



# TODD NOVAK

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## **Guest Column from Rep. Todd Novak (Dodgeville)**

### **The Importance of Dairy in Wisconsin**

**June 22, 2017**

Here in Wisconsin, June is a time where we celebrate our rich dairy history. As the America's Dairyland, it is only fitting that we dedicate June as Wisconsin's Dairy Month. This time of year is filled with breakfasts taking place at farms all around the state. First hosted in 1970 in Jefferson County, this tradition has grown to include 70 breakfasts each year. These events give families the opportunity to visit a local farm and learn about how Wisconsin's dairy industry operates, as well as enjoy a home-cooked Midwest breakfast with plenty of milk. Earlier this month, I attended the Iowa and Lafayette County Dairy Breakfasts where I helped prepare and serve meals to Wisconsin families. We are truly lucky to have such a special tradition here in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin's dairy industry has influenced my legislative priorities as well. Just recently, you may have heard that the Mineral Point 4<sup>th</sup> grade class proposed that cheese be designated as Wisconsin's newest state symbol. Their efforts led to a visit from the Governor at their school to sign the bill into law just in time for summer vacation.

Before our local schools shut their doors for the summer, I made it a priority to visit each school district for a meeting with the superintendent. During my visit, I was made aware of an issue the Monroe School District has encountered with their School Day Milk Program. This program, subsidized by the state, provides a carton of Wisconsin-produced milk at a daily milk break to students in Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 5 who qualify for free or reduced price meals. For some districts, students who are able to afford milk, along with the state reimbursement, make up the lost revenue. Other districts, such as Monroe, run deficits of \$10,000 each year due to the state only funding 50% of claims made by districts around the state.

In the governor's budget, the state contribution to this program has remained constant, while the cost of milk continues to rise and more students are claiming free or reduced price lunch benefits. To remedy this problem, I have submitted a budget motion to increase funding so that school districts aren't forced to discontinue this program due to financing concerns.

Dairy is such an important asset for Wisconsin. Locally produced and loaded with nutrition, we should do what we can to keep it in our schools for all students to access.