



Wisconsin to Host Delegation of Cheese Buyers from the Middle East

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Media Contact: Rick Hummell, Senior Communications Specialist
608-224-5041 richard.hummell@wi.gov

MADISON – Nearly a dozen prospective cheese buyers from five Middle Eastern countries will travel to Wisconsin later this month for a multi-day International Buyers Mission showcasing the state’s cheese and dairy industries.

The cheese buyers – from Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Lebanon and Qatar – will be here June 26-29 to experience a “360 view” of Wisconsin’s dairy industry through tours of cheese making plants, meetings with dairy industry leaders, a dairy farm tour, and a mini-trade show where the buyers will meet one-on-one with Wisconsin cheese making companies and exporters. Two Middle Eastern food writers/bloggers joining the delegation will share details of the Wisconsin experience with their readers.

Similar to a successful event held last year, the international buyers mission is part of the Wisconsin Initiative for Dairy Export (WIDE) program, a collaborative effort by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP), Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin (DFW), the University of Wisconsin’s Center for Dairy Research and other leading dairy organizations. DATCP has hosted international buyers missions for more than a decade.

The upcoming visit to Wisconsin is part of a larger trade mission that will have the international delegation also making stops in New York, Vermont and Illinois. The U.S. visit is being coordinated by the U.S. Dairy Export Council, with assistance from state and government agencies and dairy industry leaders, and DATCP and DFW taking lead roles in coordinating the Wisconsin event.

“Wisconsin dairy products are some of the highest quality and are sought by customers from around the world. Developing and growing new markets, including in the Middle East, is a top priority as we work to grow our exports,” said DATCP Secretary-designee Brad Pfaff. “We look forward to showcasing our state’s dairy industry and the quality foods we produce to consumers from around the world.”

“Growing exports and emerging markets are a key priority for us,” said Chad Vincent, Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin CEO. “We need to expand international market access for Wisconsin dairy and generate growth in a challenging industry while showing everyone that Wisconsin leads the nation and world for farmers, farming and dairy.”

The international delegation will arrive in Wisconsin about mid-day Wednesday, June 26, and will be welcomed by state and industry officials, including DATCP Deputy Secretary Randy Romanski; Patrick Geoghegan, DFW senior vice president of industry relations and marketing; John Umhoefer, executive director of the Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association; and representatives from the Center for Dairy Research. The group also will hear a presentation by Dr. Steve Ingham, administrator of DATCP’s Division of Food and Recreational Safety, about state rules and regulations governing the dairy industry.

Thursday, the delegation will tour several cheese making plants in southern Wisconsin, including Carr Valley Cheese, Mauston; Meister Cheese Company, Muscoda; and Cedar Grove Cheese, Plain. Later that day they will visit several supermarkets featuring prominent “store within a store” cheese niche areas, as well as Fromagination, a specialty cheese shop on the Capitol Square.

Friday, the group will travel to an event barn in Mount Horeb where they will participate in one-on-one meetings with more than a dozen Wisconsin cheese companies, as well as freight forwarding companies who assist in exporting product.

“I am confident that our foreign visitors will be impressed by the high-quality dairy products and cheese making process we have in our state,” stated Pfaff. “Our quality, variety, and craftsmanship literally sells itself.”