When Slick Willie Sutton (a fine name for a lobbyist, although he was a professional criminal) was asked why he robs banks, he logically responded, “Because that’s where the money is.”

Similarly, that’s why lobbyists spend so much time working to get their priorities included in the state’s biennium budget. It is the state’s two-year spending plan. If you have a priority that could cost money, it is only natural to try to get it done in this legislation.

This budget cycle, we pushed hard in two main areas: assistance for dairy processors and water quality initiatives. We had some success in both areas.

Additional funds were dedicated to the dairy processor grant program. Also, funds were redesignated to pay for additional efforts by the agriculture department to promote Wisconsin ag exports. The department already does some of this for dairy exports. The shift in funding would mean expanded efforts. As the budget was
Policy Radar

Truth-in-labeling proposals

Three bills aimed at prohibiting the use of dairy and meat labels on imitation food products unanimously passed in the state Assembly on June 22, for the second consecutive session. The bills now wait to be scheduled for a vote by the full Senate. Gov. Tony Evers has indicated he would likely sign the bills if they reach his desk.

DBA and 12 other agricultural organizations submitted a letter to Assembly representatives encouraging passage. The same group was advocating for the Senate to schedule the bills for a vote during the June floor period. However, several Republican senators are opposed to the bills, standing on free-speech arguments and concerns over penalty provisions that opponents say could affect grocers. The Plant-Based Foods Association, based in San Francisco, Calif., has registered in opposition. Senate leadership and the bills’ author, Sen. Howard Marklein, R-Spring Green, have said they will look to the fall legislative session, which runs from September through November, to bring the bills to the floor.

Exports legislation to watch

Several proposals that began as part of the budget process have been removed and will continue as separate legislation.

An example is SB 325/AB 314, creating an ag export program. The bill passed the Senate 32-0 but has yet to get a hearing in the Assembly Ag Committee. Also, SB 68/AB 54 would reduce participation time in the Farmland Preservation Program from 15 to 10 years and increase the per-acre tax credit.

making its way through the Legislature, a separate bill on ag export promotion was also being done. It would do even more to expand the program if it passes.

The previous legislative session ended abruptly because of COVID-19, leaving many bills unfinished, including several pieces of water quality legislation. Last session, Gov. Tony Evers declared the year of clean drinking water, and Speaker Vos created a legislative task force on water issues. DBA would still like to see some of the task force’s proposals become law. We have also partnered with other groups on a clean water initiative to advocate for the state to help address other water quality challenges.

We know it has been far too easy to simply point fingers instead of working toward solutions. Inevitably, some of those fingers are pointed at farmers. Our initiative is an attempt to change this unproductive approach. Achieving and maintaining clean water is going to require collaboration as well as significant investments by the state. DBA and our partners proposed a bold spending plan with that in mind. Much of what we were seeking has not been included in this budget, but there may be other options to get these ideas enacted.

At the same time, the budget the Legislature sent to Evers did contain some positive water quality provisions for which DBA lobbied:

- Increased grant funding for farmer-led watershed conservation groups. DBA so far has partnered with six of these groups across the state to enact conservation practices and track farmers’ progress. These groups let farmers learn from farmers and have really made a difference statewide through the expansion of non-traditional farming practices.
- Increased funding for county conservation programs, from $9.4 million to $11.28 million per year. Conservation departments and our state’s non-point program have never been funded at the level necessary to ensure broad adoption of existing state standards. This is a step in that direction.
- The Well Compensation Grant Program would receive increased funding by $1 million per year. This directly addresses the problem of contaminated wells, which is necessary to give us the time needed to work on long-term solutions.

Most of those involved with government affairs were predicting a drawn-out state budget process lasting into the summer and maybe the fall. We have divided government and posturing has begun for the gubernatorial race already. Neither of those facts would normally indicate a quick budget process. However, the Joint Finance Committee, the Legislature’s budget writing committee, defied those expectations and completed its work efficiently.

While the Legislature might be done with its work, the future of the budget is still unknown right now. Gov. Evers still has the option to veto the bill and make the Legislature try again with a different proposal. Vetoing the entire budget would be highly unusual, though. Indeed, it has not happened since 1931. Much more common is the governor exercising his line-item veto authority, which is very broad in Wisconsin. That power only applies to spending bills, but it does mean the final version of the budget that the governor signs can end up being much different than what the Legislature passed.

DBA will carefully monitor the outcome of the budget process and we expect the governor to have acted on the budget by the time this newsletter reaches your mailbox. We will also push for our other spending priorities to be included in either a supplemental spending bill or handled as stand-alone legislation.
Member participation makes key difference

By Tim Trotter, executive director

There are a lot of positive things happening at DBA, and I want to share a few of them.

DBA’s golf outing last month was perhaps our most successful in terms of the number of golfers and sponsors (more than 300!). The profits from the annual outing and other DBA events go toward supporting our policy initiatives in Madison.

To everyone who participated, I want to say thank you for contributing to such an important function. There is no question our members were eager to get back to in-person events and have some fun with friends, and it all benefits the dairy community.

One of the other ways that members can get involved in DBA’s policy work is through our Policy Picnics. These events are hosted by member farms throughout the state and are sponsored by a number of corporate members. The picnics are open to all members who want to share a meal and hear directly for our government affairs team about the most pressing issues in Madison. This is a prime opportunity for members to directly participate in pushing for effective policy. You can find the schedule for the July picnics on the right side of the newsletter.

And don’t forget DBA’s political action committee. This is an important way to support those lawmakers who go the extra mile to ensure that the dairy community’s interests are front and center. You can find more information about the Dairy PAC and how to contribute by visiting our website, dairyforward.com/DairyPAC.

Sustainability success

Over the past few months, I have been able to attend many farmer-led watershed conservation group meetings in-person or virtually. I am blown away by the excitement and passion for what they are doing individually and collectively. These proactive groups are making a difference and it’s being noticed by people in their communities, state officials, environmental groups, dairy processors and brands. They are truly trailblazers in setting the bar for continuous improvement. Not only are they doing great things, but they are also documenting the positive impact on both the environment and their farm finances. Success in both is vital to achieving resilient farms.

When DBA decided to invest time and resources toward supporting and expanding the watershed model, we had some doubting Thomases. Previously, the policy-only approach found little success. Our membership was ready for a change and has embraced this better, more comprehensive strategy.

Our members hold the key to the future, and entrusting and empowering them to help solve the issues our industry is facing is paying off. We are early in our journey, but I am glad we opted to support our members in a way that will provide sustainable solutions rather than merely relying on the old tactics of the past. Policy does play a role but only with real data and the goal of solving the problems at hand.

Welcome New Members

Church-Site Farms
Kinnard Highland Farm
Milkinaire Dairy
Northside Elevator, Inc.
Scholze Family Farms
Shaun Hardtke
Vaxxinova

Important dates

Policy Picnic @ Larson Acres
July 20 » Evansville

Policy Picnic @ Cornette Dairy
July 21 » Luxemburg

Policy Picnic @ Bomaz Farms
July 21 » Hammond

New Dairy Stream episode
July 21 » podcast app/online

New Dairy Stream episode
Aug. 11 » podcast app/online

Kickin’ it with the Cows race
Aug. 14 » Wrightstown

DBA Packer Tailgate Party
Aug. 21 » Green Bay

dairyforward.com/events

Stay informed:
Need to add a team member to our email list? Send contact information to info@dairyforward.com.
Feed represents the largest variable input cost of production, accounting for 51 percent of total production costs, according to the USDA, and is related to enteric methane emissions. This means the greatest potential to improve profitability and environmental sustainability is to improve the ability of dairy cattle to efficiently convert feed into consumer products.

Efficient feed conversion by dairy cattle has a direct impact on the animal’s carbon footprint. With the dairy industry being under intense scrutiny for its contribution to greenhouse gas emissions, the industry must recognize the urgency to develop and implement innovative technologies to prepare for potential regulations in the future.

STgenetics has seen the huge opportunity to substantially reduce the carbon footprint of dairy production by increasing the feed conversion efficiency of dairy cattle. The EcoFeed® index by STGenetics is an integrated approach to genetic selection based on progeny testing of females to identify sires that produce progeny who consume less feed while maintaining production compared to their herd mates to increase profitability and global sustainability.

How do we define feed conversion efficiency?
The EcoFeed® program utilizes a measure of feed conversion efficiency known as residual feed intake (RFI). RFI is a measure that quantifies the variation in feed intake beyond that needed to support maintenance and performance requirements. RFI can be used in multi-trait selection indexes to simultaneously improve both feed conversion efficiency and other economically relevant traits, as it is independent of body size and production. This makes RFI an ideal trait for the EcoFeed® index as STGenetics® strives to create a future in which dairy cattle produce more outputs with fewer inputs, providing farmers with the economic and environmental sustainability necessary for long term success.

What does the feed efficiency trait from the Holstein association measure?
The feed efficiency trait from the Holstein
Association is a measure of potential net profit a farmer may receive from an increase in production. This trait is calculated from the following information:

- \((\text{Dollar Value of milk produced}) - (\text{Feed costs of extra milk}) - (\text{Extra maintenance costs})\)

\[
FE = (-0.0187 \times \text{Milk}) + (1.28 \times \text{Fat}) + (1.95 \times \text{Protein}) - (12.4 \times \text{BWC})
\]

* Updates to the Total Performance Index® (TPI®) and Type Composites August 2017

This trait is not based on actual measurement of feed consumption, and it does not address the metabolic feed efficiency of animals as maintenance costs are driven by body size. The EcoFeed® index captures the variation in actual feed intake beyond that needed to support maintenance requirements, being independent of body size and performance; therefore, Feed Efficiency (FE) as calculated by the Holstein Association is uncorrelated with STgenetics® EcoFeed® index \((r = 0.07)\).

**How can you use EcoFeed® in your breeding decisions?**

EcoFeed® is an excellent trait to include in your selection criteria for dairy bulls as well as females on your farm. A list of bulls with high EcoFeed® scores can be found at stgen.com and females can receive an EcoFeed® score when they are genomically tested through Genetic Visions-ST™. To incorporate EcoFeed® into your selection program, you can simply identify bulls and females with high EcoFeed® values who also exhibit desirable characteristics for other economically relevant traits as determined by your current production goals.

Subscribe to our Dairy Stream podcast to hear from STgenetics research scientist Jocelyn Johnson about how genetics can impact your on-farm feed bill. This episode will air on Sept. 22.
Sustainability initiative draws national attention

By Jamie Mara, director of strategic communications

A project in southwestern Wisconsin spearheaded by DBA members and partners has earned national praise. The Lafayette Ag Stewardship alliance (LASA), Farmers for Sustainable Food and Grande Cheese Company were recognized in June with an “Outstanding Supply Chain Collaboration” award from the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy. Together with support from The Nature Conservancy and many others, they created and are testing a framework for conservation projects that protect soil and water quality, keep farms financially viable and demonstrate a commitment to sustainability to communities, customers and regulators.

The Framework for Farm-Level Sustainability Projects is a handbook to help farmers determine what conservation practices are most useful for their individual farms and document the environmental and financial effects. The first-of-its-kind framework is being used in a pilot project involving a dozen LASA farms.

LASA President Jim Winn, a DBA member whose dairy is involved in the project, said his group is well suited for the initiative.

“This effort builds on our members’ commitment to environmental stewardship, collaboration and transparency,” Winn said. “The framework gives us a tool to prove to ourselves, our neighbors and those who buy our products that there’s value in being innovative in the field.”

True success in sustainability lies in involvement throughout the supply chain, said Greg Siegenthaler, vice president of milk marketing and supply chain at Grande and a DBA board member.

“In order to really move the needle and see ongoing success around sustainability, we must continue to engage all partners in the process,” Siegenthaler said.

The Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy recognizes exceptional farms, businesses and partnerships for their socially responsible, economically viable and environmentally sound practices and technologies that have a broad and positive impact.

“Customers want assurances that the food they buy is being produced in a way that’s sensitive to the environment,” said Lauren Brey, managing director of Farmers for Sustainable Food, a nonprofit organization of food system partners co-founded by DBA.

“Demonstrating this starts at the farm but also has implications for businesses throughout the dairy supply chain.”

The Nature Conservancy, which closely supports farmer-led conservation projects in the state, helped author the framework.

“The work that LASA farmers have been doing since 2017 to implement soil health practices and track their outcomes shows that agriculture can be part of the solution to some of our biggest challenges, from water quality to climate change,” said Steve Richter, agriculture strategies director for The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin.

Brey expects that the results from the first year of the pilot project in 2020 will be released this month.

Listen to a discussion about the initiative on the Dairy Stream podcast that aired June 30.
New member benefit: Supplemental insurance

By Nicole Barlass, director of corporate relations

We continue to look for new and innovative ways to provide you, our members, with more value and new opportunities for your business.

We are excited to announce a new partnership with corporate member Combined Insurance, a Chubb company, to help protect employees.

DBA members can now offer their employees supplemental insurance at discounted group rates. Discounts will vary by plan types but will range up to 35 percent, needing only three employees enrolled, to provide this group voluntary benefit program through Combined. These plans are designed to be much more competitive through an employer than obtaining coverage as an individual. Every plan offered is also 100 percent portable if an employee decides to retire or leave your business.

Why supplemental insurance?
Supplemental insurance helps cover gaps in major medical and out-of-pocket costs to make employees feel more secure about unexpected medical events. When employees are less worried, they are more focused and productive at work. Better yet, these supplemental benefits can be offered at little to no cost to your company.

Some highlights:
• Accident insurance pays cash benefits to employees when they are confined to a hospital, rehab, emergency room treatments or outpatient surgeries due to injuries.
• Disability income covers a portion of lost wages when employees are out of work due to sickness or injury.
• Critical illness provides a lump sum benefit upon diagnosis or treatment of covered illnesses.
• All programs pay cash benefits paid directly to employees to use as they deem necessary.

To be eligible, employees must be 18 years of age, receive a W-2 and work at least 17.5 hours per week. The benefit is available to both farm and corporate members who may be interested in offering these benefits to employees.

Combined Insurance representatives can assist with the explanation and communication of these benefits to employees. Licensed benefit counselors are local representatives. They are also able to provide bilingual benefit counselors and customer service support for Spanish-speaking employees.

DBA member Creamery Creek Holsteins has offered Combined Insurance previously and has witnessed firsthand how the insurer helped better protect one of their employees. Filing a claim with Combined was simple and provided the employee with financial support during a time of need.

Additionally, Combined Insurance is providing a complimentary $8,000 accidental death and dismemberment benefit to any employee who meets with a benefit counselor at the time of enrollment. This coverage is complimentary for 12 months.

If you are interested in learning more about this voluntary benefit insurance plan and the added protections for your employees, reach out directly to the Combined Insurance team by contacting Nate Pastick at 608-487-4890 or email at nathan.pastick@combined.com.

For any internal feedback, contact me at nbbarlass@dairyforward.com or 920-883-0020 x104.

Take steps to protect workers from extreme heat

From Hastings Mutual

Severe heat can lead to illnesses that affect workers of any age or physical condition.

Farm workers, who spend hours outdoors, run a high risk for heat-related illness. They also often perform difficult physical labor, take few breaks in a long workday, and wear heavy, dark clothes in layers.

Employers are responsible for providing workplaces free of known safety hazards, including protecting workers from extreme heat. Workers should have access to water, rest and shade throughout the day. Employers should gradually increase the workload over the course of the season and allow new and returning workers to take more frequent breaks while they build a tolerance for working in extreme heat.

Also, plan for emergencies and train workers on how to prevent heat-related illness.

For more information visit osha.gov/heat.
DBA Packer Tailgate Party
scheduled for Saturday, Aug. 21

Let's cheer on the Packers as they take on the New York Jets while supporting DBA's policy efforts! Enjoy fun, games and entertainment for the whole family. **Register by Aug. 6.**

**Location**
Anduzzi's Sports Club—Holmgren Way

**Schedule**
Saturday, Aug. 21
12-3 PM PM Tailgate party
3:25 PM Packer game

**Tailgate-only**
$45 per person
- All you can eat and drink
- Entertainment
- Silent auction
- Drawings for prizes

**Tailgate & Ticket**
$125 per person
- All you can eat and drink
- Corner or end zone game tickets
- Entertainment
- Silent auction
- Drawings for prizes

Presented by:

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