



Foreign Cheese Buyers to be Treated to a ‘Wisconsin Experience’

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**Media Contacts: Rick Hummell, 608-224-5041 richard.hummell@wi.gov
or Bill Cosh, Communications Director, 608-224-5020 William2.Cosh@wi.gov**

MADISON – More than a dozen cheese buyers from South and Central America, Mexico and the Middle East will travel to Wisconsin next week for a multi-day reverse buyers mission aimed at providing a “360 view” of the Wisconsin cheese industry and growing Wisconsin’s dairy exports.

During the event, Aug. 5-9, the foreign buyers will participate in a whirlwind of activities spotlighting the state’s cheese and dairy industries, including site visits to a half-dozen creameries and cheesemakers around the state, tours of several large supermarkets with extensive cheese displays, a tour of the University of Wisconsin’s Center for Dairy Research, and a Mini Trade Show with nearly 20 Wisconsin cheese companies that will be much like a “speed dating” event.

To top it off, the buyers will conclude their Wisconsin trip with a visit to the Wisconsin State Fair to take in the 2018 Cheese and Butter Auction, a grand spectacle featuring the auction and sale of the fair’s top dairy product entries.

“The reverse buyers mission will provide a ‘360 view’ of the Wisconsin cheese industry,” said Jack Heinemann, director of DATCP’s International Agribusiness Center, which is co-sponsoring the mission. “Our goal goes beyond just lining up potential international buyers with Wisconsin cheesemakers and sellers – we want to provide them with a ‘Wisconsin experience’ that will have a lasting effect. When the buyers return home, we want them to make it clear to others involved in their domestic food industries that Wisconsin is number one in the world in the cheese and dairy business. We want to develop and sustain momentum.”

The reverse buyers mission is an initial activity developed as part of the new Wisconsin Initiative for Dairy Export (WIDE) program, a collaborative effort between DATCP and UW’s Center for Dairy Research and other leading dairy organizations such as the Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin, to grow new market and product opportunities. Other industry partners also are supporting the event, including the U.S. Dairy Export Council, which helped pre-qualify the foreign buyers who will be here from Columbia, Chile, Guatemala, Mexico, and Dubai. Assistance also has been provided by USDA Agriculture Trade Offices from the foreign countries.

“The WIDE program and activities like the reverse buyers mission underscore DATCP’s commitment to increasing Wisconsin’s exporting markets,” said DATCP Sec. Sheila Harsdorf. “By showcasing our state’s dairy industry and the quality foods we produce here to buyers from around the world, we are working to expand international market access for Wisconsin agriculture.”

The buyers mission kicks off Monday, Aug. 6 with a welcome from state officials, including Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch and Sec. Harsdorf, and dairy industry leaders such as Chad Vincent, CEO of the Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin. Later that day, the buyers will visit the Center for Dairy Research, part of UW’s College of Agriculture and Life Science and one of the foremost dairy research facilities in the world. The buyers also will visit several supermarkets featuring prominent “store within a store” cheese niche areas, as well as Fromagination, a cheese specialty shop on the Capitol Square.

During the middle part of the week, the buyers will visit six cheese plants in the southern part of the state. “During those tours, the buyers will get a firsthand look at how cheese is made,” said Heinemann. “This will give them a comfort level with the quality and care put into Wisconsin’s cheese products. They’ll also see Wisconsin’s beautiful farms as we drive through the countryside, and gain an appreciation and understanding that agriculture is a way of life here.”

Thursday morning, the buyers will participate in a Mini Trade Show in Milwaukee with representatives from approximately 20 Wisconsin companies. “It will be set up almost like a speed dating event,” said Heinemann. “The potential buyers will go from station to station, meeting and networking with the sellers.”

Thursday afternoon, the buyers will head to the Wisconsin State Fair for the Cheese and Butter Auction.

“In addition to seeing and tasting literally hundreds of different types of cheeses on display at the Cheese and Butter Auction, the foreign buyers will get to experience many other aspects of Wisconsin agriculture that are showcased at the State Fair,” he said. “Again, it’s all part of our effort to provide a ‘Wisconsin experience.’ ”

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