



COLUMN FROM SECRETARY BEN BRANCEL:

Every month should be dairy month in Wisconsin

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MADISON – In June we all celebrate dairy with farm tours, dairy breakfasts, signs and special menus. Even though dairy month ended when we flipped our calendars to July, we should continue to appreciate the many contributions of Wisconsin’s dairy farms throughout the year.

The dairy industry in Wisconsin has good news to tell. Our state is home to more dairy farms than any other state. With about 9,500 dairy farms, Wisconsin has more than 20% of the nation’s herds. We have farms that focus on grazing, produce organic milk, sell at farmers markets or take advantage of robotic technology. While our dairy farms are all shapes and sizes, about 96% of them are family-owned.

These farms are not only producing high quality milk, they are also making a huge impact on our state’s economy, \$43.4 billion strong. These dollars circulate through local communities, supporting schools, businesses and safety services. More than 78,000 people in the state work in jobs related to the dairy industry.

It is no secret to anyone in the dairy business that times are challenging for our farmers. Current prices are about 40% lower than a couple of years ago, leaving little to no room for profit. A lack of income doesn’t change the labor and expenses that farmers need to put into their farms to get the job done. While dairy farmers have experienced these highs and lows in the market before, it doesn’t make it any easier.

So what can we do to best support our dairy farmers? Buy Wisconsin dairy. Wisconsin milk not only fills up your glass at dinner, but it is also used to make our favorite foods like cheese, butter, ice cream and yogurt.

Wisconsin’s dairy processing is second to none. Wisconsin produces more than 600 types, styles and varieties of cheese. Governor Walker and the staff at the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection work with our universities and ag organizations on quality, food safety and marketing. It is clear Wisconsin is number one when you look at the hardware; Wisconsin took home more than 38% of the awards at the 2016 World Championship Cheese Contest.

I am optimistic for the future of Wisconsin’s dairy industry. Our universities continue to develop programming in dairy science and food science. When traveling internationally to countries like China and Mexico, they are interested in our technology and products. The Governor and I will continue to work diligently to maintain and build our relationships with trading partners around the world.

I know it’s hard out there right now for farmers. I was a dairy farmer myself during the farm crisis of the 1980’s. If I was a betting man, I would say there are stronger years ahead for Wisconsin’s dairy farmers. Until then, I have faith in the resilience of our dairy farm community to manage through these times. I am confident our dairy processors will continue to innovate to make the products our consumers demand.

Wisconsin dairy is a brand we can all be proud of. Dairy means more to Wisconsin’s economy than citrus does to Florida or potatoes do to Idaho. We should all recognize Wisconsin as America’s Dairyland, not only in June, but all year round.

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DATCP’s Wisconsin Farm Center provides information and support to farmers and their families. Services include financial consultation, succession planning, conflict mediation and technical assistance. Contact the Farm Center toll-free at 1-800-942-2474 or visit our [website](#).