Republicans Leave Small Family Farms Behind

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Trump's trade wars, tariffs, send farmers rushing to find new markets without additional assistance from the state.

WEST POINT, WI - It's no secret, small family farms are struggling in Wisconsin. There are a variety of issues that have impacted this downturn, and it's more important than ever that we are paying attention and coming up with solutions to help alleviate the pain that our agriculture industry is experiencing.

On August 12, Governor Tony Evers sent a letter, addressed to President Donald Trump, urging him to end the unnecessary and irresponsible trade wars that are having a severely negative impact on our farmers. The appeal followed a letter sent on May 30 from myself, along with my Democratic colleagues, addressed to the United States Trade Representative, Robert Lighthizer with the same request- end the trade war. Unfortunately, no Republicans signed the letter.

The trade wars, which were started due to the inflated ego of our President, who has proven his dangerous lack of understanding on how tariffs work, has contributed to the devastation of too many farming communities. While he exclaims that we are "winning" trade wars, the reality is that farmers, manufacturers, and consumers in America are paying the price. The trade war will only continue to drive up costs, bankrupt farmers, and result in Wisconsin losing thousands of jobs.

Overnight, Republicans destroyed trade relationships, at the same time that the Wisconsin agriculture industry is stressing the importance of dairy exports. By damaging our trade relationships, the federal government's short-sighted policies are forcing some farmers to depend on government aid, or to sell their cows. They deserve better.

They deserve better from Republicans on both the federal level and in Wisconsin. Recently, the Wisconsin Diary Task Force 2.0 released their report, which studies issues affecting the dairy industry and makes recommendations. Historically, the task force's recommendations have been successfully implemented, and I am hopeful that our legislators will continue to work towards reducing obstacles for farmers and implementing recommendations to help the agriculture industry.

However, recent actions of my Republican colleagues have me concerned. While reviewing the report, a few recommendations sounded familiar. Just one example was Wisconsin's role in recognizing the importance of exports, because it reflected a recommendation Governor Evers put in his budget six months ago.

In keeping with the importance of exports to Wisconsin dairy, Governor Evers' budget proposal recommended the development of the Wisconsin Initiative for Dairy Exports (WIDE). WIDE would seek to bring together stakeholders to pursue an increase in dairy exports, through increasing analysis of state and international agricultural markets, facilitation trade missions abroad, and recruiting international buyers to visit Wisconsin. While Democrats voted for the proposal, Republicans opted to delete the provision from budget deliberations and put forth no alternatives to address the need for dairy export initiatives.

Unfortunately, due to the President's tariffs, this task will be an even greater challenge for farmers. Wisconsin Dairy exports saw a 5.5% decline in 2018, compared to the previous year, and WIDE was intended to reverse that trend. Now farmers are rushing to find new markets without additional assistance from the state.

Between the president's attacks on economic security, increasing risks of unpredictable weather, and Republican inaction to fund critical programs, including mental health care for farmers, it is apparent that more needs to be done to rebuild the industry that built our state. Every day more and more farms are shutting down, and while there is not a single, simple solution, inaction is not the answer. Our farming communities deserve to have a fair opportunity to succeed, and the time to act is now.

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