

# **WCMA: Applauds Evers, lawmakers for budget investments in Wisconsin's rural communities and agricultural economy**

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MADISON, WI – Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association (WCMA) members today applauded agricultural investments made in the 2021-23 Wisconsin State Budget.

“The state’s new spending plan demonstrates a long-term, bipartisan commitment to growing Wisconsin’s \$105 billion agricultural economy,” said John Umhoefer, WCMA Executive Director. “We thank Governor Evers and legislative leaders for working together to strengthen the state’s rural infrastructure and partner with dairy processors to build their businesses and create rewarding job opportunities statewide.”

The budget doubles investments in the Dairy Processor Grant Program at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP), offering \$800,000 over the biennium to support industry innovation and continued modernization, to keep Wisconsin at the forefront of the global dairy trade. WCMA members acknowledge the work of Rep. Loren Oldenburg (R-Viroqua) on this proposal, and the leadership of Joint Finance Committee (JFC) Co-chairs Sen. Howard Marklein (R-Spring Green) and Rep. Mark Born (R-Beaver Dam). WCMA members recognize Gov. Evers for his work to spark new interest in dairy processor grants via his plans for robust funding boosts in 2020 and 2021.

The budget also supports a new DATCP initiative, championed by JFC members Rep. Tony Kurtz (R-Wonewoc) and Sen. Joan Ballweg (R-Markesan), to boost the export of dairy, meat and other Wisconsin agricultural products. State funding of more than

\$1 million over the biennium will get the program up and running, with JFC holding authority to approve more support. Gov. Evers first proposed creation of a dairy exporting program in a 2020 special session call and included funding for an agricultural exports program in his 2021 budget proposal.

WCMA members also cheered budget investments of \$129 million over the biennium to expand access to high-speed internet. Approximately 394,000 Wisconsinites lack broadband access, with 98 percent of them living in rural parts of the state, according to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) 2021 Broadband Deployment Report. Many more Wisconsinites face the challenge of inadequate internet speeds and unreliable connections.

“Bipartisan support for targeted, smart investments in Wisconsin’s dairy industry is most welcome news for farmers and processors, as they continue to meet the challenges of market volatility and a workforce shortage,” said Umhoefer. “Collaboration will remain the key to success for America’s Dairyland.”