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Randy Romanski: Wisconsin saw record-breaking year for agricultural exports

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Despite some recent years of trade disruptions and supply chain challenges, I am proud of how Wisconsin's agriculture industry has remained resilient and competitive in providing high-quality agricultural products to the world. Wisconsin hit a new record for agricultural exports in 2021, exporting an all-time high of more than $3.96 billion. All product categories saw large increases from 2020, with dairy products up 14.6 percent, meat product exports up 10.4 percent, and crop product exports up 20.4 percent. This is not only a boost for our state's economy, but for the producers who passionately produce agricultural products, agricultural workers who support these producers, agribusinesses, and other industries, such as transportation, that support Wisconsin agriculture.

This record-breaking year presents an incredible opportunity and the momentum needed to strengthen our state as a leader for agricultural exports. Given the challenges that come with exporting, such as tariffs and container shortages, the success and future of Wisconsin's agricultural exports is not set in stone. Investments in promoting agricultural products and the Wisconsin brand across the world are vital to paving the way for our state's success in exporting agricultural products.

Governor Tony Evers has advocated for strategic investments in Wisconsin's agricultural exports, beginning with his first biennial budget. The legislature agreed with the Governor and last summer, Governor Evers signed the 2021-2023 budget, marking the first time that state funding has been allocated to DATCP's International Agribusiness Center (IABC) to help promote Wisconsin agriculture exports. Recently, the Joint Finance Committee voted unanimously to release this funding, allowing the IABC to begin working on initiatives that create opportunities, facilitate connections, and help break down barriers for existing and new exporters.

This funding will help Wisconsin agribusinesses build on the success of the strong export year they had in 2021, and will assist as they enter in new markets over the next five years.

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DATCP's IABC will work collaboratively with the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) to implement the Wisconsin Initiative for Agricultural Exports plan. This plan provides flexibility to respond to exporting challenges and facilitates unique opportunities that connect exporters with international markets and buyers. In the coming months, DATCP and WEDC staff will create opportunities for Wisconsin agribusinesses and organizations to build connections with potential buyers as consumers around the world turn to Wisconsin for high-quality nutrition and products.

Trade and exports play an important role in Wisconsin's economic success. As we celebrate a record-breaking year for exports and release of this critical funding, DATCP looks forward to a bright future for Wisconsin agricultural exports. While this funding is a step in the right direction, it is important that we continue this momentum on agricultural exports and making investments toward this initiative. The time is right for us to work together to strengthen our state's exports and share some of our state's $104.8 billion agriculture industry with the world.

For more information on the Wisconsin Initiative for Agricultural Exports, sign up for email updates and visit the DATCP website.

– Romanski is secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection.