

Winter 2025

the  
**Voice of Milk**

*A leading force in dairy advocacy.*

**Connector**



Fifth-generation dairy farmer, Alex Udermann, is one of the co-owners of Meadowbrook Dairy in Stearns County, Minn.

## What's Inside

*Advancing soil health for a sustainable food system and the next generation of farmers*

*Dairy Strong 2026: Agenda highlights announced*

*Sedron transforms manure management and conservation*

*Edge and FSF launch new program—EmPower+*



## In this Issue

Welcome.....	3	Policy Update .....	8	Sustainability .....	21
Member Spotlight.....	4	Permitting .....	16	Survey.....	23
Events.....	7	Technology.....	18		

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## Happy holidays from the Voice of Milk leadership

From everyone on the Voice of Milk leadership team, we wish you a happy holiday season! We hope you're taking time to have cherished moments with loved ones and joyful festivities.

As we reflect on the past year, we are grateful for your continued contributions and support. Your voice and commitment to our organization guide our direction and progress as the Voice of Milk. Together, we are making significant strides for the entire dairy community. Thank you for helping us continue to move dairy forward!

Looking ahead to 2026, we continue to see many challenges ahead, particularly in local, state and federal policies and regulations. Our collective government affairs staff continue to monitor and engage in these issues as necessary to make sure the voice of dairy farmers is heard and understood. While our staff can share your story with elected officials, it is more impactful when farmers carry the message. We will have opportunities throughout the year for you to engage in these critical conversations, from designated dairy days in Madison, St. Paul and Washington D.C. to requests for calls and letters directly to your legislators. Your voice matters and throughout this next year we will be urging you to tell your story and share your message to help us all make an impact on issues critical to our farms.

The next year will also be ripe with opportunities to enhance our organizations. During a joint meeting in October, our boards endorsed a three-year strategic plan designed to position our members to be the most successful and engaged in the market. Initiatives are underway to achieve this outcome. We encourage you to bring forward your ideas on how we can work together in meeting this aggressive goal.

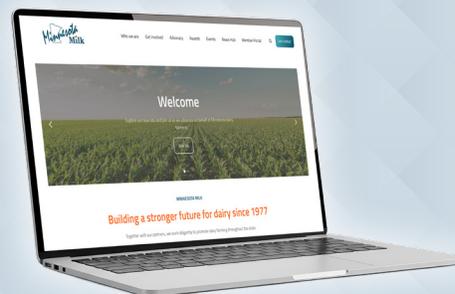
We hope the New Year brings you happiness, success and new opportunities. Here's to 2026!

**Heidi Fischer**, *president, Edge Dairy Farmer Cooperative*

**Garrett Luthens**, *president, Minnesota Milk Producers Association*

**Greg Siegenthaler**, *president, Dairy Business Association*

## Minnesota Milk unveils redesigned website with enhanced resources for members



We are happy to announce the launch of our revamped website for the Minnesota Milk Producers Association at [mnmilk.org](http://mnmilk.org). We invite you to explore the fresh and interactive features now available. The site provides a more efficient user experience and serves as a valuable resource for our members.

With the launch of the newly designed website, MN Milk members now have access to the new MN Milk Member Portal. In this portal, you can access exclusive member-only content, including important resources, links to past webinars, policy updates and other information that may affect your farm. Additionally, you can view your membership status and submit requests to update your membership profile.

If you have not logged in to your new MN Milk member profile account yet, please look for a password reset email in your inbox. You need to reset your password in order to log in.

If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to us at [info@voiceofmilk.com](mailto:info@voiceofmilk.com).

## Advancing soil health for a sustainable food system and the next generation of farmers *Written by Rachel Malcore Goblisch, Voice of Milk*



Alex Udermann, one of the owners of Meadowbrook Dairy in Stearns County, Minn., stands inside his dairy barn where he milks 80 cows.

In 2016, fifth-generation dairy farmer Alex Udermann recognized that the management practices on his family farm weren't working. Faced with disappointing crop yields, poor cattle health, high service costs and expensive equipment and labor, he knew something needed to change.

"When my brother and I started taking on a more active management role on the farm, I noticed we needed to figure out a new plan to fix our

operation for the better," Udermann said. "I knew, even before my wife and I had children, we needed to change our farm if we wanted the sixth generation to be there."

Udermann, his wife Kirsten, his brother Jake, and Jake's wife Sam

currently manage Meadowbrook Dairy in Stearns County, Minn. They are members of the Minnesota Milk Producers Association. Udermann and Kirsten now have four kids, and Jake and Sam have two. They milk about 80 cows and have about 300 feeder steers. They also do custom manure hauling and custom no-till planting.

"When we started looking into no-till and cover crops almost 10 years ago, we didn't have the resources or equipment needed to do it on our own," he said. "As a family, we decided to hire out custom work for no-till soybeans. When the no-till soybeans yielded the same as our conventional acres, we knew we needed to commit to this."

The improvement in their soils has been tremendous, Udermann says. They started noticing improvements to

soil structure, with more aggregates and earthworm activity. They could also use less

fertilizer, less fuel from decreased equipment usage and lower labor

**We needed to change our farm if we wanted the sixth generation to be there.**

costs. In 2021, the farm transitioned to 100% no-till.

“We had to learn a whole new way to farm on our own,” he said.

“The scariest part was making the

initial step, knowing that we had to change and learning it all on our own. But it was well worth it. We’ve seen the benefits all around us, starting with healthier soils, but also, healthier cows.”



Many factors can make transitioning to sustainable farming challenging, including access to appropriate equipment or the funds needed to buy new farming equipment. Additionally, it takes a long time for farmers to fully transition and see the benefits of

## We’ve seen the benefits all around us, starting with healthier soils, but also, healthier cows.

us,” Udermann said. “Programs that provide support and funding are critical. They help farmers manage the risks of making these transitions in a market where there’s little margin for error.”

At Meadowbrook Farm, Udermann and his brother, Jake, are pushing soil health further by composting, planting diverse cover crops and testing new regenerative practices, from improving water infiltration rates to

healthier soils on their farms.

“We’re focused on producing the healthiest, most nutrient-dense food possible using the tools available to

exploring innovative ways to recycle nutrients back into the soil.

“Soil health and regenerative farming aren’t about reaching a finish line,” he said. “It’s a continuous journey. There’s always more to learn, experiment with, and improve. When farmers embrace regenerative practices, it ripples beyond the farm—strengthening local food systems, protecting clean water, and improving the air we all share.”



# Dairy Strong 2026: Agenda highlights announced



The Dairy Business Association has released highlights of the 2026 Dairy Strong conference agenda, set for Jan. 14–15 at the KI Convention Center in Green Bay. This year’s event brings together industry leaders, policy experts and farmers for two days of insight and collaboration.

Dairy Strong will feature keynote speakers Brett Sciotto, CEO of Idealyst Innovation, and Ben Leibl, Public Relations Specialist for Kwik Trip, Inc., along with a strong lineup of breakout sessions focused on the issues shaping dairy’s future.

## **Cultivating Collaboration: Farmers Engaging in Local Leadership** *Farmer Panel*

Wisconsin farmers will share how they’re strengthening connections with local leaders — from serving on county or town boards to building relationships across their communities. Hear practical examples of how today’s farmers are influencing local decision-making and bridging the gap between agriculture and government.

## **Immigration at the Farm Gate: Compliance, Reform, and Real-World Readiness**

*Attorney Samuel Moheban, Ruder Ware*

This session provides an updated look at immigration policy and its impact on dairy. Learn how to navigate I-9 compliance, recognize lawful document requests and

implement best-practice protocols. Attendees will also gain insight into working with legal counsel and responding appropriately when enforcement agencies become involved.

## **Developing Your Next Family Business Leaders**

*Barb Dartt & Lydia Tuthill, Family Business Consulting Group*

Explore strategies for preparing the next generation of leaders — whether they are family members or trusted non-family employees. This session will cover assessing readiness, encouraging engagement and building a leadership pipeline that supports a successful transition. 🌱



Scan here to see the full agenda or visit [dairystrong.org](http://dairystrong.org)!

# Thanks for joining us at World Dairy Expo

Another incredible week at World Dairy Expo in Madison is in the books! We hope everyone who attended had a great time connecting with fellow

farmers, friends and colleagues, both in the trade show and around the barns. Thank you to everyone who stopped by the Voice of Milk booth or

joined us at our member reception. We truly appreciated the meaningful conversations and the chance to connect with so many of you. 🌱





**REGISTER TODAY!**

**2026 Annual Meeting & Dairy Day at the Capitol**

**February 24<sup>th</sup> - 25<sup>th</sup>**



Scan here to register!




**REGISTER TODAY!**

**Dairy Day at the Capitol**  
February 4 | Madison

Scan here to register!




**Farmers for Sustainable Food**

**ANNUAL MEETING**

**Wednesday | January 14, 2025**  
1:00 - 2:30 p.m.  
KI Convention Center | Green Bay, WI




**Annual Meetings**

**January 14**  
**3:00 – 5:00 p.m.**  
*KI Convention Center*  
*Green Bay, WI*

If you have any questions about attending the Annual Meetings, please email [info@voiceofmilk.com](mailto:info@voiceofmilk.com)!

## Federal policy update



Cassandra Kuball  
Torrey Advisory Group

On November 12, President Trump signed a funding bill into law to reopen the government after 43 days, the longest government shutdown in history. The bill included a

three-bill minibuss covering FY2026 funding for Military Construction-VA, Agriculture-FDA and the Legislative Branch, along with a short-term Continuing Resolution (CR) that would fund the remaining government agencies through January 30, 2026.

Congressional leaders will now need to come together to find a path forward for funding the remaining government agencies before their next deadline and work through issues such as an extension for the Affordable Care Act (ACA) tax credits, which was the crux of the shutdown fight and not included.

Throughout the shutdown, the House remained in recess, while the Senate continued to hold oversight hearings and consider nominations and the Administration continued to push its economic and deregulatory agenda forward.

While the shutdown slowed down progress around a farm bill 2.0, the signed CR to reopen the government included a one-year extension of the farm bill through September 30, 2026. However, Agriculture Committee leadership are still considering potential pathways for taking up the remainder of the farm bill provisions that were not covered under the

One Big Beautiful Bill Act. These provisions include reauthorization of key programs such as Dairy Forward Pricing and Dairy Indemnity and the suspension of Permanent Price Authority. Congress will now have until the end of 2026 to act before certain provisions such as Permanent Price Authority create a 'dairy cliff' but the pathway for passing a comprehensive farm bill 2.0 is still undetermined.

On Monday, November 17, the USDA made an announcement regarding three disaster programs for farmers using funds made available through the American Relief Act passed at the end of the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress. The programs are Stage Two of the Supplemental Disaster Relief Program (SDRP), the Milk Loss Program, and the On-Farm Stored Commodity Loss Program.

The Milk Loss Program will provide \$1.65 million for eligible dairy operations for milk that was dumped or removed without compensation from the commercial milk market because of a qualifying natural disaster event in 2023 and/or 2024. The enrollment period is Nov. 24, 2025 - Jan. 23, 2026. More information can be found on the FSA website for the Milk Loss Program.

Despite the slowdown on the legislative and aid fronts throughout the fall, the Trump Administration has been full speed ahead with its economic agenda. Over the past several weeks the Administration has been highly engaged in talks with our top 20 trading partners.

At the end of October, the White House announced it had reached trade agreements with

Malaysia and Cambodia as well as shared joint statements on frameworks for trade agreements with Thailand and Vietnam. The agreements included the removal of tariffs and breaking down of non-tariff trade barriers, along with reducing the major regulatory barriers often witnessed by U.S. agricultural exports. The plan is for the agreements for all four countries to be in effect by the end of the year.

The Administration also held a series of talks with other major trading partners including with leaders from Japan and South Korea, in addition to the much-anticipated meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping. The U.S. dairy industry welcomed the news that the two countries reached a temporary agreement to de-escalate tensions, including a suspension of some tariffs including partial tariffs on dairy and lifting of some non-tariff retaliation measures. While a welcomed relief, much remains on the table including the United States' active probe into China's commitments under the Phase One Deal, which may result in more tariffs on China in the coming months.

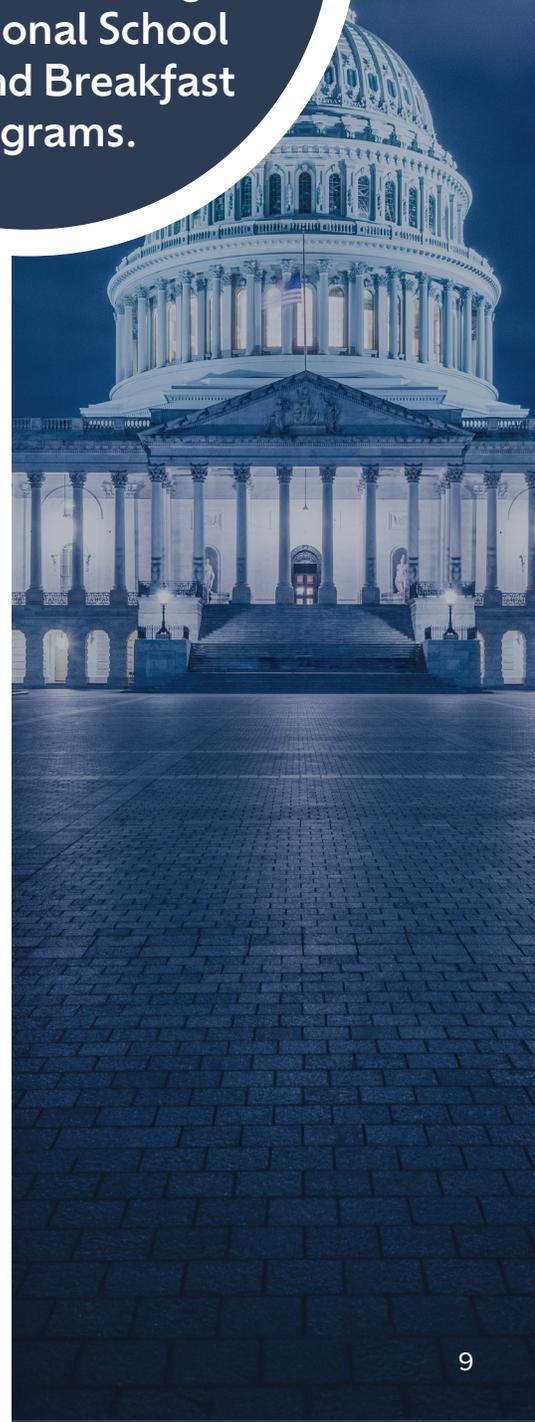


Regulatory processes actively moved during the shutdown, including those under the Administration's health agenda such as defining "ultra-processed" foods. If a formal definition is determined, it could completely change current food nutrition policies including the National School Lunch and Breakfast programs. The dairy industry is highly aware of the impact that it could have on public health, food safety and accessibility if a definition is not scientifically backed; therefore, it remains highly engaged with the Administration on this effort.

Animal health has also remained a top priority with the with the emergence of New World Screwworm (NWS) out of Mexico. USDA has implemented a five-prong plan to protect the United States' livestock, wildlife, and public health from the growing threat of NWS. As part of the five-prong,

whole-of-government plan, USDA launched a new Unified New World screwworm (NWS) website, [screwworm.gov](http://screwworm.gov) on November 21. In early November, USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins met with Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum where they agreed upon short-term priorities and action items that may eventually allow for the U.S. to once-again permit cattle to cross the border in from Mexico. Expectations are that any future opening of the border will be conditional and incremental. 

**If a formal definition is determined, it could completely change current food nutrition policies including the National School Lunch and Breakfast programs.**



## Farmers respond to DATCP's proposed fee increases for animal health programs



Chad Zuleger  
DBA executive  
director

Wisconsin dairy farmers made their voices heard loud and clear on proposed DATCP rule changes to ATCP 10 and ATCP 12, which set fees for critical animal health and movement

programs, including premises registration, disease monitoring, animal disease testing and traceability and livestock dealer licensing.

in programs that depend on cooperation and compliance.

Following a DBA call-to-action, more than 600 public comments were submitted before the October 15 deadline. Thank you to all members who took the time to weigh in. Your engagement made a difference and sent a clear message to policymakers.



### Balancing water quality and farm viability: Wisconsin's next phase of conservation

Wisconsin farmers have always been stewards of the land, not because of regulation, but because their livelihoods depend on healthy soil and clean water. As the state continues its water quality conversation, our goal is clear: advance conservation while protecting farm viability.

The 2025–27 state budget moved that effort forward with major investments in conservation staffing, nitrogen optimization, and voluntary land and water initiatives that empower farmers to lead. These programs, many championed by DBA members, offer science-based tools to improve nutrient management, build soil health and protect groundwater.

DATCP's Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Program funds research and demonstration projects that maximize fertilizer efficiency and reduce leaching. Expanded county conservation staffing grants strengthen local expertise, while the renewed Cover Crop Insurance Premium

**The department's proposal includes massive fee increases ranging from 400% to more than 1,700%, sparking public and legislative outrage.**

The department's proposal includes massive fee increases ranging from 400% to more than 1,700%, sparking public and legislative outrage. While these programs are essential to keeping Wisconsin's herds healthy and maintaining consumer confidence in animal agriculture, the scale of the proposed increases is far beyond what farmers can reasonably absorb.

DBA recognizes that these fees haven't been updated since 2009, and that some increase is necessary to adjust for inflation and strengthen disease prevention capacity. But such extreme hikes risk undermining farmer confidence and participation

DBA continues to work closely with lawmakers and DATCP officials to find a balanced, long-term funding approach. Legislators have already introduced bills to cap the fee increases, and DBA is helping shape a shared solution that maintains robust animal health programs without overburdening the farmers who rely on them.

**When DBA issues a call-to-action, it matters — and this is proof.**



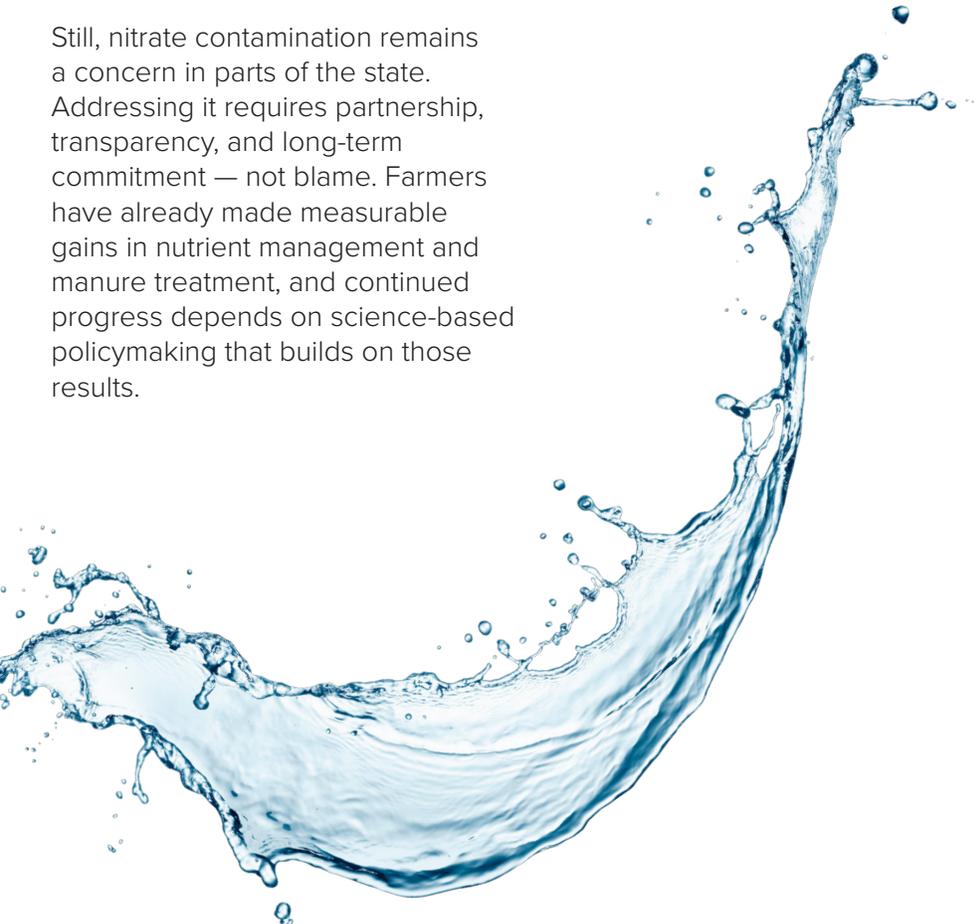
Rebate Program rewards farmers with a \$5 per-acre rebate for planting cover crops that enhance soil and reduce runoff.

This incentive-driven model stands apart from the one-size-fits-all regulations seen elsewhere. Wisconsin’s conservation progress comes from collaboration,

not mandates. Programs like the Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant Program, first backed by DBA, prove that lasting change begins on the farm.

Still, nitrate contamination remains a concern in parts of the state. Addressing it requires partnership, transparency, and long-term commitment — not blame. Farmers have already made measurable gains in nutrient management and manure treatment, and continued progress depends on science-based policymaking that builds on those results.

As lawmakers consider new proposals this fall, DBA is at the table ensuring solutions being offered are practical, data-driven, and workable for real farms. Wisconsin’s conservation story isn’t about choosing between clean water and productive agriculture — it’s about achieving both. And with strong farmer leadership, we’re proving that balance is possible. 



## Amplify Your Voice... support DairyPAC!

DairyPAC empowers us to support candidates who champion policies that align with our priorities. By pooling our resources, we can ensure that dairy farmers are heard loud and clear in Madison.

Every dollar contributed to DairyPAC strengthens our ability to advocate for sensible regulations, sustainable practices, and the infrastructure investments we need to succeed. Your support helps elect leaders who understand and value the contributions of Wisconsin’s dairy community. Please consider making a donation to DairyPAC today.



Scan here to donate to the DairyPAC!

# Your feedback drives us into 2026

## Looking Ahead to the 2026 Minnesota Legislative Session



Lucas Sjostrom  
MN Milk executive  
director

The road to the 2026 legislative session begins months before the first gavel drops. Over the fall, Minnesota Milk members filled out our 2026 Policy Feedback Form — and you didn't hold

back. Dozens of farmers, processors, and partners shared what's keeping them up at night and what they'd most like to see changed at the Capitol. Those answers are now shaping our priorities for the year ahead.

### Listening Across the State

From labor concerns to environmental rules, you helped us identify the most pressing issues on Minnesota dairy farms. The top three categories were:

Employee and labor challenges — from finding and retaining workers to navigating new laws like Earned Sick and Safe Time (ESST) and Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML).

Profit margins and tax pressure — concerns about rising input costs, new payroll taxes, and the ability to keep farms profitable in a tightening market.

State and federal regulations — including feedlot rules, nutrient management requirements, and shifting water and air quality standards.

Many respondents noted ESST and PFML compliance as top stress points, with several calling for more flexibility or simplified reporting. Others asked for immigration reform — not just enforcement, but solutions that recognize the reality of dairy's 24/7 workforce needs. One farmer wrote bluntly, "We can't milk cows without people, and we can't keep good people without clear, fair rules."

### What We're Hearing From the Capitol

Since the 2025 session ended, our policy team and farmer-leaders have met with more than 35 legislators across both parties. Those conversations confirmed what your feedback told us: legislators are paying attention, but they often don't understand the daily ripple effects of their policies on the farm.

One rural lawmaker told us, "I didn't realize how quickly ESST compliance alone adds administrative time and cost for small processors." That kind of dialogue makes all the difference — and we'll keep it going all session long.

### Session Dates and What's Ahead

The 2026 Minnesota Legislative Session begins February 17 and runs through May 18, 2026. It's a short session with a 67-67 House and 34-33 DFL Senate. Further adding to the situation is Speaker Lisa Demuth (R-Cold Spring) now running for governor against Tim Walz (and more in the GOP field) after assassination of Speaker emeritus Melissa Hortman and a record-setting eight special elections needed.

Here's what we'll be focusing on, directly informed by your survey responses:

- Revising labor laws to better fit agricultural realities, including flexibility in ESST and PFML requirements.
- Clarifying environmental and feedlot regulations to ensure practical, science-based thresholds that reward conservation without penalizing growth.
- Strengthening dairy profitability tools — expanding access to value-added grants, low-interest financing, and milk hauling infrastructure investments.
- Advocating for workforce and immigration solutions that help farms

## Market Numbers

legally hire and retain essential employees.

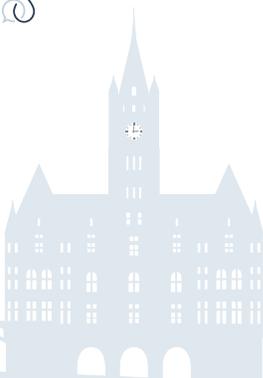
- Ensuring tax fairness for cooperatives, family-owned farms, and on-farm processing ventures.

And because many of you noted confusion around overlapping regulations, we're building relationships with DNR and MNDOT, in addition to continuing partnerships with agencies like MDA, MPCA, and DEED to ensure farmer input is part of every rulemaking process from the start.

### Our Shared Path Forward

Policy change doesn't happen overnight — but it always starts with a conversation. The feedback you provided this fall has already shaped dozens of those conversations with lawmakers. When session begins in February, Minnesota Milk will again be your voice at the Capitol, working to make sure that every new law, regulation, and initiative reflects the realities and resilience of our state's dairy community.

As we step into 2026, one thing is clear: your feedback drives us. Keep sharing it, keep challenging us, and keep believing that together, we can make Minnesota the best place in the country to milk cows, raise families, and grow the dairy future. 🌱



Federal Order Summary — October 2025							
Federal Order No.	Name	Producer Deliveries	Class I Producer Receipts	Class I Utilization	Class I Price	Producer Price Differential	Change From Previous Year
		*** Thousand Pounds ***		%	***** Dollars per Cwt. *****		
1	Northeast	2,306,374	683,360	29.6	23.1	\$1.29	\$1.21
5	Appalachian	430,447	327,632	76.1	\$23.64	*NA	*NA
6	Florida	217,158	178,199	82.1	\$0.00	*NA	*NA
7	Southeast	267,704	213,666	79.8	\$0.00	*NA	*NA
30	Upper Midwest	1,527,196	171,804	11.3	\$21.24	\$0.14	\$0.61
32	Central	997,765	368,857	37.0	\$21.24	\$0.13	\$1.30
33	Midwest	1,885,503	605,277	32.1	\$21.84	\$0.56	\$1.23
51	California	1,788,465	421,937	23.6	\$20.84	(\$1.37)	\$0.01
124	Pacific Northwest	522,364	140,658	26.9	\$20.74	(\$0.75)	\$0.43
126	Southwest	879,128	349,677	39.8	\$21.74	(\$0.02)	\$0.81
131	Arizona	280,762	127,734	45.5	\$20.64	*NA	*NA
<b>All Market Average or Total</b>		<b>11,102,867</b>	<b>3,588,801</b>	<b>32.3%</b>			

Producer Milk by Class — October 2025									
Federal Order 30				Federal Order 33			Federal Order 126		
	%	Product Pounds	Price \$/cwt.	%	Product Pounds	Price \$/cwt.	%	Product Pounds	Price \$/cwt.
Class I	11.30	171,803,752	\$21.24	32.10	605,276,831	\$21.84	39.78	349,677,384	\$21.74
Class II	10.30	158,057,493	\$16.02	24.17	455,645,684	\$16.02	16.10	141,527,716	\$16.02
Class III	69.10	1,055,528,743	\$16.91	33.02	622,657,195	\$16.91	3.46	30,511,740	\$16.91
Class IV	9.30	141,806,356	\$14.30	10.71	201,923,052	\$14.30	40.66	357,411,641	\$14.30
<b>Total* =</b>		<b>1,527,196,344</b>			<b>1,885,502,762</b>			<b>879,128,481</b>	
<b>Total Value =</b>		<b>\$296,493,617.78</b>			<b>\$74,326,908</b>			<b>\$172,577,838</b>	

Producer Prices — Federal Orders 30, 33, & 126										
Month/Year	FO 30 Producer Price Differential (\$ per cwt.)	FO 30 Statistical Uniform Price @ 3.50% (\$ per cwt.)	FO 33 Producer Price Differential (\$ per cwt.)	FO 33 Statistical Uniform Price @ 3.50% (\$ per cwt.)	FO 126 Producer Price Differential (\$ per cwt.)	FO 126 Statistical Uniform Price @ 3.50% (\$ per cwt.)	Butterfat Price (\$ per lb.)	Protein Price (\$ per lb.)	Other Solids Price (\$ per lb.)	SCC Adjustment Rate (\$ per cwt.)
Jul-24	\$0.25	\$20.04	\$1.42	\$21.21	\$1.65	\$21.44	3.572	1.9466	0.2571	0.00099
Aug-24	\$0.20	\$20.86	\$1.06	\$21.72	\$1.41	\$22.07	3.5632	2.1756	0.2959	0.00102
Sep-24	(\$0.24)	\$23.10	(\$0.62)	\$22.72	(\$0.45)	\$22.89	3.6114	2.9249	0.343	0.00114
Oct-24	(\$0.47)	\$22.38	(\$0.67)	\$22.18	(\$0.83)	\$22.02	3.0851	3.3238	0.3705	0.00112
Nov-24	\$0.38	\$20.33	\$1.60	\$21.55	\$1.81	\$21.76	3.0623	2.316	0.4049	0.00096
Dec-24	\$0.36	\$18.98	\$1.89	\$20.51	\$1.93	\$20.55	2.9104	1.9637	0.4493	0.00088
Jan-25	\$0.13	\$20.47	\$0.51	\$20.85	\$1.02	\$21.36	2.946	2.3267	0.5384	0.00094
Feb-25	\$0.13	\$20.31	\$0.64	\$20.82	\$0.92	\$21.10	2.8186	2.5337	0.4799	0.00095
Mar-25	\$0.20	\$18.82	\$1.10	\$19.72	\$1.20	\$19.82	2.6242	2.4606	0.3647	0.00091
Apr-25	\$0.27	\$17.75	\$1.32	\$18.80	\$1.57	\$19.05	2.6406	2.1682	0.3087	0.00087
May-25	\$0.07	\$18.64	\$0.23	\$18.80	\$0.59	\$19.16	2.6627	2.481	0.3222	0.00092
Jun-25	\$0.28	\$19.10	\$0.55	\$19.37	\$0.52	\$19.34	2.7378	2.5328	0.2914	0.00097
Jul-25	\$0.63	\$17.95	\$2.35	\$19.67	\$2.08	\$19.40	2.8435	1.873	0.3092	0.00088
Aug-25	\$0.58	\$17.82	\$2.24	\$19.48	\$2.01	\$19.25	2.7255	1.9646	0.3204	0.00088
Sep-25	\$0.35	\$17.94	\$0.92	\$18.51	\$0.83	\$18.42	2.1925	2.7062	0.3207	0.0009
Oct-25	\$0.14	\$17.05	\$0.56	\$17.47	(\$0.02)	\$16.89	1.8252	2.8761	0.336	0.00087

## Engage in local conversations: Your voice matters



Erin Tomasik  
*Community relations  
manager*

Across Wisconsin, towns and counties are continuing to discuss different ways they can regulate livestock agriculture. In Northwestern Wisconsin, towns with very little farmland are discussing implementing ordinances that

would significantly restrict farms from becoming a Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO). In Portage County, Wis., an ad-hoc committee is discussing additional, burdensome, enforcement of large livestock operations. These

communities are claiming that the overreaching regulations are to “protect small, family farms.”

However, they lack addressing any of the issues livestock agriculture is actually facing today such as

lower milk prices, the rising cost of implements or preparing for the next generation.

It is imperative that the livestock farmers’ voices are heard in Wisconsin. One way you can do this is by ensuring your county’s Land Conservation Committee has the proper agricultural representative appointed. In 2023,

Wisconsin Act 32 came into effect, eliminating the requirement for the Farm Service Agency to sit on the committee and replacing that role with someone engaged in agricultural use. The statutory definition of engaging in agriculture ranges, but includes crop production, keeping livestock, floriculture or aquaculture, and forest management (§91.01(2)(a)(1-7).

Over the past few years, more and more counties around Wisconsin have been revising their “Manure Storage Ordinance”, which is housed in the Land Conservation Department. These revisions must be discussed and approved by the Land Conservation Committee, but there is a clear lack of agricultural knowledge by many of those serving on the committee. The agricultural representative’s role would be crucial in any potential revisions being discussed as they can assist in educating the committee while also engaging other farmers in the area. It has been over two years since Act 32 went into effect, and we are consistently finding Land Conservation Committees without a representative appointed.

Please reach out to your county’s Land Conservation Committee chairperson (or similar committee if outside Wisconsin) and verify that there is someone representing agriculture on that committee. Without farmers speaking up, local officials will continue to pass unnecessary, costly regulations that could have a major impact on the farming community. 📣

**It is imperative  
that the livestock  
farmers’ voices  
are heard in  
Wisconsin.**



## How We Got Here: Dairy farmers share their stories

*Listen now on Dairy Stream*

Dairy Stream is proud to bring back the “How We Got Here” podcast series. This three-part series, sponsored by BMO, showcases dairy farmers as they discuss the history of their farms, the journeys they’ve undertaken to get to where they are today and the significant role they’ve played in helping to move dairy forward.

Podcast host Joanna Guza deep dives into the stories of innovative farmers, highlighting how they’ve overcome challenges and made advancements on their farms, as well as their outlook on the future of farming and the industry. Each episode features a dairy farmer and a representative from BMO who has experience in agricultural banking.

“Farmers have remarkable stories and a strong commitment to their work,” Guza said. “It’s been wonderful to be able to uncover the influences and experiences that have shaped these

people into who they are today and how their farms operate.”

### Episodes in the How We Got Here series include:



Jim Mlsna, owner of Ocooch Dairy in Hillsboro, Wis.

**Ocooch Dairy in Hillsboro, Wisconsin:** The first episode in this series features dairy farmer Jim Mlsna, owner of Ocooch Dairy. His farm milks about 930 cows and farms 1,450 acres. He’s accompanied by Brad Guse of BMO, who has over 30 years of experience in agricultural banking.

**Melichar Broad Acres in Port Washington, Wisconsin:** In this episode, meet Adam and Kendall Melichar, owners of Melichar Broad Acres. They milk 1,750 cows and farm 1,700 acres. The Melichars are joined by Jen Peal, who oversees a diverse portfolio of agricultural production relationships, bringing over 20 years of experience in the banking industry.



Dan Scheeps, owner of Scheeps Dairy in Alma, Wis.

**Scheeps Dairy in Alma, Wisconsin:** The final episode in the series features Dan Scheeps, owner of Scheeps Dairy, where he and his brother, Ken, milk 1,850 cows and manage 2,700 acres. Dan is joined by Paul Salm of BMO, who has over 30 years of experience in the banking industry.

To learn more and listen to the Dairy Stream podcast, visit [dairyforward.com/dairy-stream](http://dairyforward.com/dairy-stream).



Scan here to listen to the How We Got Here series!



Adam and Kendall Melichar, owners of Melichar Broad Acres in Port Washington, Wis.



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Brought to you by the Voice of Milk

Engage in talks on policy, sustainability, market trends, new technology, industry news and more with dairy leaders.

## Permitting and regulatory updates



Tim Baumgartner  
Director of  
regulatory &  
permitting services

It's hard to believe another year is drawing to a close. We were generally fortunate to have good crops this year and, overall, a good harvest season. Applying fall nutrients progressed smoothly and is getting

completed under favorable weather conditions. As we wind down, here are a few general reminders on items due for permitting compliance.

**180-day marker:** Be sure to record the date your 180-day marker was visible between October 1 and November 30 to meet permit compliance.

**Annual Reports:** Annual reports are due by January 31, 2026. Quarterly reports, manure logs and yearly calendars all need to be up to date for submission

in the report. It is a good idea to communicate with your agronomist to be sure the information needed is current so the report can be submitted on time.

**Soil Samples:** Samples are needed every four years to make the fields eligible to be included in your Nutrient Management Plan, and the Department is getting much more critical of land that has not been resampled in a timely manner.

**Manure spreading in winter:** It is important to stay aware of land conditions to prevent applying liquid manure on frozen and snow-covered ground. With the drier fall conditions, this should

not be an issue, but the weather can change rapidly this time of year.

**Gilbert Farms update:**

The Public hearing for Gilbert Farms, located in Sturgeon Bay, Wis., held on November 5, was the first permitting hearing held in person since before COVID, and as expected, brought out many individuals to comment on the farm.

While there are no official numbers on the amount of comments submitted at the time of this being published, the ag community was well represented at the event. Several of the farms' neighbors spoke on behalf of the Gilberts' well-run operation and the dedication the family has to their cows, community and the environment. We also had a number of dairy farmers submit comments, including our organizations' leaders, Heidi Fischer, Edge board president, Travis Spiers, DBA vice president and Paul Cornette, Farmers for Sustainable Food board president. While there was some opposition at the hearing, the support for the Gilberts at their permit hearing was evident and represented the dairy community well.

I would also like to congratulate Rob-N-Cin Farms on the successful issuance of their WPDES permit on October 1.

If you are considering expanding your farm or looking for support in renewing your permit, reach out to me at (920) 527-0623 or [tbaumgartner@voiceofmilk.com](mailto:tbaumgartner@voiceofmilk.com) to learn more about Maestro and how we can support your farm. 📞



Annual reports  
are due by  
January 31,  
2026.



The **only** program providing independent and complete permitting consultation to dairy farms.

Contact Us

Tim Baumgartner

Director of Regulatory & Permitting Services

[tbaumgartner@voiceofmilk.com](mailto:tbaumgartner@voiceofmilk.com) | (920) 527-0623

## Conversation and collaboration drives permitting process forward *Written by Rachel Malcore Goblisch, Voice of Milk*



Justin Peterson and his wife, Louisa, managers and part-owners of Creamery Creek Holsteins in Bangor, Wis., had been holding steady just under the CAFO cow-count threshold for about 10 years. In 2024, they decided to take a leap and expand their herd, adding about 1,000 cows in a robotic facility.

Expanding their herd was important to the Petersons, because they felt their growth would make them more competitive in the industry and allow their family to one day bring in the next generation.

Coincidentally, around the same time, Edge launched the Maestro permitting program, a program designed to assist farmers in navigating the complexities

of obtaining and maintaining a WPDES permit.

“We were just starting to venture down the pathway for CAFO permitting when Maestro was first unveiled,” Justin said. “When the DNR requested we put in monitoring wells, that’s when we really started engaging with Tim (Baumgartner) and the program to help work through those conversations.”

Tim Baumgartner, director of regulatory and permitting services, leads this first-of-its-kind program, which provides farmers with the tools and resources needed to streamline the permitting process.

“Working with Tim has been fantastic for us,” he said. “Tim and his team have a great network of trusted

individuals, and he helps provide guidance and direction for us.”

Transitioning smoothly with the support of the Maestro team has been beneficial for Justin and Louisa, especially given the many responsibilities they already have on the farm that keep them quite busy.

“We communicate with Tim every month through Maestro when he provides reminders and helpful checklists to make sure we’re meeting necessary deadlines for our permit,” Justin said. “He’s also great for bouncing ideas or questions off. He’ll either know the answer or know who to point me to talk to, and quite honestly, the price is kind of a bargain when you consider the hourly rate for other expert consultants.”

The program offers support to the farm to help maintain ongoing compliance and reporting.

“Working with Tim and Maestro demonstrates our proactive approach to state agencies, as we take the initiative to tackle challenges on our farm while progressing forward with ongoing collaboration,” Justin said.

For more information about the Maestro permitting program, visit [edgedairy.com/maestro](https://edgedairy.com/maestro). 



**“Tim and his team have a great network of trusted individuals, and he helps provide guidance and direction for us.”**



## Sedron transforms manure management and conservation at Kinnard Farms *Written by Rachel Malcore Goblisch, Voice of Milk*

At Kinnard Farms in Casco, Wis., manure management processes will look quite different by summer of 2026. Sedron, a leader in upcycling waste into valuable products, is installing its Varcor® System. The innovative technology is designed to separate valuable nutrients from manure by removing water and extracting nutrients to create high-concentration, low-volume fertilizer products. Kinnard Farms is one of only three dairies worldwide to implement this technology, alongside two others located in Indiana. The system is expected to be fully operational by the end of summer 2026.

*Lucas Reid,  
Sedron's vice  
president of  
development*



The Varcor System processes manure, where nutrients are in a very diluted form, and separates out end products, including clean water, a concentrated 10% organic liquid nitrogen fertilizer and a dry fertilizer.

“Our technology is a win for the farm, the community and the environment,” Lucas Reid, Sedron’s vice president of development, said. “We’re able to process the manure in real time and extract all the nutrients out of it so all you have left is clean water. It essentially removes all the nuisances associated with manure management, including hauling and application of manure and odor concerns.”

The Varcor technology has the potential to address real challenges for dairy farmers in terms of manure management, particularly for those in Wisconsin, where cropping land is often segmented into smaller fields. This results in higher costs and handling burdens on the farm, because it requires trucking in large volumes and adhering to appropriate application regulations for property line and well setbacks.

“Farmers can use the nutrients, the same nutrients in manure (nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium), but they’re really concentrated and now they’re separated out in much smaller

volumes,” Reid said. “We can pelletize or granulate the dry fertilizer product

so it can be applied using existing application equipment, and farmers can apply it when

planting, side dress it, top dress it or knife it in. It opens up a lot of opportunities.”

It also has the potential to significantly reduce a farm’s greenhouse gas emissions by eliminating the use of lagoons for long-term storage and also the land application of manure, which often requires conventional tillage practices due to the high percentage of water in manure.



“Lee Kinnard (owner of Kinnard Farms) has been a leader in technology advancement within dairy and agriculture, and his facility is probably one of the most advanced dairy farms in the country,” Reid said. “His legacy is really how do we continue to be stewards of the land and put it in a better position than when we found it. He carries that through in manure application, soil health, regenerative farming practices, all the way through to his milking herds.”

Kinnard expects to see several significant benefits once the Valcor technology is operational.

“Reducing our trucking traffic is going to be a noticeable difference right off the bat,” Kinnard said. “Our manure is 97% water and 3% solids. It doesn’t make sense to have 100 trucks going down the road with only three loads of nutrients. By taking out the water, you’re no longer hauling water; you’re hauling nutrients.”

Another advantage is that the manure is processed in real time, rather than being stored in a lagoon, allowing all the valuable nitrogen in the manure to be captured.

“When you put manure in a lagoon, some of the nitrogen is lost to the atmosphere through volatilization.



*This past summer, members of the Peninsula Pride Farms farmer-led group toured the Sedron facility at Kinnard Farms.*

When we’re no longer storing manure and instead converting it to fertilizer

right away, we’re capturing all of that nitrogen,” Kinnard said. “On top of that, the process separates out the nitrogen, making it much easier for us to balance the nutrients in our soils to the precise needs of the crops we are growing.”

Sedron is positively transforming the approach to manure management and conservation.

“Sedron is very innovative; they truly invented a better mousetrap,” Kinnard said. 

*The innovative technology is designed to separate valuable nutrients from manure by removing water and extracting nutrients to create high-concentration, low-volume fertilizer products. Graph courtesy of sedron.com.*

## COMMON WASTEWATER INPUTS



**BIOSOLIDS AND SEPTAGE**  
(1-25% solids)

**OR**



**MANURE**  
(2-6% solids)



**VARCOR®**



**DRY SOLIDS**  
Fertilizer, alternative fuel



**CONCENTRATED NITROGEN**  
Fertilizer



**DISTILLED WATER**  
Irrigation or direct discharge to waterways

# Immigration Reform for dairy isn't politics —

# It's food security.



## OUR FARMS

- ✘ Are where technology and innovation intersect
- ✘ Need employees across all areas within our farming businesses
  - ✘ The parlor
  - ✘ Herd management
  - ✘ Data collection and analysis
  - ✘ Maternity pen
  - ✘ Nutrition specialty

## WE NEED

- ✘ Access to an entry level workforce that is:
  - ✘ Reliable
  - ✘ Consistent
  - ✘ Safe
- ✘ A system that is:
  - ✘ Streamlined
  - ✘ Cost effective
  - ✘ Timely
  - ✘ Reliable
- ✘ A program that embraces the 365 days a year nature of the dairy business model

For decades, dairy farmers have been raising the issue of an inadequate agricultural visa system for dairy employees and asking for reform, only to be lost in the broader partisan divide that grows deeper with each election cycle. Their concerns, while urgent and specific, are often overshadowed by the sheer scale and complexity of the nation's immigration challenges, making it difficult for consensus around targeted legislation addressing the unique needs of agriculture specific sectors like dairy.

Dairy's need for immigration reform is not a partisan issue, it is a food security issue that ultimately is a national security issue. Food security is dependent on a reliable, skilled and safe workforce that harvest crops, care for livestock and process the food to keep American families fed.

Dairy farmers have reached a critical point. We are experiencing workforce constraints and disruptions to our farms. We are calling on our leaders in Congress and the Administration to hear us and do what others have been unwilling or unable to do – fix the farm labor crisis. The time for a farmer-led legal workforce solution is now!

We need a solution and are willing to roll up our sleeves alongside policy makers to get the work done so the American dairy farmer and our employees can get back to work.

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For more information visit:  
[edgedairy.com](http://edgedairy.com)

## Edge and FSF launch farmer-led, whole-farm approach to lowering GHG emissions on dairy farms

Edge Dairy Farmer Cooperative and Farmers for Sustainable Food announced the launch of EmPower+, a program that connects farmer-led innovation directly to environmental goals of the dairy value chain.

EmPower+ offers data support services and a portfolio of production efficiency solutions designed to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The program pairs on-farm innovation with a robust accounting methodology to measure, report and verify emission reductions at the farm level.

This farmer-led, data-driven initiative creates a practical, transparent path for verified emission reductions to be embedded directly into milk procurement, creating new opportunities to recognize and reward measurable environmental performance across the dairy value chain.

“Dairy farmers have a long history of innovation and environmental stewardship and are ready to lead the next generation of solutions,” said Tim Trotter, CEO of Edge and its affiliate Farmers for Sustainable Food, which will administer the program.

“Through EmPower+ we are building a collaborative, industry-aligned effort to promote and support farmer-led solutions to meet today’s environmental challenges,” Trotter said. “For too long, sustainability programs have taken a one-size-fits-all approach. But dairy farms are complex ecosystems — lasting progress requires looking at the whole picture, from cow care and nutrition to crop production and manure management. Our goal is to give farmers the tools and

metrics they need to deliver verified reductions in greenhouse gas emissions for the industry.”

The development of this transparent, whole-farm, outcomes-based model positions dairy farmers as leaders in sustainable agriculture by aligning the interests of farmers, processors and food companies. Built on credible data, third-party verification and full-farm GHG performance metrics, in alignment with the global GHG Protocol, the program establishes a foundation for shared value and accountability across the entire value chain.

EmPower+ is a multi-stage program grounded in trusted data collection. Farms participating with their processors are supported in creating a comprehensive data stream with protected information to both the farmer and the processor. Farms can choose to participate independently. In both cases farmers and processors can use the program to meet their business goals:

Farmers are empowered to understand how their management practices impact their footprint to make informed decisions that improve efficiency and reduce emissions across the entire farm.

Processors use the data to meet value chain reporting requirements and demonstrate measurable Scope 3 GHG reductions.

“Edge’s vision is to provide the programs farmers need to be the most successful and engaged in the market,” Trotter said. “The EmPower+ program is one more way we are



**Empowering  
Results.  
Backed by  
Science.**

stepping up to bring our members, and all dairy farmers, the tools they need to compete in an ever-changing marketplace.”

To learn more about EmPower+, visit <https://edgedairy.com/empower>. 



# TIMELY AND ACCURATE PAYMENTS PROVISION TO THE FARM BILL

For about 100 years the regular practices of timely payments and consistent standards - verified milk weights, tests and samples - have been dairy industry norms. As the industry changes, both cooperative and proprietary processor participation in the Federal Milk Marketing Order has become less consistent.

## Key Points



Currently, only about 70% of U.S. milk is covered under the Federal Milk Marketing Orders. This leaves 30% (68 billion pounds) of U.S. milk and the farmers that produce it without FMMO assurances.



When a processor is de-pooled, farmers are no longer guaranteed the certainty of these practices as they are outside of FMMO and oversight of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service.



With the exception of fluid milk processors, all manufacturers located in Federal Order Markets have the option whether or not to participate in the Federal Order structure.



Codifying these standard business practices will provide consistency and assurance to farmers that these protections they share with their processor will be maintained.



Timely payments and required third-party verification provide a structure of mutual confidence and transparency between processors and farmers.



These measures must be pursued through legislation to ensure they extend beyond the FMMO structure. This will provide consistency and continued assurances that these practices are maintained.

*Endorsed by: AgCountry Farm Credit Services, American Farm Bureau Federation, Compeer Financial, Dairy Business Association, Edge Dairy Farmer Cooperative, Minnesota Farm Bureau Federation, National All Jersey, Nebraska State Dairy Association, South Dakota Dairy Producers, Western Iowa Dairy Alliance.*

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# Let us know how we're doing: Your feedback matters!

This issue marks the first year of the Voice of Milk Connector - and we would like your feedback! Please complete the short survey found at the QR code to the right to let us know if the content is valuable to you and what you enjoy about the publication or would like to see that is not currently covered.



Let us know how we're doing and what you'd like to see more of in the next year of the Connector!

## We Are the Voice of Milk.

We are a force of independent dairy organizations, united across state lines to make sure dairy farmers are heard. From local communities to Congress to the supply chain value, we speak up where it matters most.

We advocate for policies that are smart, science-driven and built to last—because the future of dairy depends on it.

***This is dairy's voice. This is your voice.***

Visit [voiceofmilk.com](http://voiceofmilk.com) to learn more.





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