



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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Get Cheesey in June

Celebrate Dairy Industry's Contribution to Wisconsin Economy

By State Representative Don Vruwink

Growing up on a dairy farm and milking cows every day gave me an appreciation for everything that is dairy. During my teenage and college years, I helped my uncle, grandfather, and parents milk cows on their farms.

In those days, milk cans were stored in cold water to keep the milk from spoiling, and I became pretty strong lifting cans out of the water. Then bulk tanks replaced the cans, and milking became a little easier. At my uncle's farm, I remember putting the straps around the cows to connect the milking machines and then carrying the buckets to the bulk tank. My grandpa had a pipeline to carry the milk to the bulk tank, which was a lot easier.

Many of us Baby Boomers who grew up on farms have good (and not so good) memories of chores. At home I was responsible for milking 22 cows on two milking machines. I took the cows closest to the barn doors so I could hit rocks with a baseball bat into the barnyard. Hitting a rock sure made a baseball seem a lot larger when I was on a baseball field, batting at home plate.

June is Dairy Month, a time to celebrate the bounty of our dairy farms. Wisconsin's economy and the dairy industry are closely knit. Dairy and related food processors generate \$45.6 billion and 78,000 jobs in Wisconsin, fueling the state economy at the rate of \$80,000 per minute, according to UW Extension.

In 2020, Wisconsin produced 30.7 billion pounds of milk, which was 14 percent of our national milk production. Roughly 90 percent of Wisconsin's milk is turned into cheese and 90 percent of that cheese is sold outside of the state.

Much of Wisconsin's success in the dairy industry can be traced to William Hoard of Fort Atkinson. Besides serving as 16th Governor of Wisconsin, he tirelessly promoted the industry for 50 years through his marketing association and Hoard's Dairyman magazine.

Research at the University of Wisconsin helped advance the dairy industry. Babcock's butterfat test; the UW College of Agriculture tests for bacteria; university short courses to educate farmers on best practices; and the promotion of crop storage in silos all helped dairy growth.

Seeking a way to distribute extra milk during the warm months of summer, grocers organizations created National Milk Month in 1937. By 1939, June had become the official dairy month and it continues today with dairy breakfasts across Wisconsin, free ice cream, and other promotions. I drink a glass or two of milk every day, although these days I opt for skim.

Today Wisconsin is still number one in cheese production. Our 127 cheese plants produce over two billion pounds annually, which is 26 percent of the nation's total, led by Munster, Brick Cheddar, and Mozzarella. Last year we also led the nation in production of specialty cheeses.

But what is more iconic than the cheese curd? I like mine squeaky fresh; others prefer deep fried. As you bite through a fresh curd, the mesh rebounds and rubs across the enamel of your teeth. That feeling can give a person the heebie-jeebies, but also make you happy.

I encourage you to join me in celebrating June Dairy Month by attending a dairy breakfast near you. The breakfasts in my district are:

Rock County: McNally Farms, 5928 E Bingham Road, Milton, 6:30 to 11 am, Saturday, June 5. I will be serving coffee.

Walworth County: Walworth County Fairgrounds, 411 E. Court St., Elkhorn, 6-10:30 am, June 19.

Jefferson County: Jefferson County Fair Park, 503 N. Jackson Ave, Jefferson, 7 am-Noon Aug. 21.

Dane County: Hinchley's Dairy Farm, 2844 State Road 73, Cambridge, 7-11:30 a.m. Aug. 21.

To see a map of all of the breakfasts statewide, please visit bit.ly/dairy2021.

I hope to see you there!

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State Rep. Don Vruwink represents parts of Rock, Walworth, Jefferson, and Dane counties, which include the communities of Whitewater, Milton, Edgerton, Footville, part of the Village of Oregon, and 15 surrounding townships. He can be reached at 608-266-3790, Rep.Vruwink@legis.wisconsin.gov, and P.O. Box 8953, Madison WI 53708.