

WDA: COVID-19 crushing the dairy industry

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No one could foresee a crippling global pandemic.

We are witnessing the decimation of the dairy industry. The crisis playing out before our eyes is staggering. Dairy farmers are dumping milk into fields and down drains; retailers are limiting consumers dairy purchases; and farmers are left questioning if the milk they produce will be get picked up or if they will even get paid. The amount of fear and uncertainty surrounding our industry today is unprecedented.

This was the last scenario dairy farmers anticipated; after nearly five years of back-breaking milk prices and ensuing dairy bankruptcies — fueled by unfavorable market and weather conditions, agricultural tariffs and trade wars.

Major segments of the milk marketplace dried up virtually overnight. The shutdown of the nation's schools, restaurants and coffee shops obliterated major dairy markets, leaving cheesemakers and milk processors with nowhere to ship what they produce.

Prompt action is critical to save this essential industry. Payments going directly to farmers do not fix our market. We need to look at the entire supply chain and put our dollars and efforts into finding solutions in processing and distribution to get our dairy products to those who need them most. The solution lies in the immediate movement of our cheese inventory.

This week, the Feeding America network estimated the need for an extra \$1.4 billion in resources over the next six months as the number of food insecure people is set to increase by a historic 47% due to COVID-19.

"The people we serve and the charitable food system in the United States are facing a 'Perfect Storm,' with surges in demand, declines in food donations and volunteers, and disruptions to normal operating procedures, as a result of the COVID-19 crisis," said Claire Babineaux-Fontenot, CEO of Feeding America. "It is all of our neighbors who now more than ever need help putting food on their tables."

We have the ability to remediate this, but time is of the essence. At the farm level, there is ample milk ready and available for use in processing. At the other end of our supply chain, food banks, pantries and shelters all have a desperate call for dairy products.

We are asking the government to use disaster funds to buy cheese inventory that is in storage and package it into consumer-sized portions. We need blocks of cheese broken down and converted into one-pound sizes. We need them delivered in real time to the food banks, pantries and shelters for the people who need them most. This Covid-19 crisis is far from over.

Food security is a two-sided coin. Producers must remain in business, and economically at-risk people must have access to high quality dairy protein. We can accomplish this. America cannot afford to cut its own throat. Ensuring food security for tomorrow will require a patriotic investment in the dairy industry today. We are calling on Secretary Purdue and The White House to act now.

About Wisconsin Dairy Alliance

WDA represents modern regulated dairy farms in Wisconsin and works diligently to preserve Wisconsin's heritage as the Dairy State. Our non-profit organization advocates for the truth by contesting unnecessary regulations that do not protect natural resources. The WDA believes in parity for all dischargers and works to operate under the uniform "zero-discharge" standard applied to WDA members.