



November 3, 2017

Members of Wisconsin Legislature
Wisconsin State Capitol
2 E. Main Street
Madison, WI 53703

RE: Co-sponsorship of LRB 4632/1: redesigning the motor vehicle registration plate

Dear Sir or Madam:

Please do not co-sponsor LRB 4632/1. Instead, you should oppose this ill-conceived measure should it ever be introduced. This legislation, proposed by Rep. Scott Allen, would discredit our heritage, insult those responsible for one of our state's most powerful economic sectors and foolishly undermine our state's brand image.

Wisconsin's dairy community — with its hard-working farm families, cheesemakers and host of other supporting businesses — has been the backbone of this state for well over a century. That heritage, how far we have come and where we are headed should be celebrated as great sources of pride. Our license plates provide one opportunity to do that. The use of the slogan "America's Dairyland" for nearly 80 years is a recognition of our past, the important role that dairy continues to play in our state and culture, and what the future holds for the most innovative farmers and processors in the world.

While it is true that most Wisconsinites live in urban areas and do not work in agriculture, farming and food processing remain vitally important to our state. Dairy alone has a \$43.4 billion impact on Wisconsin's economy. That is hard for any other segment of the economy to match. Dairy farming, processing and allied businesses (e.g. lenders, manufacturers, data specialists, feed and seed companies, haulers, engineers, construction firms, packagers, etc.) tens of thousands of people in rural and urban parts of our state.

Rep. Allen has argued that our license plates should reflect who we are, not who we were. I do not disagree. However, that is what our plates currently do. We are still America's Dairyland. Innovation and modernization abound in dairy food production, and Wisconsin is leading the way. Our farms, processing plants and universities are looked to from around the nation and the globe for technological advances. Each year, we also host World Dairy Expo, the world's preeminent dairy technology event. Wisconsin is blessed with a diverse and vibrant economy. Yet, we hold a leading position in dairy farming and processing that is unlike anything else that we do in our state. This is something worth acknowledging.

It is also something upon which we should build. Attracting new businesses is great, but it can be a challenge. The importance of existing clusters to economic success is well recognized. Our strength in dairy, agriculture and food processing provide one of the best opportunities to grow our modern economy. Undervaluing this part of our economy in pursuit of the “next big thing” is not an intelligent strategy.

The development of a brand is something that companies, cities and states spend decades and millions of dollars to accomplish. Many states lack a clear brand. People struggle to associate anything with most states. Worse yet, some states have something that is commonly associated with them, but that something is viewed as a negative. Wisconsin is lucky to be associated with dairy in general and cheese in particular. While we make a lot of great dairy foods, most of our milk is used to make cheese and we produce more cheese than any other state. (Also, as even Rep. Allen has acknowledged, it’s the best cheese in the entire United States!)

We have a brand. It is viewed positively by the overwhelming majority of people. We have spent more than a century and a lot effort and money to create this brand. It does not make sense to back away from it. At a minimum, we should be quietly thankful. Even better, we should do more to strengthen our brand. Therefore, at a minimum, we ask that you oppose this proposed legislation. Even better, let’s get creative with what the Legislature can do to further strengthen our strong and dynamic dairy community.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike North". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mike" and the last name "North" clearly distinguishable.

Mike North
President