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## **FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative Has an Eye on the Future at Fourth Annual Meeting**

*Members take time to prepare for future dairy prices and transition challenges*

Madison, Wis. [February 17, 2016]—Over 200 dairy producers and industry members gathered together for FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative’s fourth annual meeting on Feb. 12-13 in Onalaska, Wis. The cooperative event focused on preparation for the future, with the workshop presentations providing producers with the knowledge to anticipate transition challenges between generations as well as what the dairy market might forecast for the year ahead.

“There are many challenges facing our dairy farmers today, and the greatest challenge right now are the low milk prices. We want our members to know what the future looks like for dairy markets so that they can be prepared,” says David Cooper, general manager for FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative. “Understanding what factors are at play on the global market allows producers to better understand when better prices might become a reality.”

The two-day event kicked off with its Producer Discovery Workshops on Friday afternoon, featuring Michelle Birschbach from Steimle Birschbach, LLC as she highlighted the importance of preparing and communicating the plan for a farm transition, and John Newton from National Milk Producers Federation addressed the current dairy market and political environment as we go through 2016.

This year’s evening banquet began with a keynote address by Kim Bremmer from Ag Inspirations. She shared her message with producers and industry guests about how important it is to share their story of agriculture to encourage consumers not to ‘fear their food.’ She commented, “you have a great story and you share common ground with consumers. When we don’t tell our own stories, others tell them for us. If not you, then who?”

“Today’s dairy producers are in a much different environment than they were a decade ago,” says Cooper. “They have to be top-notch managers of their dairy farm in addition to being able to serve as their own spokesperson for their dairy farm in the community and on social media.”

Retiring board members were also recognized at Friday evening’s banquet, including David Allen of Reedsburg, Wis., Wayne Hansen of Van Dyne, Wis., Lee Klumpers of Waupun, Wis., Mark Ryan of Fond du Lac, Wis., and Dave Schmitz of Fond du Lac, Wis. Long-time staff members were also recognized in appreciation of their dedication and commitment to the cooperative and its divisions. Bob Hodgson was

recognized for celebrating 30 years with the cooperative, Karen Gengler for celebrating 25 years, and Cheryl Harrmann for celebrating 20 years.

“Having such tremendous and dedicated employees and board members to help the cooperative achieve its goals in various ways is vital to maintaining our grassroots and our commitment to members,” commented Cooper.

This year’s annual meeting theme is ‘We Are FarmFirst,’ acknowledging the diversity of the cooperative, most especially the dynamic producers throughout the cooperative membership.

“FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative is truly unique in being able to service such a diverse group of dairy farmers. FarmFirst is also unique in having the opportunity to work with so many different entities of the industry, all of which help us to better serve producers and improve the industry,” says Cooper.

New to this year’s annual meeting was a Young Cooperator panel, which was emceed by the newly elected steering committee chair, Janet Clark. Four individuals who also serve on the Young Cooperator Steering Committee for the cooperative participated in this panel.

“This panel was a great opportunity for our cooperative members to understand a little more about who we are as farmers, as well as what our goals are for the Young Cooperator program,” says Janet Clark, the chairperson of the steering committee, elected on Friday of the annual meeting.

“FarmFirst has a very exciting future ahead, and we look forward to being part of it,” says Clark.

Established in 2013, FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative, based in Madison, Wis., is the largest dairy marketing cooperative in the Midwest. Dedicated to its family farm members, the cooperative represents nearly 5,000 farms in Wisconsin, Minnesota, South Dakota, Michigan, Iowa, Illinois and Indiana through policy bargaining, dairy marketing services, laboratory testing opportunities and industry promotion. Learn more about FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative by visiting: [www.FarmFirstDairyCooperative.com](http://www.FarmFirstDairyCooperative.com).

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Editor’s note: Images available for download at: <http://bit.ly/1Q1LOS0>