

Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association: Calls for immigration reform to support industry growth

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Madison, WI – The Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association (WCMA) is calling for Congressional action to expand opportunities for legal immigration and to allow more immigrants to become permanent residents or citizens of the United States of America.

“The \$753 billion American dairy industry relies on immigrants as vital members of its supply chain, from the farm to processing facilities and beyond,” said WCMA President Steve Bechel of Eau Galle Cheese in Durand, Wisconsin. “The nation’s labor crisis will worsen in the years ahead, and legislative action is needed now to provide the workforce that dairy businesses must have to meet the demands of a growing global population.”

WCMA’s immigration policy platform, endorsed by its 21-member Board of Directors, supports these key provisions:

- The addition of dairy manufacturing, processing, and related supply chain jobs to the list of those eligible for an agricultural guestworker visa program;
- The elimination of “touchback” provisions requiring agricultural guestworkers to return to their home country periodically, disrupting their work in the United States;
- The provision of temporary legal status to the spouses and minor children of non-seasonal agricultural guestworkers;
- An extension in the length of agricultural guestworker visa terms;

- At-will employment flexibility in an agricultural guestworker program, allowing workers accept any agricultural industry employment for the duration of their work authorization period;
- Incentives to aid the provision of optional employer-provided housing, transportation, and other services to agricultural guestworkers;
- An expansion of opportunities for agricultural guestworkers to gain permanent residency; and,
- Strong legal safeguards for employers acting in good faith to determine an individual's eligibility for employment with their organization.

WCMA members encourage Congress to act now – before the start of the next legislative term – to advance legislation to expand immigration opportunities.

“The U.S. dairy industry employs three million people in America today, and a trained, reliable – and sizable – workforce remains essential to its strength. Dairy manufacturers and processors look to legislative leaders to work together to deliver immigration reforms to support business growth,” said John Umhoefer, WCMA Executive Director.