

WCMA: Ag groups urge legislators to help rural wisconsin

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MADISON - At a press conference Thursday at the State Capitol, agriculture organizations urged the Senate to take up important bills that have been passed by the Assembly and are available for Senate approval. Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, Dairy Business Association, Wisconsin Farmers Union, Wisconsin Agri-Business Association, Cooperative Network, Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association, Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association, Wisconsin Corn Growers Association, Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association, Wisconsin Hemp Alliance, Wisconsin Pork Association, Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association, Wisconsin Soybean Association, Wisconsin Association of Professional Agricultural Consultants, Grassworks, and Farm Credit are all supporting a series of bills important to Wisconsin farmers and our agricultural economy.

The next critical step before moving to the Governor's desk is passage of these bills by the State Senate. During the week of March 23rd, the Senate is expected to reconvene for its last floor session. This coalition of farm organizations strongly supports these proposals, which deal with water quality, truth in food labeling, dairy processing, income tax, agricultural research at the University of Wisconsin and wildlife damage abatement.

WATER QUALITY: AB 789/SB 724 and AB 800/SB 722 provide increased assistance for rural well remediation. AB 796/SB 718 provides funding for a pilot program to study the reduction of nitrates in groundwater. AB 795/SB 715 funds producer-led water shed grants and incentives to try innovative conservation practices such as cover cropping. AB 790/SB 723 would increase funding for additional County Land and Water Conservation agents. "These modest investments by the legislature will pay huge dividends, both for water quality and for farm profitability," said Kirsten Jurcek, beef farmer from Jefferson County. "Saving soil saves us money in the long

term. Maintaining our rural property values also depends on us having clean water to drink and access to lakes and streams that are fishable and swimmable.”

TRUTH IN LABELING: AB 515/SB 463 requires any food identifying as a dairy product must include a milk-based source. AB 516/SB 466 requires any product identifying itself as milk must be sourced from the secretions of a mammal. AB 518/SB 464 requires any product identifying itself as meat must be sourced from the flesh of an animal. Tom Crave, President of Dairy Business Association expressed, “These labeling bills are about fairness. Farmers pay millions of dollars into checkoff organizations to promote milk, cheese, beef, pork and more. We’ve made the investment, and the plant-based industry shouldn’t be able to ride on our marketing coattails.”

DAIRY PROCESSING GROWTH: Special Session AB 6 will allocate up to \$5 million in state investments to a new export initiative designed to help cheesemakers sell more dairy products abroad. Special Session AB 7 invests \$1 million in the impactful dairy processor grant program at Wisconsin’s Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. “Increased dairy exports and the creation of new, value-added specialty dairy products are key to stabilizing markets for milk and increasing profitability for dairy farmers,” said Dave Buholzer, Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association President and co-owner of Klondike Cheese Company in Monroe. “These investments in dairy processing are designed to strengthen every component of the industry’s supply chain and our rural communities.”

REFUNDABLE TAX CREDIT ON FARM SETS: AB 873/SB 818 would allow a producer to claim an income tax credit up to \$7,500 on farm improvement taxes assessed on their business. “This bill literally puts dollars into the hands of farmers,” said Wisconsin Farm Bureau Vice President Dave Daniels. “Farmers fuel the local economy by paying a feed bill, employee or buying groceries for their family. When farmers succeed, our rural communities succeed.”

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN APPLIED AG RESEARCH: AB 556/SB 497 would properly account for time spent by UW integrated state specialists working with producers in the field to develop innovative farm practices. AB 627/SB 563 would increase funding for UW Extension state specialists conducting applied agricultural research. “UW Integrated State Specialists are specialized agricultural faculty who conduct cutting-edge research and lead farm extension programs that are vital to the health of Wisconsin’s farm economy,” said Wisconsin cranberry grower Karl Pippenger of Pip’s Cranberries in Phillips. “As technology and growing practices change, we need

the latest scientifically sound information for our growers to maintain their commitment to sustainable farming and these researchers are essential to meeting that goal.”

WILDLIFE DAMAGE ABATEMENT PROGRAM: AB 695/SB 628 would allow DNR to administer the current wildlife damage abatement program directly and lifts the monetary cap on individual damage claims. The bill would also encourage participation in the program by allowing bear traps to be placed on rented acres without opening the land for public hunting. “This bill represents a common-sense solution for those farmers facing tens of thousands of dollars in losses due to wildlife damage to their corn crop,” said Zeb Zuehls, Vice President of the Wisconsin Corn Growers.