

WCMA: Praise budget investments in dairy processors, rural communities

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MADISON, WI – Members of the Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association (WCMA) today applauded Governor Tony Evers' action to sign the 2023-2025 biennial state budget into law. The bill includes funding to support dairy innovation, boost dairy exports, and improve infrastructure in the state's rural communities.

"Our sincere thanks go to Governor Evers and legislative leaders for their steadfast, bipartisan support of Wisconsin's dairy industry," said **John Umhoefer, WCMA Executive Director**. "Their willingness to listen to dairy processors' voices and invest in this \$46 billion economic engine helps ensure a bright future for all those in the dairy supply chain, from farm to consumer."

The budget provides \$1 million for the Wisconsin Initiative for Agricultural Exports (WIAE), an effort launched in December 2021 to increase sales of Wisconsin dairy, crop, and meat products overseas. WIAE boosts the state's International Agribusiness Center and funds industry-run grant programs, including one administered by WCMA which provides export education and helps dairy processors engage in key international trade shows and marketing campaigns. Funding for this initiative was championed by Joint Finance Committee (JFC) members Rep. Tony Kurtz (R-Wonewoc) and Sen. Joan Ballweg (R-Markesan), as well as JFC co-chairs Sen. Howard Marklein (R-Spring Green) and Rep. Mark Born (R-Beaver Dam).

"Consumers worldwide know and trust the high quality, safety, and nutrition of U.S. dairy products, especially Wisconsin cheese. This continued investment in the Wisconsin Initiative for Agricultural Exports will help dairy processors build on that outstanding reputation overseas – ultimately bringing home the benefits to our state's dairy farmers," said **Kim Heiman, WCMA Treasurer and President of Nasonville Dairy in Marshfield**. "We appreciate the ongoing support of Governor

Evers and members of the Wisconsin State Legislature in that effort.”

The budget increases funding to \$1 million over the biennium for the Dairy Processor Grant program at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. These targeted, competitive grants are awarded to dairy businesses each year to fund innovation and plant modernization projects. Legislators also voted to provide \$7.8 million per year to support the Dairy Innovation Hub, which harnesses cutting-edge research and development at three University of Wisconsin campuses. Members of the State Senate and Assembly also approved a historic \$150 million to repair aging roads and bridges in rural communities, where many dairy processors live and operate.

“This strategic funding will benefit our industry and our state well beyond this biennium. We’re pleased to see Governor Evers and state legislators work together to invest in programs and resources that help dairy processors attract and retain top talent and grow their operations,” said **Rebekah Sweeney, WCMA Senior Director of Programs & Policy.**