

# Wisconsin Dairy Farmers Have Been Duped

Jim Goodman - Wisconsin Dairy Farmer



For a farmer, getting the news that you no longer have a market for your product is devastating. I know, I got one of those letters a few months ago. It is especially problematic if you are a dairy farmer, since cows need to be milked every day. So, in April, when 75 Wisconsin farmers were notified by their milk buyer, Grassland Dairy Products, that they would no longer have a market, state government officials took notice.

While our government officials appear to be concerned about the well being and economic viability of Wisconsin's dairy farmers, I wonder if they are really more interested in the viability of the "dairy industry".

Are they concerned about fair farm prices and the environment or keeping the economic engine rolling? Since the Assembly, Governor Walker and the Wisconsin Department Of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) have done all they can to encourage Wisconsin farmers to produce more milk, never questioning how much milk might be

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too much, I'm guessing their concern lies with a dairy industry that depends on cheap milk.

In 2003, the Wisconsin Legislature passed Act 235, a bill that limited the ability of local communities to oppose large farms. In 2011 the Assembly voted to provide dairy farmers tax credits for modernizing or expanding their operations.

In 2012 Governor Walker introduced his "30x20" plan to grow Wisconsin's milk production to 30 billion pounds annually by 2020, offering grants to

dairy producers to help them grow their businesses and, Wisconsin's dairy industry. Dairy economist Bob Cropp, Professor Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, thought the initiative was a good idea and it would not lower milk prices, apparently agreeing with the Governor who noted that "The reality is, that the growth is not fast enough for the opportunities that are before us".

Wisconsin dairy farmers met the 30 billion pound goal last year, but the predictions of no downside to the increased milk production didn't work out so well.

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Continued on pg 15



The support for larger farms and more milk does not end with the Governor and Wisconsin Legislature. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) seems to be very interested in being a partner to large scale farms, not that that is totally wrong, but after the partnering it's time to ensure environmental protection standards are followed.

As former DNR Secretary George Meyer noted, "The standards aren't really at stake, those are set in law," but complaints of non-enforcement by the DNR are increasing under the Walker administration. Since Governor Walker was elected in 2011, he and the Republican-controlled Legislature have co-opted the administrative rule-making process, taking that power, basically, into their own hands.

Even the Wisconsin Attorney General got into the act with his legal opinion stating that the DNR had no authority to consider the cumulative effects of high-capacity wells on the waters of Wisconsin, a gift to the CAFO's but a real problem for the environment and the citizens of Wisconsin.

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Wisconsin is open for business, specifically the CAFO dairy business. By doing all they can to support the growth of dairy CAFO's, by gutting the DNR's enforcement capabilities through staff and budget cuts and by appointing a DNR Secretary who says she has "brought customer-friendly private-sector principles to the agency" the Governor and state Legislature have encouraged large dairies to locate and expand in Wisconsin and produce as much milk as they can.

While far too much emphasis has been placed on increasing milk output in Wisconsin and the rest of the nation, solutions to the problem are falling short.

Governor Walker blames Canada for supporting Canadian dairy farmers over US farmers, and not to be out-

done in stupidity, the State Assembly's answer was sending a letter to University of Wisconsin System President Ray Cross, asking him to direct some research funds into exploring alternative uses (beyond consumption) for milk.

They encourage farmers to overproduce, cry their crocodile tears over low prices and lost markets, then, despite the \$250 million they cut from the UW budget, they ask for research on alternative uses for milk?

Perhaps producing less milk might be an idea? Supply management, which would promote fair prices for farmers, a stable supply for consumers and possibly some protection for the environment by limiting the growth of CAFO's? No,— that would make too much sense and it might cut into industry profits.

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Jim Goodman is a dairy farmer from Wonevok Wisconsin