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FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative Focused on the Future at 2019 Annual Meeting

Delegates, Members Gathered for Cooperative Annual Meeting

Madison, Wis. [February 26, 2019] – Delegates were ‘Focused on the Future’ during FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative’s seventh annual member meeting on February 22-23, 2019 in Onalaska, Wis., discussing issues pertinent to the future of their dairy farms and expanding their knowledge on a variety of topics.

Friday afternoon kicked off the meeting with Producer Discovery Workshop, featuring Joe Bragger who shared his first-hand experiences on nutrient management practices that have protected watersheds and improved soil quality on his farm. While nutrient management practices might be different across the Midwest, dairy farmers were able to learn about successes utilizing different cover crops and various tillage methods.

The second workshop featured Chad Vincent, CEO of Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin and Molly Pelzer, Chief Experience Officer of Midwest Dairy Association, who provided members an inside look at the work of their regional checkoff organizations, and how they are using dairy farmer dollars help promote dairy through a variety of channels. Members asked a variety of questions, ultimately providing valuable feedback for their checkoff organizations.

The next day’s business meeting continued to focus on the future. President John Rettler gave a heartfelt address acknowledging the challenges that come during low milk prices but shared his optimism for a brighter future and his excitement of having three of his four sons deciding to farm with him and his wife, Joann. He attributed much of his farm’s success to being a family farm build on passion and values.

Delegates brought forth this same passion when setting policy for 2019, supporting a variety of resolutions related to federal dairy issues, common food names, international trade issues, food labeling, federal and state inspections and dairy checkoff.

Members also were briefed by Bill Halfman, Monroe County Agricultural Agent, on what to expect from meat packers and processors regarding Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) certification as it may impact livestock sent to market. Steve Etko, lobbyist for FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative, also provided a legislative update on dairy policy issues, sharing details on international trade issues, the progress of the 2018

Farm Bill being implemented in conjunction with the Dairy Margin Coverage program, and the latest work being done on FDA dairy labeling.

General Manager, Jeff Lyon, also addressed the delegates, highlighting some of the changes he and staff have made to position the cooperative for the future. He reaffirmed the cooperative's dedication to serving its members and through programs and services, advocacy efforts and policy representation.

While the cooperative focused on the future, individual accomplishments and milestones were recognized at the Friday evening awards banquet. The cooperative's milk marketing division, Family Dairies USA, recognized its top-quality award winners, in addition to retired staff and board members. Bill Burri of Reedsville, Wis. retired last August from the Family Dairies USA division, wrapping up just over four years with the cooperative. Dennis Pank of Bloomer, Wis. retired in June of 2018, having served the cooperative's member service division for 24 years before retiring. Both members have spent their careers, first as cheesemakers, and then as field representatives.

Two individuals retired from the cooperative's board of directors. Ken Wunderlin, a dairy farmer from Livingston, Wis., who served on the board since 2007, chose to get involved in the cooperative to serve as a voice on legislative issues impacting dairy farmers. Randy Geiger from Reedsville, Wis., who concluded 38 years as a cooperative director. His dedication to helping other dairy farmers and raising concerns on national issues has always motivated Geiger in his leadership role.

As part of their annual event, a live and silent auction were held to help raise funds for youth educational programming. This year's live and silent auction raised over \$3,600 to be put towards its youth education, including college scholarships and dairy camp sponsorships. The cooperative recognized last year's 16 scholarship recipients who received \$12,500 altogether.

The 2020 Annual Meeting is set for February 14-15, 2020 in Oshkosh, Wis.

FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative was established in 2013 and is based in Madison, Wis. The cooperative represents farms in Wisconsin, Minnesota, South Dakota, Michigan, Iowa, Illinois and Indiana through policy bargaining, dairy marketing services, laboratory testing opportunities and industry promotion.

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View the Full Press Release online, [here](#). Access cooperative logos and photos, [here](#).

Access 2019 Annual Meeting Photos, [here](#).