

Wisconsin Dairy Farmers Need Innovation

Farming in general is a community-based system. I know this because I am a dairy farmer from central Wisconsin. I am so proud to have grown up in this industry and proud to support my community as much as my farm does. I recently evaluated how we spend money on our farm and found that 62% of my expenses are paid to businesses and individuals within a 15-mile radius. I knew a lot of my business was done locally, but I never knew exactly how much I relied on those local business to support my farm and vice versa, until taking a closer look.

This money is spent on feed, parts, rent, labor and much more. This is money that is spent again and again within our community as workers purchase groceries, the feed mill buys corn and so on. Multiply that by the more than 8,000 dairy farms in Wisconsin and you will see the fiscal impact.

Wisconsin dairy farms have struggled the past several years with low prices. Farmers are used to price cycles, but this cycle has been extended for a variety of reasons, including the current battles with our nation's trading partners across the globe. This not only affects our farms, but the communities in which we live.

This is why we need the Dairy Innovation Hub within the UW system. The time is right to develop new products consumers desire. This includes allergy-free alternatives, products meeting the palette of our export partners, dairy products with increased shelf life and doing our part to help reduce obesity. All of this must occur simultaneously while building trust and transparency with consumers. But the Hub will be far more than consumer focused. It will affect everything dairy touches from the cow feed we grow in our fields to the delicious dairy products that make their way to our dinner table. Research has already proved to be beneficial on my farm.

The UW system has been instrumental in helping better the health of my animals. They helped design a ventilation system for my young calves to help significantly reduce sickness and almost eliminated antibiotic use. The UW faculty also helped my farm set a team approach to reproduction and is a reason that today I continue to have team meetings, bringing industry experts together to help solve the challenges we face.

Farmers in general are excellent stewards of the natural resources around us. We have significantly reduced water usage and greenhouse gas emissions over the decades, but that trend must continue. As our population continues to grow, we need to continue to find solutions to reduce water usage, improve air quality, optimize feed efficiency with our cows and develop alternative uses to farm waste along with minimizing nutrient losses. We need bold discoveries and research to help these trends continue. We need the Dairy Innovation Hub.

The dairy industry in Wisconsin is a \$43 billion business. To put that into perspective, Florida's citrus contributes \$9 billion to their economy, Idaho potatoes contribute \$7 billion and Maine's lobster industry contributes \$1.5 billion. Wisconsin dairy has a huge impact in our state and affects almost every community.

I encourage you to call your state representatives and senators and encourage them to support the Dairy Innovation Hub. Money put toward the Hub will truly be an investment that will pay dividends in our rural communities and local businesses. It is crucial that we bring top notch faculty to Wisconsin for

research to help revitalize dairy, so my fellow farmers and I can continue to be world leaders in agriculture for decades to come.

Kevin Krentz

Dairy Farmer

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