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NEWS RELEASE

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WCMA Applauds Unanimous Assembly Approval of Rural Capital Access Bill

MADISON, WI – The Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association (WCMA) today applauded the Wisconsin State Assembly’s unanimous approval of Senate Bill 219, which stands to expand access to capital for rural business owners, including dairy manufacturers and processors.

“Wisconsin’s dairy industry has faced a myriad of challenges in recent years, from the tumult of international trade to low milk prices that stress the financial picture for our farm family partners,” said John Umhoefer, WCMA Executive Director. “This legislation will spark lending opportunities for our rural businesses, allowing owners to invest in their companies, innovate and grow, add good-paying jobs and expand a dependable local tax base.”

Conceived by Wisconsin Dairy Task Force 2.0 members, Senate Bill 219 would launch a pilot program at the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA). Using existing funds available through the Agribusiness Guarantee Program, \$3 million in loan guarantee authority would support rural development projects, including brick-and-mortar investments, equipment and machinery, marketing, and working capital.

The pilot would guarantee up to 25 percent of a loan, or \$750,000, whichever is less. The borrower is required to pay back the entirety of the loan, with a state commitment only coming into play in the event of a default. All borrowers would be subject to rigorous vetting to participate in the program.

SB 219 was authored by Senator Howard Marklein (R-Spring Green), Senator Janet Bewley (D-Mason), Representative Gary Tauchen (R-Bonduel), and Representative Don Vruwink (D-Milton).

“We thank lawmakers for working across party lines to support rural economic development – and investments in Wisconsin’s dairy industry,” said Umhoefer.

The Wisconsin State Senate approved SB 219 in June. The legislation will now be sent to Governor Tony Evers for further consideration.

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Note: Since 1891, the Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association has served as the voice of cheese and dairy manufacturers, processors, and marketers. Today, WCMA represents more than 100 dairy processing companies and cooperatives operating across the United States and around the world, and more than 575 companies that supply equipment and services to the industry.