

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Wednesday, March 5, 2025

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Madison Cheese Shop Owner Urges the White House to End Actions Damaging to Wisconsin's Dairy Industry

MADISON, WISCONSIN - Madison small business owner Ken Monteleone, owner of Fromagination, sent a letter to President Donald Trump Wednesday asking him to reconsider three policies that are set to damage Wisconsin's dairy industry.

"I'm very concerned about cuts to USDA grants and staff that affect dairy research and dairy and cheese business improvements," Monteleone said. "The new administration is also demonizing and threatening non-citizen dairy workers and hamstringing the science of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC)."

"We've heard from several cheese makers who've had their previously approved grants suddenly taken away," he continued. "The sum of these actions will surely negatively impact Wisconsin's best-known, showcase industry."

The letter was copied to several federal and state officials, including the chairs of key committees in the Wisconsin Legislature.

"We hope the letter will be considered not only by those who lead federal agencies, but also state leaders who may have a clearer understanding of what's important to Wisconsin's farmers, dairy producers, and cheese makers."

"We didn't even mention what this administration's tariffs will do to our economy," Monteleone added. "Stopping these damaging actions to our dairy industry is front and center for me. People in Wisconsin need to be aware of what's happening."

Background: Fromagination is a cheese shop on Madison's Capitol Square which showcases Wisconsin's best-known product. It's been in business since 2007 and employs less than 20 people. Fromagination has been recognized by publications such as Travel+Leisure and USA Today for its commitment to Wisconsin's cheese heritage and local producers.

A copy of the letter follows.

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Wednesday, March 5, 2025

President Donald Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

President Trump:

I have owned and run a cheese shop for 17 years across from the Wisconsin State Capitol. We promote Wisconsin cheeses to local customers, regional visitors and online customers, as well. Cheese, as you know, is a Wisconsin heritage. For many of us around here, it's a cultural icon and source of state pride.

I write to you with serious and urgent concerns about three new issues that directly affect my small business in Madison, Wisconsin. They also are affecting businesses across the state of Wisconsin and will have a far-reaching effect on the economy of Wisconsin and, indeed, the United States. These issues have arisen since you took office and are a direct result of your surprising policy changes.

First, your administration is firing employees and severely undermining the work of the federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) at a time when avian flu has spread to U.S. cattle herds. Blocking scientific work and information is unconscionable. It's a threat to dairy businesses throughout the U.S., and to cheese producers in Wisconsin. This policy change destabilizes the U.S., and is certainly dangerous.

Second, immigrant labor makes up a sizable portion of dairy industry employees in Wisconsin. These are workers who help produce the best milk available to create Wisconsin cheese. These hard-working non-citizens are not a threat to public safety, they pay taxes, and they are members of rural communities across Wisconsin. While comprehensive immigration reform is long overdue, demonization of workers and slash-and-burn deportations threaten Wisconsin's families and businesses...and its dairy industry.

Third, two of our excellent small-scale cheese producers have just had their USDA grants – to fund purchase of high efficiency equipment and new staff wages – cancelled out of the blue. Wisconsin's Dairy Business Initiative helps dairy farmers increase commerce in our state. Now these small businesses are stuck with the costs of improvements...or just abandoning them. And they get no reimbursement!

In addition, the local CSA coalition – an organization of 80+ local, small-scale farms which works in our region to strengthen the local food system – was recently notified that it lost \$500,000 in federal funding to directly support small-scale farmers' ability to market their produce. Your decision to stop funding agriculture and small businesses is wrong, and will seriously damage Wisconsin's economy.

I hope to hear from you soon about these concerns.

Thank you. Sincerely,

Ken Monteleone, owner & founder
Fromagination



- CC: U.S. Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins
- U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem
 - U.S. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick
 - U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin
 - U.S. Senator Ron Johnson
 - Congressman Mark Pocan
 - Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers
 - Wisconsin Secretary of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection Randy Romanski
 - Wisconsin Secretary of Workforce Development Secretary Amy Pechacek
 - Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation Chair Henry Newell
 - Wisconsin State Senator Patrick Testin
 - Wisconsin State Senator Dan Feyen
 - Wisconsin State Representative Travis Tranel
 - Wisconsin State Representative Paul Melotik
 - Wisconsin State Representative David Armstrong
 - Wisconsin State Representative Rick Gundrum
 - Wisconsin State Representative Elijah Behnke
 - Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin
 - Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association

