

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Julie Sweney, FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative
608-286-1909 or jsweney@farmfirstcoop.com



FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative Leading with Purpose at 2020 Annual Meeting

Delegates, Members Gathered for Cooperative Annual Meeting

Madison, Wis. [February 18, 2020] – FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative members and delegates gathered on February 14-15 to learn more about hot industry topics, approve new public policy for 2020 and look back on the cooperative’s accomplishments during the past year at its eighth annual meeting in Oshkosh, Wis.

The Producer Discovery Workshops kicked off Friday afternoon, featuring Dr. Mark Stephenson, Director of Dairy Policy Analysis of UW-Madison, who shared his insight on the future of dairy markets and provided his predictions for 2020 milk prices. Dr. Stephenson noted that cheese consumption continues to rise, showcasing opportunities for growth especially abroad. While fluid milk sales have continued to decrease due to competing beverages and changing preferences, he pointed out that more people today are consuming more dairy in a variety of other ways than putting milk on their cereal, including higher protein snacks and specialty cheeses.

Dr. Stephenson acknowledged that with no Farm Bill and it being an election year means that it is unlikely that there will be dairy policy changes. He noted that he has heard more conversations regarding milk price discovery than in the past and more discussions will be taking place regarding federal order reform. While farm milk prices have improved and will be better on average in the year ahead, the entire supply chain needs to be healthy.

The second workshop featured Katie Burgess, Commodity Risk Analyst with Blimling & Associates, who shared data and statistics about the latest trends in consumer food-purchasing habits. Overall, there is overwhelming data proving that consumers are seeking convenience in accessing healthy, on-the-go food options, including individually packaged protein snacks like those paring up cheese, nuts and dried fruits. Today, consumers want to save time when purchasing food, making their purchases online to be delivered to their car in the parking lot or front door at home. As more consumers seek out digital conveniences to save time purchasing their groceries and meals, the industry must continue to evolve to meet their needs and desires.

At the cooperative’s business meeting the next day, President Rettler of Neosho, Wis. reflected on the challenges over the past year, highlighting the many ways weather negatively impacted harvest and made it an incredibly challenging year on that front alone. He emphasized the importance for members

to take the time for themselves. During challenging times, he reminded members to reflect on what motivated them to become a dairy farmer in the first place and not let current circumstances cloud their passion. Rettler shared the joy he had in the past year in becoming a first-time grandfather and the importance of family and friends during challenging times for the dairy industry.

He also reminded members of the importance of continuing to engage with others that do not have an agriculture background as they become further removed from how their food is produced and those that produce it.

During the resolution session, delegates reiterated their support for the FARM program but believe greater farmer input is needed with respect to practices intended to protect the welfare of their animals. Delegates continued their strong support for getting more fluid milk options in schools and opposed size limits on milk sold or distributed in schools. Delegates also supported farmer access to A2A2 labeling on dairy products containing the A2A2 milk from their dairy herd. Delegates also took a stance on having the Food and Drug Administration keep non-prescription medications available to producers to prevent costly veterinarian bills for common animal illnesses.

General Manager Jeff Lyon shared legislative accomplishments including implementation of the new Dairy Margin Coverage program and passage of the USMCA trade agreement. He noted that trade negotiations with China, European Union tariffs, and trade with Japan will be high profile issues in 2020. He added that the cooperative will be involved with dairy labeling, standards of identity and updating U.S. dietary guidelines.

Lyon indicated that the newly created FarmFirst Services LLC, would ensure that the milk loss program due to natural disasters would still be available to members. He noted that the cooperative was able to reduce overhead expenses and successfully find additional sources of income.

He concluded by promoting the new “FarmFirst Future Dairy Leaders” program which will start this spring to prepare the next generation of cooperative leaders.

Dean Sommers from the Center for Dairy Research (CDR) provided an overview of the programs and services of CDR, which receives a majority of its funding from dairy checkoff dollars. Sommer shared the work and innovative dairy products the CDR has helped create and bring to the marketplace, working alongside cheesemakers and other dairy manufacturers.

During its awards program, the cooperative recognized its top milk quality awards winners for its Family Dairies USA, milk marketing division. Staff members, Jeff Bradley (15 years), Anne Simon (15 years), Cheryl Harrmann (25 years) and Bob Hodgson (35 years) were recognized for their career milestones and contributions to the cooperative. Lastly, 2019 scholarship recipients were in attendance to share their appreciation for the cooperative’s scholarship program and what they plan to accomplish following graduation in a few years.

As part of the annual event, a live and silent auction were hosted to help raise funds for youth educational programming. This year's live and silent auction raised more than \$5,000 to be put towards its youth education, including college scholarships and dairy camp sponsorships.

The 2021 Annual Meeting is set for February 12-13, 2021 in Onalaska, Wis.

FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative, established in 2013 and based in Madison, Wis., represents farmers in Wisconsin, Minnesota, South Dakota, Michigan, Iowa, Illinois and Indiana by providing legislative and regulatory advocacy, dairy marketing services, disaster protection, laboratory testing opportunities and industry promotion. FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative is a merger of three long-time prominent Wisconsin-based cooperatives. Learn more about FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative by visiting: www.FarmFirstDairyCooperative.com.

###

View the Full Press Release online, [here](#). Access cooperative logos and 2020 Annual Meeting photos, [here](#).