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Cheesemakers roll out policy agenda, call for more state funding

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The Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association is calling on state lawmakers to boost funding for an ag exports program and grants for dairy processors.

The organization yesterday released its policy priorities for 2023, which also include food labeling, transportation regulations, broadband expansion and efforts to address the workforce shortage.

WCMA Executive Director John Umhoefer says policymakers should “champion investments and policies that sustain and grow the state’s signature industry” in the new legislative session.

“We’re grateful for the widespread bipartisan support legislators have expressed for the issues that matter most to dairy manufacturers, and we look forward to seeing swift action in the coming biennium,” he said in a statement.

According to the group’s release, lawmakers in the previous budget cycle allocated $400,000 for the state’s Dairy Processor Grant program, which funds business development and innovation efforts. The association is calling for an annual allocation of up to $1 million per year, given that applicants in 2022 sought $1.7 million in total funding.

WCMA says the additional funding would help support more automation to address labor shortfalls while helping “artisan” cheesemakers in the state to grow and “maintaining Wisconsin’s dominance” in specialty cheeses.

Meanwhile, the organization is also seeking more funding for the Wisconsin Initiative for Agricultural Exports, a five-year, $5 million effort launched in 2021. WCMA says the initiative’s support is “already moving the needle” on state dairy exports, as sales have risen 37.7 percent in 2022.

Going forward, the group is proposing a $2 million investment per fiscal year for the program, which would be $4 million over the 2023-25 biennium, according to the

release.

The association is also calling for maintaining funding for the Dairy Innovation Hub, expanding funding for dairy-related positions at DATCP, continued support for a food security initiative, improving broadband internet access in rural areas in particular, changing regulations for transporting certain dairy products and product labeling, and more.

See the release:
https://www.wisbusiness.com/2023/wisconsin-cheese-makers-association-releases-2023-wisconsin-advocacy-priorities/

Listen to an earlier podcast with Umhoefer:
https://www.wisbusiness.com/2021/wisbusiness-the-podcast-with-john-umhoefer-executive-director-of-the-wisconsin-cheese-makers-association/

–By Alex Moe