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FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative Speaks Up for Dairy Farmers at National Trade Meeting

Madison, Wis. [May 3, 2017] – FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative spoke in Washington, D.C. this week at a national trade policy rally to represent Midwest dairy farmers and stress the importance of free and fair trade on the dairy industry. This meeting comes a month after Grassland Dairy Products Inc. received notice from one of their Canadian buyers that they would no longer be purchasing its dairy products, and 74 dairy farms in Wisconsin and Minnesota were told they would be without a market starting May 1st.

“Trade is incredibly important to dairy, especially when a market suddenly closes and 74 farmers are at risk of losing their livelihoods,” says David Cooper, General Manager of FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative. “We’re here today to ensure that our concern for dairy farmers is heard, so that more are not put at risk.”

FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative met with House Ag Committee Chairman Mike Conaway, House Ag Committee Ranking Member Collin Peterson and Speaker of the House Paul Ryan, describing the dire situation that several Wisconsin and Minnesota dairy farmers found themselves in at the beginning of April. FarmFirst also spoke on the key issues at hand for what influenced this sudden change in markets.

“Canada has changed its pricing program to not only incentivize Canadian processors to stop purchasing U.S. dairy exports, such as Ultra-Filtered Milk (UFM) from Grassland here in Wisconsin, but also has begun to export significant quantities of skim milk powder on the global market at below-cost prices,” says Cooper.

“Canada is breaking its trade commitments, which will only depress the global skim milk powder market further--and harm more farmers. This has gone from a bilateral trade issue between Canada and the U.S. to a global challenge,” says Cooper.

In addition to discussing improving trade and making sure Canada keeps its trade commitments, Cooper also shared praise for the U.S.’s key dairy export destination: Mexico.

“Mexico has been a key trade partner for U.S. dairy products, purchasing \$1.2 billion from the U.S. in the last year. Its importance cannot be overstated,” says Cooper. “We must maintain a good trade

relationship with Mexico so that they do not seek to reject U.S. suppliers for those from other regions, such as the EU.”

Jim Mulhern, President and CEO of NMPF, thanked FarmFirst for lending its voice to dairy industry efforts to raise the profile of the Canada trade issue in Washington. Mulhern said lawmakers “need to hear first-hand from dairy leaders that Canada’s new pricing policy undercuts our farmers’ exports and threatens to cause great damage to world dairy prices by dumping Canada’s surplus milk on the world market.”

FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative has long recognized the positive impacts that trade has on the dairy industry, and has been advocating for fair trade deals on behalf of U.S. dairy for years, with this past year as no exception.

“Trade continues to play an ever-important role for dairy,” comments Cooper. “In 2000, dairy exports accounted for \$1 billion and then grew to an all-time high of \$7.2 billion in 2014. Exports in 2016 were nearly \$5 billion, quadruple that of what it was only 15 years prior.”

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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Editor’s note: Images available for download at: <http://bit.ly/2pyGMFX>