The DBA and Clean Wisconsin boards of directors and staff met in October at Crave Brothers Farm for a tour and discussion. More on Page 3.

**DBA helps lead FMMO taskforce**

*Among groups’ focus areas are farmer education, pricing model transparency, proposal for reform*

**By John Holevoet, director of government affairs**

DBA, together with Edge Dairy Farmer Cooperative, began a regional effort to examine the Federal Milk Marking Orders (FMMOs) in spring of this year. Farmers and staff from Iowa State Dairy Association, Minnesota Milk, Nebraska State Dairy Association and South Dakota Dairy Producers are also part of this taskforce that is looking at ways to improve the orders and farmers’ understanding of them.

The group has been aided in its work by Dr. Marin Bozic, a dairy economist and professor at the University of Minnesota. Dr. Bozic was already an adviser to the boards of both Edge and Minnesota Milk on dairy economics.

One of the group’s main purposes is helping farmers better understand their milk checks and the pricing structure that is central to their businesses, even though it is notoriously complicated. Taskforce members helped to coordinate and produce a great deal of educational content, including an
ongoing webinar series. This trove of FMMO information can be accessed through Edge’s website, voiceofmilk.com. Simply click the resources tab and choose Federal Milk Marketing Orders.

The taskforce is also drafting an educational piece that will touch on FMMO history and will focus on the practical consideration of what benefits farmers derive from the federal orders and what the future utility of the orders will be given the changing market landscape. Frustration with the orders often leads to calls to eliminate them without considering how they are still beneficial and what we could expect to come after.

Another of the group’s priorities is promoting a more transparent pricing model. It is ridiculous to think that many dairy farmers do not truly understand their milk checks. The taskforce is examining both formal (requiring a change in law or order structure) and informal (voluntary moves by farmers and/or processors) ways of combatting this lack of clarity. It simply should not be as complicated as it is, and the system itself suffers because of that. When farmers do not understand the oddities of the pricing model, it makes them mistrust the system and their processors. No other ag commodity has not be as complicated as it is, and the system itself suffers because of that. When farmers do not understand the oddities of the pricing model, it makes them mistrust the system and their processors. No other ag commodity has.

The need for a regional group to take a deep dive into the policies surrounding milk pricing has existed for years, but the effects of COVID-19 have made it even more necessary and timely. The impact of the pandemic and government attempts to address it caused unprecedented market disruptions. Farmers in various parts of the country continue to deal with lost revenue from negative Producer Price Differentials (PPDs). In addition to helping dairy farmers and processors. Also, linking the Class III and Class I prices would reduce the appeal of depooling for processors. Most importantly, it would also reduce the chances of negative PPDs going forward. The Class III Plus proposal is the only significant plan put forward that would tackle the issue of negative PPDs over the long term.

Even though addressing the impact of negative PPDs was top of mind, the taskforce is also looking at other ways to improve FMMOs. While all the members of the taskforce may not agree on every strategy, much is gained by simply working through the different options available to dairy farmers seeking reforms. The idea of an academic study of milk pricing was also raised at a recent congressional hearing on milk pricing. This could also be a worthwhile incubator for ideas.

The taskforce will wrap up its work by the end of the year. However, there is hope that this will be the first of many regional collaborations. In the end, the taskforce will allow DBA and Edge to be well-positioned to represent our members’ interests in the event a federal order hearing is requested or during discussion of milk pricing as part of the next farm bill.
Water quality partners learn from each other

By Tim Trotter, Executive director

About a year ago, DBA announced a new and bold approach to clean water. This strategy relied on a fresh method to policy formation built on sustainable solutions to provide certainty for our members today and into the future, while protecting our water and other natural resources.

To do this, DBA reached out to Clean Wisconsin, The Nature Conservancy and Wisconsin Land and Water to see if they would welcome a new approach rather than the finger-pointing and policy battles of the past. We learned that although we have not always been on the same side of these issues, our fundamental goals are the same. We all want clean water, and we also want our agricultural community to be successful.

To further solidify a strong foundation to build upon, former DBA President Tom Crave invited the Clean Wisconsin and DBA boards to tour his family’s farm and cheese plant last month. This exchange was very helpful in building a better understanding of the challenges facing dairies today, as well as the need for practical regulations and empowerment of farms to innovate. It was another example of the need for all partners to step out of their comfort zones — by listening, learning and being open to developing a better path forward. Also, it was obvious in this exchange that we can protect and enhance our environment and have a vibrant dairy community, too.

This approach has been welcomed by many of our state legislators and regulators as well. They see value in groups coming together and co-creating a plan that has buy-in from a broader range of groups. For too long, we have relied on the policy ping-pong that has left us with no clear path forward.

I realize I don’t need to sell many of you on our approach, as the feedback from our membership has been supportive and encouraging. After all, more than 20 percent of our members are no strangers to building relationships on environmental issues. They’ve worked together with many stakeholders in developing and supporting a growing number of farmer-led conservation groups. The Nature Conservancy has been a tremendous partner in these efforts. The results are indisputable. Our members are pushing the envelope and expectations of what DBA needs to do to support them. This energy is not merely for a quick win but rather a sustained goal where farmers can and will remain an important value in our state’s economy.

We all realize there will be days when we don’t agree. That is true of anything in life, but sustained relationships are built upon trust and integrity. DBA and its members have earned respect — by being bold and doing what is right.

“DBA and its members have earned respect — by being bold and doing what is right.”

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Important dates
New Dairy Stream episode
Nov. 3 » podcast app/online

Dairy Summit
Nov. 17 » virtual

New Dairy Stream episode
Nov. 24 » podcast app/online

STgenetics Cow Academy
Nov. 30 » location TBA

New Dairy Stream episode
Dec. 15 » podcast app/online

New Dairy Stream episode
Dec. 29 » podcast app/online

Dairy Strong conference
Jan. 19-20 » Madison

dairyforward.com/events
There are many reasons to invest in new technology for your dairy — better throughput, increased milk production, reduced energy, or costs of various functions — but once you know what you want to achieve, the next step is to start thinking about how you’re going to do it.

Can you add new technology to your existing milking system or maybe replace your current equipment and install a more efficient system? Do you have big expansion goals that require you to build new or retrofit your space?

There are many ways to update your dairy, but here are a few considerations to help you start formalizing a plan:

- Start sharing your ideas for improvement with your family, dairy farmer friends and farm support team. Collect as many ideas as possible. Chances are there are other producers out there who have done something similar and have thoughts on how to improve if they were to do it again.
- Use Google maps or other site planning tools to figure out the optimum location for your new parlor or expansion. Can you utilize the existing infrastructure?
- Do not be afraid to get creative with design thoughts. Why not put the rotary off the front of your old batch parlor and use that as your new holding area?
- Always keep cow flow and workflow in mind. Something may fit great in a location on your site, but if cow alleys have many bends or your staff needs to take extra steps to complete a work function, these issues will only become worse over time. This is another reason to get ideas and input for your design to help avoid issues down the road.
- If you are looking to use your existing milk transport infrastructure, make sure to do the math. You may be milking the same number of cows per day, but milk per hour may increase, which would result in needing to upsize cooling and other transport components.

If adding technology to your existing milking system aligns better with your farm’s goals, there are any number of efficiency-enhancing solutions available. Rather than focusing only on the amount of milk harvested in the parlor, look for technologies that generate measurable improvements in these three areas:

1. **Efficiency of labor and cow movement**

   **Stoplight technique:** One of the most exciting uses of technology for cow movement in the holding pen is a traffic light to indicate
So you want to update your dairy. But how?

Automated crowd gate: Automated crowd gate technology encourages cows to continue moving forward. It reduces the amount of time spent away from milking to move cows, and it reduces the need for milkers to enter the holding pen.

Rapid-exit systems: After we are done milking the cows in the parlor, we need to quickly get them out and back to eating, drinking and resting. Some rapid-exit systems also allow for gang exit or the release of smaller groups of animals to minimize cow flow bottlenecks at the parlor exit.

Herd management automation: A producer can automate the sorting process and increase labor efficiencies by using cow identification, herd management data and sort systems.

2. Efficiency of the milking process

Vacuum levels: Today, we can control vacuum per individual cow based on the actual flow rate. Once a set flow rate has been reached, the vacuum level for that cow can be increased to speed the milk flow through the system and away from the cow.

Rotary speed: Almost every rotary needs the ability to automatically change speed based upon the groups’ average milking speed. For heavy-producing or longer-duration groups, the deck will slow down, and for lower-producing or short-milking-duration groups, the deck will speed up.

3. Efficiency of labor during milking:

Robotic technology: To help make the best use of labor on a dairy, consider the various technologies, from robotic teat spray applicators to fully robotic rotary milking systems. Automating a repetitive task reallocates man hours to a higher-value role or eliminates them altogether.

Automated control systems: With the increasing use of plant status monitoring and control systems in dairy operations, the ability to automate and monitor various tasks and functions — like milk filter or tank switching — is almost limitless and allows employees to focus on the more strategic and management-related tasks.

Choosing to update your dairy is a major financial decision that can’t be made without first identifying weaknesses and inefficiencies in your current system. If the addition of technology can improve those inefficiencies, it’s good to also consider the potential return on your investment.
Our customers deserve truthful food labeling

By Amy Penterman, DBA president and Steve Bechel, Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association president

Customers must come first.

That is why Wisconsin’s dairy farmers and cheesemakers are advocating for legislation to deliver accurate food labeling in Wisconsin and across the country. We believe people deserve to know what is in the food they’re buying and serving to their families.

Research consistently shows that when plant-based imitation dairy manufacturers use words such as “milk” and “mozzarella” on their product labels, nearly a quarter of customers believe those products contain real dairy ingredients — and the protein, calcium and vitamins only real dairy foods can deliver. This confusion is the core reason why the manufacturers of plant-based imitations have been so keen to appropriate dairy terminology.

Dairy’s good name is rooted in its nutrition. But it is also the result of generations of hard work and financial investments made by dairy farmers and processors. Americans recognize that “milk does a body good” because of years of consistent, costly promotional campaigns paid for by dairy farmers. It is only fair for the dairy community to expect their investments to be protected against imitators hoping to ride on their marketing coattails.

The Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act requires that labels on packaged food products not be false or misleading. Lax enforcement from leaders in Washington, D.C., means it is time for states such as Wisconsin, America’s Dairyland, to send a strong message — the goal of food labeling bills now pending in Madison.

Enforcing federally defined terms does not limit the sale of any products, as some opponents claim. All plant-based imitators could still be sold, just under clear, truthful labels. Almond beverage sells just fine in Canada without a misleading label.

Similarly, the passage of laws such as those proposed will not inhibit the creativity of non-dairy manufacturers. On the contrary, they encourage ingenuity in both the development and marketing of food products that go beyond mere mimicry.

And, yes, commercial speech is protected by the First Amendment. But free speech is not limitless. As the dairy industry knows well, many regulations apply to packaging and labeling. All those regulations are constitutional if they serve a legitimate government purpose. Preventing customer confusion, particularly about the nutritional value of plant-based imitations, meets that standard.

Wisconsin can lead the charge for labeling transparency, and it’s appropriate that we do, especially in the case of milk, cheese, yogurt, butter — and their non-dairy imitators.

America’s Dairyland is not just a folksy saying we put on our license plates. It speaks to our state’s heritage and, importantly, to its present and future. Dairy contributes $45.6 billion in revenue to the state each year and supports more than 240,000 jobs.

Earlier this year, a coalition of 13 Wisconsin agricultural groups — including some representing vegetable growers — called for legislative action on bills to deliver food labeling transparency. We thank the members of the state Assembly for their unanimous approval, and we urge a vote in the state Senate, where the proposals enjoy strong bipartisan support.

Dairy farmers and processors remain focused on our essential mission: delivering nutritious, delicious dairy foods for our neighbors here, across the country and around the world. We’ll continue to champion clarity for customers, and what is fair for them and for all food manufacturers.
Every farmer hopes they never have to deal with on-farm devastation. Most days things operate well, employees stay safe and accidents don’t occur. Unfortunately, sometimes accidents and losses happen, and that is when you realize it pays to have an insurance agent who understands your dairy business.

DBA member East-Colt farm experienced first-hand the importance of having an agent and insurance agency who had their back. Three years ago, their worst nightmare came true when their barn burned down, and all the cows were lost in the fire. The family was devastated. Their agent and adjuster were out the next day and immediately cut a check to help with initial expenses. Hastings was quick to pay out everything, including high-valued cattle on the farm.

Hastings continues to be a great partner to the Dairy Business Association. All members insured by Hastings receive a 10 percent discount on their farm insurance policy. The insurance company also provides a generous kick-back in monetary support to DBA for all members insured, allowing the association to continue its critical work in advocating on dairy’s behalf.

To obtain a quote from one of our Hastings agency partners, reach out to any of the agencies listed below and tell them you’re a DBA member. View the list of partners and their contact information at www.dairyforward.com.
Amplify dairy community’s voice through contributions to DairyPAC

DairyPAC is DBA’s vehicle for political success for our members. Farmer volunteers and DBA government affairs staff raise contributions from members. These funds are then pooled and contributed on a nonpartisan basis to candidates for public office who support the dairy community and other agricultural interests.

This is critical. Up to 4,000 bills are introduced each session in the Legislature, and elections determine who will be voting on these bills. DairyPAC helps elect people who write the laws with which you and your farm or business must live. Through extensive research and ongoing monitoring, DairyPAC keeps farm professionals informed, involved and influential.

DairyPAC facts
- Funds are disbursed on a nonpartisan basis. Contributions are based on issues and candidate support of the DBA legislative agenda.
- DairyPAC is a powerful voice for dairy in Wisconsin.

How you can help
Visit www.dairyforward.com and scroll over Advocacy on the top menu bar. Click on DairyPAC in the drop-down menu, then click either Online Contribution or Mail-In Contribution.

DairyPAC is authorized to accept PERSONAL FUNDS ONLY. Corporate/business funds — checks and credit cards — are prohibited.

Questions?
For more information, reach out to Chad Zuleger, associate director of government affairs, at czuleger@dairyforward.com or 608-345-6906.

DairyPAC facts
- All fundraising efforts and contributions to candidates are administered by the DBA Board of Directors with recommendations from the DBA Government Affairs Committee and government affairs staff.