

WCMA: Praises Gov. Evers' action to support agricultural exports

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MADISON, WI – The Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association (WCMA) today thanked Governor Tony Evers for signing Assembly Bill 314 (AB 314) into law as Act 92. The bill was unanimously approved by both houses of the legislature earlier this fall, following over a year of compelling advocacy from WCMA members and extensive bipartisan collaboration.

“This investment is a smart, necessary boost that will benefit not only our dairy industry, but the state’s entire economy,” said WCMA Executive Director John Umhoefer. “We’re grateful for the leadership of Governor Evers, Wisconsin State Senator Joan Ballweg, and Wisconsin State Representative Tony Kurtz working in united purpose to make this legislation a reality.”

Governor Evers first proposed the 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. Following Senator Ballweg and Representative Kurtz’s introduction of AB 314, both houses of the Wisconsin Legislature, as well as the powerful Joint Finance Committee, unanimously approved the bill.

Act 92 supports a new five-year initiative led by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) to boost the export of 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.

Among the coalition of groups and individuals directly involved in the bill's passage were several WCMA members, including Chr. Hansen, Nasonville Dairy, Nelson-Jameson, and Specialty Cheese Company.

"As an experienced exporter, Chr. Hansen has seen firsthand the critical role exports play in the growth and stability of our business. This investment will help ensure a stronger dairy industry in the future, in Wisconsin and the United States," shared Mike Neu, Senior Director of Business Development - Cheese Insights for the Milwaukee-based ingredient supplier.

"Exporting is an essential component to growing our business in the future. If we're to keep pace with the productivity of our farmers and stabilize our industry, we must find new buyers abroad. This state support will help us build those connections," stated Kim Heiman, President of Nasonville Dairy.

"The Wisconsin Initiative on Agricultural Exports will help to support growth in Wisconsin's dairy processing industry, providing greater opportunity throughout the supply chain and in our rural communities," added Mat Bartkowiak, Director of Strategic Partnerships for Nelson-Jameson, Inc., a supplier to the dairy and food industries.

"Thanks to this funding, cheesemakers will have access to more tools and assistance to help them navigate the challenging logistics of exporting. As they find success in new markets, we'll see both short- and long-term benefits for dairy processors and farmers alike," added Paul Scharfman, CEO of Specialty Cheese Company.

DATCP will present its plan for executing the initiative to the Joint Finance Committee later this month, with implementation expected for early next year.