

June 25, 2019

Dear Lawmaker,

Our dairy heritage is part of what makes Wisconsin great. More importantly, our dairy community remains a vital part of our state's economy and helps to keep population and investment in rural Wisconsin. While dairy farmers are facing challenging times, there is still excitement for what the future holds. We are very appreciative of the bipartisan support shown by the Joint Finance Committee for the Dairy Innovation Hub, which would be housed at three UW campuses – River Falls, Platteville and Madison. We urge you to keep this provision in the budget, as written, as you consider passage by the full Assembly and Senate.

The Dairy Innovation Hub concept grew out on a 2017 summit sponsored by the Department of Agriculture and UW System that aimed to address challenges in the dairy economy. The Dairy Task Force 2.0 recently made several recommendations to help improve the dairy business climate in Wisconsin. The Dairy Innovation Hub was one of the first ideas to get broad support among taskforce members. The proposal encompasses several areas of interest into one by focusing on four distinct areas: 1) land and water stewardship, 2) human health and nutrition, 3) animal health and welfare, and 4) improving and integrating farm businesses and rural communities. The hub will preserve Wisconsin's place as an international leader in dairy production and research.

The Joint Finance Committee's appropriation for the hub provides for \$1 million in the first year of the biennium to get the program started and another \$7.8 million in the second to pay for the new researchers' salaries. Investments will be made in tenure-track positions as well as graduate or post-doctoral fellows. The hub intends to attract the world's best research talent to our state and provide the tools for making important new discoveries. It will train industry leaders, who will help transfer that new knowledge to farms, processing plants, watershed groups and beyond.

The state cannot afford to wait on this. We need more research on water quality and soil health. Our farmers also need investments in innovative new products to help grow their bottom lines after several years of low milk prices, increasing operational costs and changes in trade policy that are hurting dairy exports. Please support the Dairy Innovation Hub and urge your colleagues to do the same.

Sincerely,

