New bill arose from DBA member issue

Legislation to help farm families avoid complicated probate process when passing on farm equipment

By Chad Zuleger, associate director of government affairs

A bill authorizing non-probate transfers of farm implements passed unanimously out of the state Assembly and Senate and now heads to Gov. Tony Evers for his likely signing into law.

The process of getting this bill introduced and passed is a great example of member engagement. The idea of allowing non-probate transfers of farming implements at death was raised by an attorney, Todd Anderson from Grantsburg, who works with our farmer members. Anderson recognized that this type of non-probate transfer would give him and other attorneys another tool to aid farm families in the estate planning and business transition process.

He talked with some of his farmer clients about his idea, and they put him in touch with DBA. From there, the government affairs team worked with Anderson to find a member of the Legislature who would be interested
Policy Radar

State Budget
The Legislative Fiscal Bureau (LFB) projected the state will finish the 2021-23 budget with a $3.8 billion surplus, nearly $2.9 billion more than was expected just several months ago.

The LFB said the revised estimate was due to $2.5 billion more in expected tax collections by the end of the two-year period, an increase of $331.1 million in revenues and a drop of $339.4 million in appropriations.

LFB also noted that the budget stabilization fund balance is more than $17 billion. That exceeds the automatic trigger that directs the state to divert some surplus state revenues to the fund, meaning the Legislature will have that money available for new spending, tax cuts or to leave in the general fund.

Legislative Session
The state’s two-year legislative session will be over in the second week of March and lawmakers will be returning to their districts to campaign. Several DBA priorities are near the finish line:

Assembly Bill 727 / Senate Bill 677 establishes a nitrate optimization pilot program, a cover crop incentive and a state hydrogeologist position to conduct much-needed mapping. It passed the Assembly 96-0 and needs a vote in the Senate.

Senate Bill 893 creates non-probate transfer of a farm implement to a beneficiary upon the death of the owner. “Farm implement” is defined in the bill to include tractors and various types of machinery used exclusively and directly in farming. The bill passed the Assembly and Senate unanimously and awaits Gov. Evers’ signature.

Senate Bill 827 transfers unused funds from a federal loan program to the newly established Agricultural Exports Program. The bill passed the Assembly and Senate unanimously and awaits Evers’ signature.

in addressing the issue. Rep. John Macco, R-Ledgeview, stepped forward to offer his assistance and to get the bill drafted. He was later joined on the legislation by Sen. Joan Ballweg, R-Markesan, who owns a farm implement dealership with her husband and also chairs the Senate Agriculture Committee. Both are strong legislative advocates for farmers.

Wisconsin statutes already feature several mechanisms to help estates avoid probate. This includes exemptions of certain types and amounts of property. It also includes transfer-on-death deeds that allow real estate to transfer upon an owner’s death to designated parties outside of the probate process. Macco and Ballweg’s helpful legislation, which enjoyed broad bipartisan support, would create a similar mechanism for the non-probate transfer of farm implements.

This is important because while a certain amount of personal property is allowed to transfer without triggering a probate proceeding, expensive farm equipment can quickly add up and tip an estate over the threshold requiring it to go through probate. For most Wisconsinites, the current personal property exemptions are sufficient to allow the transfer of one’s personal belonging upon his or her passing. For many Wisconsin farm families, that is not the case, and they must deal with the cost and delay caused by the probate process.

This legislation should save government resources. It is true that the number of probate filings will decrease, and local courts will miss out on the filing fees they get for those cases, but the filing fees never cover the cost to the court system of the entire probate case.

The county courts are not the only ones that will see savings because of this bill. It will also help farmers and their descendants save the time and money associated with going through probate court, which usually involves hiring an attorney. As mentioned above, existing law provides many ways for estates to avoid probate already. This is done because it is advantageous to all parties. The additional carveout provided by this legislation makes equally good sense.

This is the second session in a row where DBA has taken an idea brought to it by membership and shepherded it through the legislative process and into law.

DBA is just beginning the process of formulating our legislative priorities for the 2023-24 legislative session. The non-probate transfer bill this session and the tax credit bill from last session show the importance of member engagement in this process. We welcome your ideas for changes that would improve the legal or regulatory environment for our state’s farmers. We would love for your idea to be the next success story of how casual conversation with a member can result in legislative change.
An update on our
government affairs team

By Tim Trotter, chief executive officer

After nearly eight years as director of government affairs for DBA, John Holevoet is leaving our organization to go into private legal practice.

During his tenure, John has been integral to shaping and executing an aggressive, solutions-based policy strategy. He has been a tireless champion of your interests at the Capitol and provided critical help directly to our farmers. We are grateful for his deep commitment to the dairy community.

Make no mistake, John was a vital asset to us, and we will miss having him around daily. However, as we look forward, John will remain available to DBA on an as-needed basis. Also, the association has retained a former member of the government affairs team, attorney Aaron Stauffacher, as general counsel to DBA and to provide legal services around regulations.

Chad Zuleger, our associate director of government affairs, will continue his work fighting for you in Madison, and we will have the ongoing support of veteran consultant Shawn Pfaff.

Additionally, we have retained Houston Engineering to help provide regulatory support. The firm has been working closely with DBA partner Farmers for Sustainable Food and our local farmer-led conservation groups developing continuous improvement strategies to safeguard our natural resources.

Change is nothing new. DBA will remain in the best position to meet the needs of our members as we push the dairy community’s interests forward.

Rest assured we will continue to stand up for farmers — every time.

Stay informed:
Need to add a team member to our email list? Send contact information to info@dairyforward.com.
Measuring inner body temperature, activity, rumination and drinking behavior directly inside the cow, the smaXtec Bolus provides health data that gives producers valuable insights into their herd’s health and fertility, enabling them to increase efficiency and profitability.

The ability to react to the first internal signs of illness while cows still appear healthy aids in a smooth transition phase and higher start-up milk production. The unique calving alerts provide an approximately 15-hour warning for imminent calving, allowing for just-in-time calving pack optimization and more control over potentially problematic cows. Continuous temperature measurement provides the chance to get on top of infectious diseases, like mastitis or metritis, and metabolic diseases, like milk fever or ketosis, before they have a chance to escalate to more severe clinical cases. Ultimately, this enables a clear overview of animals needing support and peace of mind for the rest. The individual and group level rumination monitoring from inside the reticulum, as opposed to estimating rumination via secondary metrics, enables feed management and ration optimization, while being a direct indication of rumen health. If farmers ensure consistency in energy consumption and that this energy goes to milk production as opposed to mounting an immune response, they not only make smart decisions for our animals’ welfare, but also for their own wallets. The bigger picture here is that these cows will have more of the tools needed to cycle normally and be performers for their second and third lactation. Look at your KPIs – how many first lactation cows are unnecessarily leaving your farm, especially early in lactation?

Once we have secured healthy animals that are approaching a positive energy balance, efficient timing of insemination and herd fertility management are essential to the economic success of any dairy farm. With smaXtec, farmers can not only improve their heat detection rate but can also:

- easily cherry-pick cycling animals
- reduce the calving interval
- improve services per conception
- use the best genetics with more confidence
- identify cows with fertility issues
- spot open cows that were confirmed pregnant
on herd health, reproduction

**How does the heat detection work?**

Heat notifications and clearly structured working lists, with ideal insemination time windows based on each individual cow’s behavior, take the guesswork out of breeding cows. Naturally, some animals will need extra help and with the automatic heat detection and repro work lists, it is easy to find exactly the right protocol for the farm, while significantly reducing hormone usage and labor.

**Savings and peace of mind**

Adam Hurtgen of Hurtgenlea Holsteins in Elkhorn, Wis., considers his cows the profit center of the dairy which is why he installed smaXtec on his dairy farm: “The smaXtec system is as accurate and precise as I have ever seen. From temperature alerts, rumination decreases, calving alerts to activity monitoring – all four of which help add the level of care required to maintain a profitable enterprise.”

Since then, smaXtec technology and its bolus have had a big impact on daily routines at Adam’s farm for heat detection:

“Before, we did 90% of our breeding with Ovsynch protocol and maybe 10% were natural observed standing heat. With the smaXtec system in place, we are now breeding only 10% on shot protocols.”

**Only a healthy herd brings success**

Early detection of diseases and improving overall herd health is equally as important and a key factor of reproductive success on any dairy. By measuring cow health data continuously and precisely, the smaXtec system allows for early disease detection, allowing for the earliest possible intervention when necessary, reducing the risk of serious disease progression and significantly lowering the use of medications - customers report up to a 70% reduction in antibiotic use.

By continuously monitoring key health parameters – inner body temperature, activity and rumination – smaXtec enables farmers to protect their herd, while ensuring milk yield stability and cost savings.

Visit https://smaxtec.us/en/ to learn more.
DBA honors Jerry Meissner as Advocate of the Year

By Mary Hookham for DBA

Keep your priorities straight, take care of those around you, never take anything too seriously and love like crazy.

Josh Meissner and his family will cherish those lessons from his late father, Jerry, who was honored Jan. 19 as a champion for the dairy community.

It was a bittersweet moment as the Meissner family accepted the Dairy Business Association’s Advocate of the Year award on behalf of Jerry, who passed away last month due to an illness. Jerry was made aware of the award before his passing.

“We’ve learned so many things from Dad and he’s shaped our lives in so many ways,” Josh Meissner told an audience that filled a banquet hall at the Monona Terrace during DBA’s Dairy Strong conference.

Jerry, who farmed in Clark County, was a founding member and past president of DBA and helped create a sister organization, Edge Dairy Farmer Cooperative.

“People have always had great respect for Jerry,” Tim Trotter, chief executive officer of DBA, said. “He was a tireless leader and a center of influence in the dairy world.”

Jerry’s parents started the family farm in the late 1940s. In 1965, after a fire, the family built an 80-stall barn and milking parlor, which was one of the first in Wisconsin. Over several decades, they purchased crop acreage and taught their children the value of owning land.

“Working alongside multiple generations became one of the greatest blessings of his life,” said Bob Hagenow of Vita Plus, who presented the award. “However, his work extended far beyond the end of the farm’s driveway. Jerry served the community tirelessly, holding leadership positions in dairy, agriculture and beyond.”

With the support of his parents, Jerry worked his way into the family farm with his brothers. Each generation continues to be willing to let the next generation step up to the plate, make decisions and run the farm when the time comes, something Josh appreciates about his dad.

“I am so very thankful for the work and love that Dad and our family have poured into this business, which will allow generation four to have all the opportunities I did,” he said.

Today, Josh Meissner runs Norm-E-Lane just as his father taught him. Milk production happens based on the farm’s mission statement, which is to produce milk through passionate people, sustainable farming and exceptional animal care. The farm milks 2,500 Holstein cows and raises another 2,000 cows and heifers while also operating 5,000 acres of crop land used for animal feed.

“With Dad gone from our world, things will certainly be different,” Meissner said. “There will be pain, emptiness and some big shoes to fill, within our family and our business. But along with his loss comes memories, appreciation for what he and Mom have built, and a legacy that can only be built upon.”
Slips, trips and falls

From Hastings Mutual

Slips, trips and falls are among the most common injuries on the farm.

There are many ways to lose your balance: walking on surfaces covered in mud, manure or other materials; weather hazards; poor lighting; poor housekeeping; obstructed walkways; cluttered work areas; and more.

Keeping work areas clean and well-lit can help prevent a lot of falls. Use slip-resistant mats or provide textured flooring in places that are likely to get wet. In barns and livestock areas, remove manure and make sure surfaces are clean and dry. Wear slip-resistant shoes and boots. Make periodic walkthrough surveys of your premises to ensure a safe working environment.

Promptly investigate incidents, and document findings if an accident and/or injury occurs to make sure it doesn’t happen again.

To obtain a quote from one of our Hastings agency partners, reach out to any of the agencies listed on our website and tell them you’re a DBA member. View the list of partners and their contact information at www.dairyforward.com.

Dairy Stream turns two, focuses on succession

From DBA

In two years since its inception, Dairy Stream, a podcast produced by DBA and Edge Dairy Farmer Cooperative, has released 47 episodes. The podcast has been downloaded over 17,400 times since its release.

Among the most popular topics covered by Dairy Stream’s guests are Federal Milk Marketing Orders, renewable natural gas, impacts from COVID-19, farm-level sustainability projects and how to be a farmer of the future.

DBA and Edge proudly provide this resource to members, processors, lawmakers and the greater dairy community.

Looking forward, Dairy Stream will be releasing a three-part podcast series on succession planning.

In the first episode of the series, host Mike Austin speaks to two individuals with first-hand experience on the subject. Steve Bodart, a senior dairy consultant with Compeer Financial, and Jamie Pagel Wittcpalek of Pagel’s Ponderosa Dairy discuss their experiences in succession planning, key players and professionals to have involved, common challenges in the transition and what tools are available to farmers.

For more information about the podcast or to listen to the first succession planning episode, please visit www.dairyforward.com/podcast.

DBA farmers visit Capitol, push policy priorities

From DBA

At our annual Dairy Day at the Capitol, DBA leadership laid out key bills and other changes the organization will push for and against during the remaining months of this year’s legislative session.

The association continues working on solutions to the state’s water quality issues, blocking untruthful labeling of plant-based foods, protecting a shrinking farm workforce and improving the program that regulates large livestock farms.

DBA members, leaders and staff called for action on these and other priorities in meetings with lawmakers and aides during the group’s annual event.

“DBA is focused on common-sense ways to continually protect and improve not only the livelihoods of our members, but also the future of our rural communities and the well-being of our state,” DBA President Amy Penterman said. “By identifying solutions and threats, and helping lawmakers understand the impact, we are demonstrating to our state leaders the opportunities they have to bring about wide-ranging benefits.”

“Our members drive these efforts,” Penterman said. “We are proud of them for stepping up, and we are proud to stand up on their behalf.”

Member Matters

From Hastings Mutual

“DBA is focused on common-sense ways to continually protect and improve not only the livelihoods of our members, but also the future of our rural communities and the well-being of our state,” DBA President Amy Penterman said. “By identifying solutions and threats, and helping lawmakers understand the impact, we are demonstrating to our state leaders the opportunities they have to bring about wide-ranging benefits.”

“Our members drive these efforts,” Penterman said. “We are proud of them for stepping up, and we are proud to stand up on their behalf.”

Slips, trips and falls

From Hastings Mutual

Slips, trips and falls are among the most common injuries on the farm.

There are many ways to lose your balance: walking on surfaces covered in mud, manure or other materials; weather hazards; poor lighting; poor housekeeping; obstructed walkways; cluttered work areas; and more.

Keeping work areas clean and well-lit can help prevent a lot of falls. Use slip-resistant mats or provide textured flooring in places that are likely to get wet. In barns and livestock areas, remove manure and make sure surfaces are clean and dry. Wear slip-resistant shoes and boots. Make periodic walkthrough surveys of your premises to ensure a safe working environment.

Promptly investigate incidents, and document findings if an accident and/or injury occurs to make sure it doesn’t happen again.

To obtain a quote from one of our Hastings agency partners, reach out to any of the agencies listed on our website and tell them you’re a DBA member. View the list of partners and their contact information at www.dairyforward.com.
Three directors re-elected to DBA board at annual meeting

Members of the Dairy Business Association re-elected three directors to its board during the group’s annual business meeting at DBA’s Dairy Strong conference.

The three board members:

- Steve Bodart of Compeer Financial has worked in the dairy community for 35 years and has been involved with DBA as a corporate member for the past 20. He has contributed to webinars and as a speaker at events, participates in advocacy meetings with lawmakers at the Capitol, and will remain DBA treasurer.

- Kevin Collins has dairy farmed for many years in Greenleaf and has served as chairman of his local town board, a school board member and chairman of the Wisconsin Farm Bureau’s Young Farmer and Agriculturist Program. He has participated in meetings with lawmakers in Madison and in Washington, D.C.

- Bob Nagel is a partner and manager of Holsum Dairies, based in Hilbert, and was a practicing large-animal veterinarian. Nagel has been a member of DBA for 14 years and on the board since 2019 where he has served on the communications committee and represents DBA on a Midwestern task force exploring potential milk pricing reform. Nagel has participated in lobbying activities in Madison and Washington.

Other board members: Amy Penterman of Dutch Dairy in Thorp, president; Lee Kinnard of Kinnard Farms in Casco, president-elect; Greg Siegenthaler of Grande Cheese Co., secretary; Paul Fetzer of Fetzer Farms in Elmwood; Spencer Frost of Frost Farms in Waterfod; Jack Hippen of STgenetics in Middleton; and Tom Crave of Crave Brothers Farm in Waterloo, president emeritus.