



## “Home for Thanksgiving” Takes on a New Meaning in 2020

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*A commentary by Randy Romanski, DATCP Secretary-designee*

MADISON – As I reflect on the coming holiday season, I know this Thanksgiving will be different for most this year, including my own family. Celebrations will not include fifty family members happily crowded into one house. There cannot be four generations sitting around the table sharing a meal, telling stories, and playing games. I (along with many others) wish this holiday season were different, but I understand we need to make these difficult choices now for our individual health, for the health and safety of those we love, and for our state.

That said, for our farm families, some holiday traditions will stay the same in 2020. Parents and children across Wisconsin will wake up before dawn to milk their cows. Milk haulers will still drive down town roads, emptying bulk tanks and hauling full loads to our cheese processors. Grocery store workers will restock their shelves with canned goods and fresh produce, ensuring that shoppers have what they need for their families. As they have throughout the pandemic, many agricultural and food workers will be on the job this Thanksgiving.

Throughout this past year, it has become even clearer to me that we have so much to be thankful for in Wisconsin. Most years, I would emphasize how lucky we are to have Wisconsin-grown turkey, potatoes, green beans, or cranberries; this year, Thanksgiving is about so much more.

As COVID-19 continues to spread in our state, I am consistently impressed with our robust and diverse food supply chain. We have dedicated farmers who are growing diverse crops and raising livestock. We have processors transforming these crops into products that are world-renowned for their quality. We have a complex distribution system, able to quickly move fresh, processed, and frozen products to consumers, wherever they are.

While many in Wisconsin are blessed to be able to purchase these nutritious and delicious foods for their families at stores, restaurants, and other points of purchase, others cannot. Throughout the past nine months, I have been inspired by the ways the people of our state have come together to help each other. Our food security network has been working in overdrive through statewide and local organizations to provide hunger relief. People have continued to donate high-quality Wisconsin agricultural products to support those who need it most.

At DATCP, our employees mobilized quickly to find creative ways to continue to serve our customers and the public. From virtual inspections to regular industry conference calls, the department has upheld its commitment to transparency and service, regardless of the challenges COVID-19 presented.

These contributions – by DATCP staff, individuals, and the agriculture and food industries – have made all the difference to Wisconsinites in every corner of the state, from our urban cities to our rural communities. People working together during uncertain times and sharing our

thanks is what this season is all about, and is something that even a pandemic cannot take away from us.

I hope you can find creative ways to stay connected with your family and friends during this holiday season, even when you are physically apart. While gatherings may be very small or done through a screen, I hope your hearts can be full. I urge you to check in with your family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues, virtually or by phone, to share a greeting and offer kindness.

This Thanksgiving, I will stay home for all those working in our agricultural and food supply chain who cannot. I hope you stay safe and know that you have my sincere thanks. You have faced tremendous challenges in 2020, and I recognize there are more to come. I, along with our team at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP), are thinking of you, appreciate you, and are here to support you during the holiday season and throughout the year. Happy Thanksgiving.

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