

WCMA: Applauds State Assembly action on eight bills to boost Wisconsin's dairy industry

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MADISON, WI – The Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association (WCMA) applauded members of the Wisconsin State Assembly for approving eight key bills designed boost Wisconsin's dairy industry.

“Wisconsin lost more than ten percent of our dairy farms in 2019, and the challenges of trade volatility, a labor shortage, and a sharp decline in milk consumption remain,” said John Umhoefer, WCMA Executive Director. “We are grateful for the bipartisan leadership shown today in the Assembly to support dairy processing growth and make dairy farming more profitable.”

Special Session Assembly Bill 6, first introduced by Governor Tony Evers and championed by Rep. Tony Kurtz (R-Wonewoc), will allocate up to \$5 million in state investments to a new export initiative designed to help cheesemakers sell more dairy products abroad. Assembly passage was unanimous.

“Exports are key to long-term growth in Wisconsin's dairy industry, this proposal offers tremendous support to cheesemakers as they connect with international buyers,” said Umhoefer. “Legislators are setting an ambitious, shared goal to ‘double in a decade’ the value of our dairy exports, and with state support, we’re confident we’ll reach it.”

Also introduced by Governor Tony Evers in his January State of the State Address, Special Session Assembly Bill 7 invests \$1 million in the impactful dairy processor grant program at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. Rep. Loren Oldenburg (R-Viroqua), who previously served as board

president for WCMA member Westby Cooperative Creamery, amended the bill to give preference to smaller dairy processors – those making up to 50 million pounds of finished dairy products per year – applying for grants. Assembly passage of SSAB 7 was unanimous.

“Dairy processor grants, which are given in modest increments of under \$50,000, increase capacity and help to develop new value-added dairy products, which stabilize and strengthen markets for milk, increasing profitability for dairy farmers,” said Umhoefer.

Authored by Reps. Travis Tranel (R-Cuba City) and Loren Oldenburg (R-Viroqua) and Sen. Howard Marklein (R-Spring Green), Assembly Bills 515 and 516 would ban the labeling of products as milk or as a dairy product or ingredient, if the food is not made from the milk of a cow, sheep, goat, or other mammal. Assembly approval was unanimous.

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 as they choose what to eat and how to feed their families, and we applaud state leaders for recognizing that need and acting in the public interest,” said Umhoefer.

The Assembly unanimously concurred in Senate Bill 685, authored by Reps. Travis Tranel (R-Cuba City), Dave Considine (D-Baraboo), and Assembly Committee on Agriculture Chair Gary Tauchen (R-Bonduel) and by Sens. André Jacque (R-De Pere) and Jeff Smith (D-Eau Claire). The bill eliminates a costly and duplicative requirement for annual collection of affidavits, attesting that milk is free of bovine growth hormone, commonly known as rBST. The bill now advances to Governor Tony Evers for final consideration; Evers began a lengthy rule-making process to address industry’s concerns in a similar fashion last year.

“No other state requires annual rBST affidavit collection, meaning that Wisconsin’s regulation has our farmers and processors at a competitive disadvantage,” said Umhoefer. “We thank lawmakers for recognizing the urgent need for this reform.”

Also today, the Assembly unanimously approved Assembly Bill 821, creating a new tax incremental district for the Village of Little Chute designed to support a major expansion project planned by WCMA member Agropur Inc., and Assembly Bill 629, which provides \$1 million in state funding for certain agricultural extension positions at the University of Wisconsin System.

Earlier this week, the Assembly unanimously concurred in Senate Bill 91, authored Rep. Joel Kitchens (R-Sturgeon Bay) and Sen. Rob Cowles (R-Green Bay) and supported by bipartisan sponsors in both legislative houses. SB 91 proposes the establishment of a statewide clearinghouse through which farmers could receive financial incentives from municipal water treatment plants or dairy processing facilities to reduce the amount of pollutants entering waterways. Trading “credits” for pollution reduction would encourage farm-level solutions and provide options for permit compliance.

“We are truly grateful that the Assembly focused its attention on the pressing needs of the agricultural community in Wisconsin, approving impactful legislation to support dairy industry growth. We are also grateful to Wisconsin State Senators who are working diligently to shepherd priority policies through to the Governor’s desk and look forward to final action on the bills in March,” said Umhoefer.