



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Ballweg and Kurtz Reveal Comprehensive Agriculture Export Program

Madison... Senator Joan Ballweg (R-Markesan) and Representative Tony Kurtz (R-Wonewoc) were joined by industry leaders to announce the introduction of a comprehensive agriculture and agribusiness export program. A similar but more limited program was included in Governor Evers' budget proposal.

"Agriculture contributes over \$100 billion to Wisconsin's economy each year. Last year, we saw \$3.37 billion in agricultural and food exports. This industry faces unique challenges from the pandemic, and the state and federal government have made important investments to try and address that," said Ballweg. "However, I believe this program will take those investments one step further and is a vital piece in cultivating our ag industry for the future."

The bill will require the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) to work with the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection to create a plan and achieve export objectives by June 30, 2026.

"Wisconsin's agricultural exports are the backbone of our second largest industry. I'm glad to see that Governor Evers recognizes the importance of dairy, meat, fish and cheese, but his proposal falls short of recognizing all of Wisconsin's top exports like cranberries, ginseng and bovine genetics," said Kurtz. "Our proposal will promote all Wisconsin exports and make the important investment in tracking the market data so we can continue this effort beyond this budget."

The agricultural export program requires WEDC to spend \$2.5 million on increasing the value of Wisconsin's milk and other dairy products, \$1.25 million to increase the value of Wisconsin meat exports and \$1.25 million to increase the value of Wisconsin's crop exports.

"There is tremendous opportunity for growth in Wisconsin's cranberry export market," said Karl Pippenger, a cranberry grower from Phillips and a Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association Board Member. "Cranberries are a unique and innovative product, and we believe that legislation like this can help Wisconsin growers access new markets."

To ensure this program is creating real outcomes for Wisconsin's agriculture economy, WEDC and DATCP are required to submit a report on the program's

progress in achieving outcomes by June 30, 2024. Additionally, the Legislative Audit Bureau is required to conduct an evaluation of the program's effectiveness by no later than December 31, 2026.

Other stakeholders have said of this program:

"Wisconsin dairy processors are doing a great job reaching American consumers, who – on average – are eating more than 40 pounds of cheese per year. But if we don't look beyond our borders and gain a foothold in emerging global markets, we're limiting the dairy industry's future growth. With a targeted state investment now, providing necessary guidance and organization for export success, Wisconsin has the opportunity to boost its cheesemakers, dairy farmers and rural communities, strengthening the state's backbone economy for generations to come."

- *Jack Heinemann, export sales manager for Specialty Cheese Company of Reeseville.*

"We have to invest in our rural communities and this bill is one way we should do so. Increasing the exports of dairy, meat and other crop products is money well spent. These investments help create long term relationships with export markets that could pay dividends for Wisconsin agriculture and our local communities for years to come."

- *Kevin Krentz, Farm Bureau President and dairy farmer from Berlin in Waushara County.*

"Exports add value to beef produced in Wisconsin. There continues to be room for growth in our export markets and we thank Rep. Kurtz and Sen. Ballweg for targeting agricultural exports in this legislation."

- *Eric Johnson, a beef producer from Dane and the Chair of the Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association Legislative Committee.*

"Securing existing exports and establishing new partnerships is critical to the viability of dairy in our state and to the survival of rural Wisconsin. We'd like to thank Senator Ballweg and Representative Kurtz for their efforts to focus attention and resources on agriculture exports. We hope this legislation will gain strong bi-partisan support. We appreciate the timeline for enactment and the commitment to drive exports for products that carry the special Wisconsin brand and help feed the world."

- *Tom Crave, President Emeritus of the Dairy Business Association.*

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Photo (L-R): Kevin Krenz, Karl Pippenger, Representative Tony Kurtz, Eric Johnson, Senator Joan Ballweg, Jack Heinemann, Tom Crave