsin, and that means June Dairy Month. From my days working in a cheese plant, I've never missed the chance to support our state's dairy industry, which now contributes \$45.6 billion to Wisconsin's economy. I know things have been hard for dairy farmers these past several years, and this June won't be any easier. Even though you might not be headed out to a crowded dairy breakfast this year, we can (and should) still celebrate this powerhouse industry.

June Dairy Month is a long-standing, proud tradition in our state. There's no better way to start the summer than by eating plenty of curds and ice cream to support our dairy industry. But dairying is more than just producing high-quality food: it's an integral part of our state's heritage. It's why we call ourselves "America's Dairyland," and why I've worked hard to try and help position our dairy industry for success.

Our state has relied on the resilience and dedication of our farmers for generations, and in this state, nobody carries the burden alone. We need to be better partners for our farmers, agricultural industries, and rural communities. In January of this year, I unveiled a three-pronged plan to start addressing these challenges, starting with a special session of the Legislature to get to work on this issue right away. Now, the legislature hasn't sent any bills to my desk yet, but I remain hopeful the proposals I introduced will pass with bipartisan support before the year is out.

In the meantime, my administration isn't waiting to help our farmers. I am directing \$50 million of the funding Wisconsin received through the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act toward direct payments to support Wisconsin farmers, including dairy producers.

Wisconsin's dairy community is more than just farms, too. Those farms are connected to a vast network of equipment manufacturers and technicians, cooperatives, veterinarians, construction companies, milk haulers, processing plants, software companies, and many more. When Wisconsin dairy thrives, all of these interconnected industries thrive too. There's no denying that this year, June Dairy Month looks different. Even before COVID-19, Wisconsin's dairy industry endured several tough years. Dairy farmers in particular were hit hard by low milk prices and President Trump's trade wars. Now, the global pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for our farmers, food processors, and all those in the food supply chain. Some farmers were pushed to take the heart-wrenching step of disposing of their milk - the commodity they work so hard to produce every day.

But, in these difficult, constantly-changing circumstances, we have seen just how resilient our dairy community is. Almost as quickly as challenges arose, the dairy industry found ways to address them. Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin and the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) banded together with Hunger Task Force to deliver thousands of gallons of fresh milk to people in need. Wisconsin cheese makers made generous donations to help feed their local communities and save milk from going down the drain. There are countless stories like these, and every day we see more. I'm proud of our state's dairy industry. It's part of our past and present, and it will be part of our future, even as we continue to respond to the market changes brought on by COVID-19. This year's June Dairy month recognition is especially hard-won, but I hope you'll join me in celebrating nonetheless. We're America's Dairyland, and that's one thing COVID-19 won't change.

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