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FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative Urges Congress to Explore Every Option for Dairy Farmer Assistance

Madison, Wis. [March 24, 2020] – FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative urges Congress to explore every option available to provide financial and legislative support to dairy farmers during the coronavirus pandemic.

“Dairy farmers were looking to 2020 to be the year of improved milk prices and to slowly begin recovering from the past few years of low milk prices,” says John Rettler, dairy farmer from Neosho, Wis. and president of FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative. “Since the coronavirus pandemic began, all of that optimism has disappeared, and now farmers are simply looking for ways to ensure their milk continues to get picked up in the coming weeks as the situation continues to play out.”

Working in stride with the Midwest Dairy Coalition and the National Milk Producers Federation, FarmFirst has been discussing what types of assistance would serve dairy farmers the best to ensure product keeps moving to consumers, processors can continue to run their plants with minimal disruption, and most importantly, that dairy farmers can continue to keep their farms operating.

“Since the first moment this began, FarmFirst has been monitoring the markets and communicating with processing plants. Our milk marketing and lab testing divisions have been working to ensure new protocols and resources are being shared to ensure everything is done to keep businesses running, so milk can continue to get picked up and processed,” says Jeff Lyon, general manager of FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative.

Additionally, FarmFirst has advocated for re-opening the signup and updating production history in the Dairy Margin Coverage program, allowing for additional dairy product purchases for food banks, and providing compensation for milk disposal.

“At the time of the 2020 Dairy Margin Coverage sign-up, everyone had a much different perspective on how dairy markets would fare throughout the next year. In a matter of a few weeks, the prices have plummeted, completely changing the perspective for dairy farmers who now need to utilize these same margin protection tools to keep their businesses afloat through this challenging time,” says Lyon.

“We are also requesting updated production histories to allow these programs to be most effective for the farms that are operating today. Many farms may not have added more cows but have improved production thanks to improved nutrition, cow comfort and other technologies,” says Rettler. “In addition to dairy policy, we encourage policy changes to allow institutions to freeze or delay farm loan payments and allow farmers to refinance to take advantage of the lower interest rates. Every avenue of financial saving should be explored to help keep our farmers in business as they manage through this pandemic.”

“While sanitation will be of utmost importance, we appreciate all the processing plants doing what they can to slow the spread of the virus and to keep operating. We are grateful for milk haulers, intake personnel and plant employees for doing what they can to limit contact with others while continuing to work. Perhaps most importantly, we are incredibly grateful for our dairy farmers continuing to manage with closed businesses and limited services through this pandemic,” says Lyon.

“FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative extends appreciation to the USDA for their quick response on developing actionable items to support the dairy industry, including approved food purchases and flexibility in transportation rules,” says Lyon. “We look forward to working with the USDA and Congressional leaders to develop tools and resources to ensure that U.S. farmers have what they need to continue to provide wholesome nutritious food during this very challenging time.”

“Time is of the essence. Dairy farmers need support as they continue to serve as an essential part of the foodchain,” says Rettler.

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.

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