

Senator Jeff Smith: What We Can Learn From Dairy Month

Written by Jeff Smith, State Senator District 31
Wednesday, 10 June 2020 10:29 -

<http://newiprogressive.com/images/stories/S5/farm-family-s5.jpg>



The Senator writes about ways we can support our dairy farmers and celebrate June Dairy Month in Wisconsin. He reflects on conversations with friends from the farming community and their ability to be resilient during tough times.

EAU CLAIRE, WI - Last Friday, I had the chance to connect virtually with some good friends in western Wisconsin to celebrate June Dairy Month. We had a conversation about the ways dairy has made an impression on our own lives and the impact the dairy industry has on the State of Wisconsin. And of course, after sharing stories, we started a milk chug challenge, throwing back glasses of fresh, cold milk.

My friends on the call are farmers or have close ties to Wisconsin's dairy industry going back generations within their family. They talked about their interest and lifelong dedication to the dairy industry while sharing their optimism of better days ahead for dairy farmers.

Time and again, Wisconsin's dairy farmers have exemplified their resilience in times of uncertainty. This time isn't any different. During June Dairy Month, let's remember all of the contributions our dairy farmers have made to make Wisconsin, America's Dairyland. Although we'll be celebrating Dairy Month differently this year, we can still find ways to support our state's farmers and the dairy industry.

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During the beginning of the 20th century, farmers experienced an agricultural crisis like they'd never seen before. The rising cost of agricultural products after World War I, in addition to extreme drought conditions, created significant problems for farmers trying to make ends meet.

Even at the end of the 20th century, farmers still faced significant market challenges. Many of us can still remember the heart-wrenching bankruptcies and farm auctions that destroyed the dreams of many farming families. But, once again, the grit of our farmers showed through as they stuck with their love for the land and their lifestyle.

Today, our farmers are still facing serious challenges, many of which are man-made. While farmers experience the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic head-on, they're still under escalating pressure due to over-production, high land prices, and low milk prices. But farmers push ahead and show us, how resilient they can be in stressful situations.

During last Friday's call, Shane Goplin, a member of the Wisconsin Farm Bureau, proudly said, "Dairy is the glue that keeps rural America together." I couldn't agree more and that's why I'm so committed to making sure we do everything we can to support our hardworking dairy farmers.

We all have a role to play to support our farmers moving forward and to keep our close-knit rural communities growing stronger. The Legislature must get to work, set aside ideological politics, and pass policies that give farmers the resources and tools they need to survive. I know that laying out the tools in front of clever and resilient people leads to amazing growth both intellectually and economically, just like farmers have demonstrated throughout the last century.

In May, Governor Tony Evers announced the distribution of the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act for Wisconsin. As part of this relief package, \$50 million will be directed toward the Wisconsin Farm Support Program, which will provide payments between \$1,000 and \$3,500 for eligible farmers. The goal of the program is to provide immediate assistance to farmers struggling amid this global pandemic. This is a solid first step, but it's only a down payment for what else the state must do to offer support to help our farmers.



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While there are state-level solutions that must be considered and passed, there are simple ways you can support Wisconsin's dairy farmers during June Dairy Month. Start by buying dairy products from local family farmers and producers. Find out if your county is celebrating June Dairy Month through a virtual or drive-thru dairy breakfast. Also, take part in a milk chug challenge with your friends on social media to share why you're thankful for our farmers and what Wisconsin's dairy industry means to you.

Like always, we should acknowledge our farmers' resiliency to get us through these tough times. During this month, as we celebrate Wisconsin's dairy industry, let's remember how our farmers' determination has pulled us through crises before. Let's learn from them and return the favor, honoring them in the month of June and supporting them for years to come.