



Research and Innovation Key to Wisconsin Dairy's Future

A column from Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) Secretary Brad Pfaff

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MADISON – From the Wisconsin Dairy Task Force 2.0's early meetings, members highlighted the need for research and innovation to maintain Wisconsin's world leadership in all things dairy. Across the 51 recommendations that members have developed and approved in the past seven months, there is a consistent emphasis on the need to look to the future.

One of the first recommendations that the Dairy Task Force 2.0 passed was for increased investment in research through an initiative called the Dairy Innovation Hub. Members identified four critical research areas: steward land and water resources, enrich human health and nutrition, ensure animal health and welfare, and grow farm businesses and communities. The Dairy Task Force 2.0 recognized that research has been crucial for the dairy industry's advancement for more than a century, and research is key for the next century and beyond.

The Wisconsin Center for Dairy Research (CDR) has been described as our crown jewel and the nation's dairy industry is envious of the advantage its work provides Wisconsin. The Dairy Task Force 2.0 recommends CDR conduct a staffing analysis to optimize the capability of the new facility. Members also recommended additional technical staff to support innovation, working with companies to develop new cheese varieties and other value-added dairy products.

To make the most of completed research, the Dairy Task Force 2.0 recommended increased collaboration within the UW System and with private industry. The group recognized the need to leverage the cross-disciplinary expertise and work to get research benefits out quicker to farmers and processors. To get this research done, the Dairy Task Force 2.0 also recommended additional support for public and private partnerships, such as the Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grants.

Implementing new and emerging technology on the farm or in the processing plant is essential to innovation in Wisconsin's dairy industry. Unfortunately, access to capital can be a hurdle when it comes to incorporating these new technology systems. The Dairy Task Force 2.0 passed a recommendation asking for a loan guarantee program and developer grant program for producers and processors to incorporate new technology systems and adaptations in their operation.

In the 2018 Farm Bill passed by Congress and signed into federal law at the end of 2018, there was language and authorization to establish no less than three dairy product and business innovation initiatives across the country. The Dairy Task Force 2.0 recommends that Wisconsin be one of those sites. In partnership with the University of Wisconsin System, DATCP, industry associations, and others, Wisconsin plans to submit an application when the opportunity is available. This will complement the work already being done in research, product innovation, and market development in Wisconsin.

In dairy, the only thing we know for certain is that the industry will continue to change. Research and innovation are key to navigating that change and setting the course for the future. The Dairy Task Force 2.0 recognized Wisconsin's strengths and identified areas of potential growth. I hope you will take the time to read more about the recommendations on research, innovation, and other important topics at dairytaskforce.wi.gov.

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