

WCMA: Commends Joint Finance Committee passage of agricultural export bill

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MADISON, WI — The Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association (WCMA) today applauded members of the legislature's Joint Finance Committee as they voted to advance legislation to increase the state's agricultural exports, including dairy.

"We believe the potential for growth of Wisconsin's dairy and cheese exports is limitless," said WCMA Executive Director John Umhoefer. "We have the high-quality products, the skilled teams, and the right market conditions; all that's needed is this added support. This legislation will provide a welcome boost to help dairy processors expand their customer base globally and strengthen our state's leading industry."

"With 96 percent of the world's consumers living outside the U.S., exporting is and will continue to be essential to the overall strength of our dairy industry. This assistance will ultimately benefit not only our cheesemakers and dairy processors, but all those involved in Wisconsin's dairy food chain," added Mike Neu, Senior Director of Business Development - Cheese Insights for WCMA member and dairy processing ingredient supplier Chr. Hansen, Inc.

Senate Bill 325/Assembly Bill 314 (SB 325/AB 314), authored by Sen. Joan Ballweg (R-Markesan) and Rep. Tony Kurtz (R-Wonewoc), creates a new five-year initiative led by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection in partnership with the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, to increase the export of the state's dairy, meat, and other agricultural products by 25 percent. The

bill specifies that \$2.5 million, or half the total funds appropriated, will be used to increase the export sales of milk, cheese, yogurt, whey, and other dairy products.

“If we don’t look beyond our borders and gain a foothold in emerging global markets, we’re limiting the dairy industry’s future growth,” stated Jack Heinemann, export sales manager for WCMA member Specialty Cheese Company. “With this investment, Wisconsin has the opportunity to bolster its cheesemakers, dairy farmers and rural communities, strengthening our state’s trademark industry for generations to come.”

“Sales of dairy products in the United States continue to grow, but only incrementally. This program has the potential to grow Wisconsin’s ‘brand’ globally and support cheesemakers as we develop new products and navigate practical challenges like customs paperwork and international shipping,” said Kim Heiman, co-owner of WCMA member Nasonville Dairy.

Discussions on investing in dairy exporting endeavors began in early 2020 when Governor Tony Evers proposed increased support as part of his call for a special legislative session on rural issues, and again as part of his 2021 budget.