2020 is ending and it has been a year like none other. Despite COVID-19 and all the associated fallout, elections still happen, and the process continues to move forward. With that in mind, DBA is preparing for the legislative session to come.

We have made a concerted effort over the last several years to do more legislative outreach to make sure we build a strong base of support for our proposals. That has included more opportunities for member engagement with their lawmakers. We plan to continue that in the 2021-22 legislative session, even if some of those opportunities might need to happen virtually.

We have many policy priorities for the upcoming session. First, we plan to work on having some of the “orphaned” bills from the 2019-20 session reintroduced and passed. In even numbered years, the business of the Legislature generally wraps up early to...
Policy & Purpose

Policy Radar

COVID-19 limited liability legislation

This legislation has been circulated by state Sen. Chris Kapenga, R-Delafield, and Reps. Mark Born, R-Beaver Dam, and Dan Knodl, R-Germantown. The bill protects individuals and businesses from threat of litigation by providing “safe harbor” to owners, lessees, occupants and others in control of a premises so long as they follow public health orders and take reasonable precautions to protect the public. This liability exemption does not protect bad actors who knowingly violate public health orders or act in a manner that is reckless.

The bill is unlikely to move forward this session. Barring a lame-duck session following the general election in November, the issue will be debated in the upcoming session in January.

Dairy Innovation Hub

The Dairy Innovation Hub inaugural conference, Dairy Summit, is slated to be held virtually on Nov. 18. DBA was a key proponent of Dairy Hub funding, which was part of the Dairy Task Force 2.0 recommendations and included in the 2019-20 state budget.

DBA will moderate a legislative panel discussion at 2 p.m. on Nov. 18 that will feature Sen. Howard Marklein, R-Spring Green, and Reps. Dave Considine, D-Baraboo, and Tony Kurtz, R-Wonewoc.

The Dairy Summit will host various programs throughout the day. DBA members Amy Penterman, from Dutch Dairy in Thorp and Mitch Breunig, from Mystic Valley Dairy in Sauk City will participate in a discussion about challenges facing dairy farmers.

Full agenda and free registration info can be found at bit.ly/2IKbpUC.

(continued from page 1)

accommodate the need to campaign for re-election. This year, COVID-19 cut the Legislature’s schedule even shorter. Several bills passed out of the state Assembly, but never got their vote in the state Senate because the last floor period planned for March was canceled. Some of these bills deserve to return in the coming session. That includes three bills that dealt with the issue of milk, dairy product and meat labeling. All three would add Wisconsin to a growing number of states that are taking a stand against misleading labels on plant-based or lab-grown products.

Key long-term policy priorities

In addition to some bills that almost made it across the finish line this year, DBA is going to continue pushing for several long-term policy priorities that have yet to be passed. That includes proposals to reimagine the CAFO program to make Wisconsin a more competitive place to dairy, developing a driver’s cards for non-citizens and finding a workable solution to our transportation funding problems.

Some of the “orphaned” bills from last session overlap with our long-term policy priorities. This is the case when it comes to our desire to further proactive efforts to improve water quality. Farmers are invested in this discussion and they want a partner to develop positive change. Last session, we saw a major focus on water quality with the formation of the Speaker’s Water Quality Task Force. Sadly, none of the bills recommended by the task force passed because of the canceled Senate floor period. We hope the best of these measures will return for a vote in the coming session. We also acknowledge that we must do even more than what was envisioned by the Task Force. For example, we should rethink how our state’s non-point rules are enforced to make sure all farms are meeting the same basic standards. The burden should not fall solely on permitted livestock farms.

DBA aware of lean state budgets

Finally, the state is facing lean budgetary times because of the economic impact of COVID-19. That means we need to get creative with our proposals to lawmakers because we do not want to propose ideas that have little chance of being funded. Instead, we will look at budget-neutral regulatory reforms that can promote innovation on dairy farms and save farmers time and money. For example, we will be supporting the move to allow broader use of telemedicine and remote services by veterinarians.

Throughout the upcoming session, we hope you will be engaged with us. We want and need to hear from you about the items we are working on. What could we be doing better and where are we missing the mark? We also need your help to make lawmakers understand the practical implications of the issues about which we lobby. We might live in strange times, but there is no reason they cannot also be highly productive.

We also need your help to make lawmakers understand the practical implications of the issues about which we lobby. We might live in strange times, but there is no reason they cannot also be highly productive.

Sign up for our text alerts.

Text DAIRY to 50457.
Customers show trust in agriculture

By Tim Trotter, executive director

The past eight months have been surreal for many of us due to the pandemic. Tensions have run high as people struggle to understand what’s happening and how we move forward.

Although COVID-19 has been chaotic for all of us in dairy, the analytics firm Gallup has revealed some positive news about agriculture. For the first time in Gallup’s 20 years of tracking Americans’ views of business and industry sectors, farming and agriculture has the highest positive rating, with 69 percent of the country trusting what those in agriculture are doing. Interestingly, the grocery and restaurant industries were second and third.

Customers have been closely connected to farming throughout the pandemic because of an intense focus on food. Shifting consumption and shopping behaviors due to social distancing and stay-at-home orders have caused people to think more about where their food comes from. Trust in agriculture has grown as our industry has adapted and responded to the changing customer needs. DBA will leverage that trust to build a better future for dairy.

When we look at the operations of DBA, we too understand that to be a trusted organization we must deliver on our promises. DBA will not deviate from the tasks at hand during COVID-19. Our policy team continues to deploy strategies to protect and support our farmers at the local, state and federal levels. We are a constant and reliable resource for lawmakers and policymakers, advising them on critical tools to help farmers and processors.

At the same time, we are connecting our members with their elected officials to make sure those relationships remain strong. Much of this has been done through video meetings and conference calls, and when possible, we’ve facilitated in-person meetings. The situation is certainly not ideal, but we have made these interactions effective.

We have had tremendous engagement in 2020. I would like to thank you for being involved.

Trust comes not from what you say but from what you do. Gallup has confirmed the overwhelming trust Americans have in what farmers do. DBA will leverage that trust to build a better future for dairy.

“Trust in agriculture has grown as our industry has adapted and responded to the changing customer needs. DBA will leverage that trust to build a better future for dairy.”

Stay informed:
Need to add a team member to our email list? Send contact information to info@dairyforward.com.
A new resource is available to guide farmers and their partners in conservation on the road to success with the launch of the Producer-Led Group Roadmap: Finding Success in Farmer-Led Watershed Organizations.

The document is the result of a collaboration between the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP), the Dairy Strong Sustainability Alliance (DSSA) and The Nature Conservancy.

Farmers are always working to improve in every area of their farm, and we are seeing a growing interest in new conservation practices and the farmer-led watershed group model. We want to help farmers and partners understand the key components to creating and maintaining an effective organization. This is way for farmers to learn from each other and to see results.

This roadmap is intended for groups that are either funded through DATCP’s Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant program or for those that are functioning without the state funding. These farmer-led organizations foster innovation and shared learning among members to bring about continuous measurable improvements in areas such as water quality and soil health by exploring innovative on-farm conservation practices.

The roadmap guides groups through all of the necessary steps, including setting goals, membership requirements, securing DATCP and outside funding, tracking outcomes, documenting progress, establishing communications, developing work plans and reporting.

“We are excited to partner with the DSSA and The Nature Conservancy to offer this guide as a resource to producer-led groups. The Producer-Led Roadmap will help new and established groups be successful over the long term, create mechanisms for groups to measure their success, and ultimately strengthen our Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant program,” said Sara Walling.
New resource lays groundwork for farmer conservation programs

Steve Richter, director of agricultural strategies with The Nature Conservancy, said the guide will be an important resource. “Producer-led groups have been very successful at helping farmers learn which conservation practices are working for each other and how to implement them on their farms to build soil health and protect clean water,” Richter said. “We’re excited to be a partner in the creation of this new guide, which we hope will help more Wisconsin farmers work together and learn from each other.”

The roadmap is available on the DBA or DATCP website.

Join the Dairy Strong Sustainability Alliance

The Dairy Strong Sustainability Alliance provides support for farmer-led initiatives around Wisconsin with potential to expand around the Midwest. These non-profit organizations are farmer led and industry supported. They work to foster innovation and shared learning among members to bring about continuous measurable improvements in areas important in their community, such as water quality and soil health.

DSSA serves as an incubator and support system for the organizations. The alliance offers various types of support that each group can choose depending on its individual needs. Examples of services are administrative help, communications, strategic services and connections with experts. DSSA also serves as a conduit between the farmer organizations, experts and other entities that can add value and help in achieving their goals and amplifying their stories. DSSA also helps groups secure funds for research projects or other initiatives they may not otherwise have funding for.

Membership levels:

- Farm group member: Farmer-led conservation groups supported by DSSA: $1,000
- General members: Includes farmers, farmer cooperatives, dairy processors, conservation group directly supporting farmers, vendors or service providers, government agencies, university or dairy and trade non-profit:
  - Individual farmers: $500
  - All others: $2,500

Contact Lauren at lbrey@voiceofmilk.com or (920) 883-0020 x107 to get involved.
Conservation efforts change the landscape

By Steven Schauer, communications specialist

Something is growing in farm fields across the state and it is happening at a rapid pace. What used to be uncommon as recently as 15 years ago is becoming a widely used practice.

Cover crops are being planted with different machinery and in several varieties to help protect and improve the land and water. They are being planted with just one seed type or as many as a farmer wants. The most common cover crop is cereal rye and farmers are also planting a mixture of crimson clover, seven top turnip, daikon radish and barley.

Jacob Brey, a member of Peninsula Pride Farms, has been planting cover crops for a few years and has witnessed success.

“One benefit we have seen in our field is increased water retention and building organic matter,” Brey said. “The field we planted the cover crop on has shallow depth to bedrock. What we are trying to do here, because we are not able to apply manure, is build organic matter and increase the soil health.”

Farmers are communicating with other farmers, while also reaching out to county agencies, Natural Resources Conservation Service and UW-Extension staff to assist in formulating the best plan for cover crops.

“It begins with promoting living roots in the soil year-round,” said Josh Kamps, ag educator with UW-Extension in Lafayette County. “Farmers are innovators by nature. They are eager to implement new techniques as part of their farming systems.”

While there has been trial and error happening across Wisconsin, the results are worth the effort.

Clint Hodorff, a member of Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers, hosted a field day this fall. The event occurred less than 12 hours after his fields received 4 inches of rain. Farmers who attended saw very little runoff.

“The reason we plant multi-species cover crops is to help with water infiltration, soil structure and to keep the nutrients in the upper level of the soil structure,” Hodorff said.

The momentum in the use of cover crops is showing no signs of slowing down. Peninsula Pride Farms members, for example, passed the 10,000-acre mark for cover crops in 2019. That’s double what it had been just a couple of years earlier.

Cover crop multi-species mix of Italian rye grass, barkant turnip, daikon radish, berseem white clover and crimson clover were planted into no-till corn at Brey’s field in early June.
STgenetics and DBA partner for Cow Academy

From STgenetics and DBA

STgenetics has partnered with DBA to host a Cow Academy course for DBA members. Hosted by the STgenetics Technical and Sales Support Team, Cow Academy is a direct avenue for herd managers and those alike to learn insight on the dairy industry, data integration and reproduction and genetic management.

As professionals in the industry, STgenetics team members feel a strong responsibility to provide as many tools and resources as possible to dairymen and the industry.

A top goal of Cow Academy is to build understanding and continuity of knowledge across all aspects of the dairy industry. Instead of the intent of simply selling semen, STgenetics wants to reach beyond that to topics such as:

• how beef on dairy markets are progressing
• how to better manage sexed semen use while managing heifer populations
• financial implications of genomic testing for future genetic gain
• data application to on-farm practices

This course aims to create connections between producers in the area and the industry leaders that can provide support to their dairy. If each attendee can bring back even one new piece of information to their farm to improve efficiency and profitability, the course’s main goal will be achieved.

Cow Academy is a venue for employees that do not get the chance to attend management seminars and trainings to feel valued for the inclusive training.

Past cow academies have brought people together and created a community of producers and industry leaders. Cow Academy provides an inviting environment to mingle with and learn from people from various aspects of the industry. The laid-back atmosphere encourages communication and learning in a way that is enjoyable and effective, with small groups helping to limit the intimidation factor of asking questions in front of a group of people. Each dairy has their own management styles and goals but spending time with others and sharing those mentalities is a great tool for improvement on each dairy.

Attendees of Cow Academy can expect to gain knowledge on all factors of reproduction – ranging from heifer inventory management, to grading of beef on dairy cross calves, to the financials of 4M™ high purity semen. They can expect to have an enjoyable, relaxing time with fellow dairymen and women, while gaining important knowledge about industry-leading strategies and management techniques. The chance to meet other farmers and interact with ST employees, will provide the unique opportunity to build understanding and bring back new knowledge for effectively managing a dairy of any size and scale.

This course will be hosted by English-speaking professionals and a Spanish-speaking translator will be available along with materials in both languages to ensure attendees feel as comfortable as possible.

You can now register for the Dec. 1-3 STGenetics Cow Academy up by visiting dairyforward.com/events.

If you need assistance, contact Nicole Barlass at nbarlass@dairyforward.com.

Cow Academy early-bird registration ends Nov. 17

Preventing combine fires

From Hastings Mutual

Prevention and preparation are essential when it comes to preventing combine fires. The number one measure of prevention is making sure the machine is kept clean.

Below are some tips to prevent a combine fire:

• Remove caked-on oil, grease and crop residue using a pressure washer.
• Check coolant and oil levels daily.
• Frequently blow leaves, chaff and other harvest materials from the engine area using an air compressor or portable leaf blower.
• Remove crop residue wrapped around bearings, belts and other moving parts.
• Inspect exhaust system for leaks, damage and crop residue accumulation.
• Keep a 10-pound ABC dry chemical fire extinguisher in the cab.
• Mount a 20-pound ABC dry chemical fire extinguisher outside the machine at ground level.
• Carry a cell phone.
• Always have a plan.

Being prepared can’t prevent the worst from happening, which can cause thousands of dollars in damage. It is estimated that combine and tractor fires cause over $20 million in property losses each year and millions more because of lost time and downed crops during the busy harvest season. Fires not only cause huge losses and waste time, they also cause nearly 50 serious injuries each year, and in some instances a person is killed because of a farm machinery fire.
Register now for Dairy Strong 2021:
Free farmer registration ends Dec. 15

Rebekah Morrow
events and executive administrator


This year’s conference, which will be virtual, will provide valuable opportunities for sharing and collecting ideas and connecting with other dedicated people in agriculture.

Each day’s keynote speakers, presentations and discussion sessions will follow a theme. There will be plenty of ways for attendees to interact.

Dairy Strong is a premiere conference that brings together a wide variety of farmers, corporate professionals and others.

Farmers who register before Dec. 15 will receive two free passes per farm to the conference. We encourage all to register by Dec. 31 to receive a discount on the registration fee. Register by visiting dairystrong.org.