

# Dairy Business Association: Finance committee's 'investment' shows commitment to Wisconsin agriculture

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Dairy Business Association applauds funding for specialists, exports

MADISON, Wis. — The Dairy Business Association, Wisconsin's leading dairy advocacy group, applauded action today by the state Legislature's Joint Committee on Finance to boost agricultural research and increase international exports of dairy and other products.

The committee unanimously approved funding for two previously authorized programs. The University of Wisconsin will receive \$2 million over the next two years for additional agricultural specialists, and \$558,400 will go this year toward helping support a new initiative aimed at promoting agricultural exports. Both efforts originated with Republican lawmakers but gained bipartisan support.



“These programs represent significant investments in agriculture in Wisconsin,” DBA President Amy Penterman said. “Where state leaders decide to commit money points to priorities. Clearly, lawmakers who championed these efforts understand the significance of agriculture to our state’s farmers, food processors, affiliated businesses and rural communities.”

Penterman said the finance committee's co-chairs — Sen. Howard Marklein, R-Spring Green, and Rep. Mark Born, R-Beaver Dam — deserve special recognition for their work to secure the funding. She also thanked lawmakers for bipartisan support.

**UW-Extension specialists:** Eleven new positions will be created, eight at the county level to work directly with farmers and three at the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at UW-Madison. The positions are a continuation of renewed financial support for research. Earlier this legislative session, the Legislature approved continued funding for the Dairy Innovation Hub, which was a significant investment in dairy research at three UW campuses. The Hub was created based on legislation authored by Marklein and Rep. Travis Tranel, R-Cuba City.

“The Dairy Innovation Hub and these new specialists will help Wisconsin farmers stay on the cutting edge of developments in agriculture,” Penterman said. “Our state will continue to shine as an innovative leader globally in the sustainable production of nutritious food.”

**Exports:** The bill creating the exports program, co-authored by Sen. Joan Ballweg, R-Markesan, and Rep. Tony Kurtz, R-Wonewoc, committed \$5 million to the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection's (DATCP) Center for International Agribusiness Marketing. Today's committee approval repurposes \$558,400 from elsewhere in the state budget into that total. DATCP will be able to request the same amount for 2023.

The goal is to boost exports of Wisconsin dairy, meat and other agricultural products by 25 percent within five years. Half of the total investment will be dedicated to dairy exports. DATCP will work with the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation.

“This is an ambitious and worthy goal,” Penterman said. “Long-term stability and growth for the dairy community rests in large part on the opportunities we have to sell more of our high-quality food around the globe.”

The finance committee's actions today are the latest positive steps for agriculture during the 2021-22 legislative session.

Among them were bills related to truth-in-labeling for plant-based imitations of milk, dairy products and meat; updates that would make the Farmland Preservation

Program more effective; and allowing UW-Extension faculty to count their time instructing farmers toward their teaching hours requirement. Each measure advanced out of committee with bipartisan support, and the teaching hours bill was signed into law by the governor.

Items that ultimately made it into the budget, in addition to the specialists, exports program and Dairy Innovation Hub, included added money for farmer-led conservation grants, improved access to well compensation grants and additional funding for county conservationists, who work directly with farmers on practices that protect water and land resources.