



UNITED TO GROW FAMILY AGRICULTURE

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Vilsack visit targets infrastructure, dairy support

Tour stop highlights need for collaborative, meaningful dairy policy reform

CAMBRIDGE, WI -- U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack's stop at a Wisconsin dairy farm today highlighted investments in critical rural infrastructure and improvements to the Dairy Margin Coverage program. USDA's signup period for the Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) program and the new Supplemental Dairy Margin Coverage began on Monday, December 13.

This afternoon's visit to the farm that Dane County Farmers Union members Duane and Tina Hinchley run alongside their daughter, Anna, aligned with a USDA announcement that communities across Wisconsin will receive \$114.5 million in infrastructure projects.

"It was good to hear from Secretary Vilsack on issues ranging from DMC to trade and exports to research and rural broadband," said WFU Government Relations Director Nick Levendofsky. "Rural resilience was a key theme in Vilsack's comments, and the investments USDA is making in agriculture and rural America will ensure continued resiliency as we weather the challenges of COVID-19, weather, and global markets."

The Hinchleys noted they appreciated hearing Sec. Vilsack's insights on the need for farmers to diversify and for farm groups to unify around priorities in the lead-up to the next farm bill.

"When the elephant in the room came up -- a question about when USDA will have a hearing again on dairy pricing -- the Secretary was very straight-forward about the need to get dairy groups to work together and push for a consensus incorporating different regions within the United States dairy industry," Duane Hinchley said.

Tina Hinchley, who has been active in the Dairy Together movement to unify dairy farmers, promote growth management, and stabilize prices, agreed with the importance of that message. A growing coalition of Dairy Together Allies has united around the Dairy Revitalization Plan, based on research by the UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems.

Regarding updates to the DMC, WFU President Darin Von Ruden noted "The Dairy Margin Coverage program has been a valued safety net, and new changes to the feed cost calculations will help producers receive more payments. The program can be a helpful tool in managing low price cycles; however, we hope to see other tools added to farmers' toolboxes, too, including meaningful dairy policy reform in the 2023 Farm Bill. While this money will help farmers and comes at a key time as they clean up year-end books, it doesn't address the systemic issues that are forcing dairy farmers out of business. Most farmers would much rather receive their paycheck from a fair marketplace than from government handouts."

Earlier in the day, a stop in Bloomer in northwestern Wisconsin highlighted the infrastructure investment and the broader Build Back Better agenda that will expand access to clean drinking water. Tomorrow Sec. Vilsack is expected to travel to Illinois, where he will make a major announcement underscoring USDA's efforts to strengthen the food supply chain and support school meal programs.

Wisconsin Farmers Union is a member-driven organization committed to enhancing the quality of life for family farmers, rural communities, and all people through educational opportunities, cooperative endeavors, and civic engagement.

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