

Sen. Marklein: Dairy Innovation Hub update

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As you may recall, I led a legislative effort in the last state budget to fund a Dairy Innovation Hub in the University of Wisconsin System. This innovative idea was developed by the Dairy Task Force 2.0 and was a top priority for dairy and agriculture in Wisconsin.

We successfully allocated \$8.8 million for UW-Madison, UW-Platteville and UW-River Falls to reprioritize and restore focus on dairy innovation in Wisconsin. Approximately \$1 million has been distributed to the campuses, with another \$7.8 million planned for the next fiscal year. The first year of the Dairy Innovation Hub involved intense planning, collaboration among the campuses and strategies for the future.

Last week, I met with Heather White, Dairy Innovation Hub Faculty Director, Dean Kate VandenBosch (UW Madison), Dean Wayne Weber (UW Platteville) and Dean Dale Gallenberg (UW River Falls) to discuss their progress and plans for the future. I am pleased to report that they have made significant progress and are already working on a number of innovative research projects. They have thorough plans to hire necessary faculty and staff to execute big plans. They have purchased necessary equipment. They have connected with advisory groups made up of stakeholders and experts.

I challenge stakeholders and the dairy industry to carefully monitor the actions of the hub to ensure that their projects are innovative and helpful for the industry. It is up to the advisory committees, stakeholders and farmers to make sure that we get a strong return on our investment.

Among the three campuses, they have recruited 19 postdoctoral fellows to perform

a wide variety of research projects starting this year. The projects include ideas such as a study of using whey-fortified fermented milk for relieving indigestion, improving crop management to increase profitability on the farm, using artificial intelligence on the dairy farm, improving the way ice cream feels when you eat it, using spoiled milk and whey for 3D printing, water quality improvement projects, compost research and more! UW Madison is also focused on seven short-term, high-impact projects that are intended to start this summer with fast completion.

Dean Weber at UW Platteville told me that they are working hard to involve undergraduate students in the Dairy Innovation Hub on their campus. Students from many programs will be doing hand-in-hand research with faculty. They are tapping talent and innovation from all angles.

In addition to research, the campuses have used the initial funding to invest in equipment and facility upgrades to enable this unique collaboration. But they are also discovering that they don't always need to buy new things because they can share! This is a key element and benefit of the Dairy Innovation Hub.

Our campuses are collaborating, maximizing, communicating and sharing with each other. We have tremendous and unique programs at UW Madison, UW Platteville and UW River Falls – but in the past, they didn't always work together. They are leveraging resources and people. It is working.

The Dairy Innovation Hub has brought all of our resources, people and expertise together. A researcher at UW Madison recently connected with data and equipment that was available at Pioneer Farm at UW Platteville. Rather than creating expensive duplication, they collaborated and capitalized on what we already have.

As Wisconsin faces budget shortfalls and financial instability, I will be monitoring the funding for the Dairy Innovation Hub and advocating on behalf of this important initiative. Now, more than ever, we need to innovate in agriculture and I know that the Hub is an important part of this effort. The success in this first year illustrates the potential.

For more information and to keep in touch with the Dairy Innovation Hub, please connect with the Hub online <https://dairyinnovationhub.wisc.edu/>. As always, please do not hesitate to connect with me to provide input, ideas or to seek assistance. Send an email to sen.marklein@legis.wisconsin.gov or call 608-266-0703.