

Don Vruwink: Eat cheese, be happy

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Wisconsin has a rich heritage as a dairy state, but it wasn't always that way. In the late 1800s, many Wisconsin farmers were struggling as wheat-growers, but a forward-thinker from Fort Atkinson saw dairy as a better future.

William Dempster Hoard founded the Hoard's Dairyman publication in 1885 to advise and encourage dairy farming in Wisconsin and across the Midwest. Hoard's Dairyman has evolved into an international operation, guiding the dairy industry in 80 countries around the world.

W.D. Hoard went on to be elected Wisconsin Governor in 1888. Before that, he launched the Jefferson County Union newspaper, now known as the Daily Union. Through his speeches and publications, Hoard advocated for high standards for the dairy industry, utilizing science and farmer education. As governor, he rallied against food adulteration and established the nation's first Dairy and Food Commission to defend consumers against food contamination.

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Today, Wisconsin is known as America's Dairyland, and June is National Dairy Month. I grew up on a dairy farm and worked on three different farms to pay my way through college: My family's, my uncle's, and my grandfather's. I understand the difficult and risky work it takes to make a farm successful.

As a member of the Assembly Agriculture Committee, the Dairy Business Association, the Governor's Dairy Task Force, and the Jefferson County Agribusiness group, I advocate for policies that promote our agricultural products and assist our family farms.

This past legislative session, I voted in favor of a bill that will boost promotion of Wisconsin agricultural exports and a bill that will ease the transition to next-generation farmers. Both bills were signed into law.

I voted in favor of truth in labeling of dairy and meat products so that consumers know that “milk means milk” and “meat means meat.” These bills passed the Assembly, but not the Senate.

I also co-sponsored legislation to nurture a creative arts economy in rural regions; to fund broadband expansion grants; to assist food pantries and schools in purchasing Wisconsin-grown food; to employ more farm support agents; and to provide incentives for sustainable farm practices. Although these bills had bipartisan support, none of them received a public hearing.

As June Dairy Month kicks into high gear, I look forward to the many dairy breakfasts in our area.

I represent a portion of Jefferson County, and this year I will be at the Jefferson County Dairy Breakfast at the fairgrounds in Jefferson from 7 am to Noon on Saturday, June 4. Hope to see you there!

- Vruwink, D-Milton, represents the 43rd Assembly District.