

FARM FIRSTTM

DAIRY COOPERATIVE

Priority Issues

Effective legislative and regulatory advocacy is a cornerstone of FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative's mission and vision. It's what makes dairy farmers want to belong to FarmFirst. Getting guidance from members through our public policy process and our board of directors, FarmFirst staff work directly and through the Midwest Dairy Coalition and National Milk Producers Federation to get our policies passed by Congress and signed into law or included in regulations.

FarmFirst was extremely successful in 2018 but knows there is more to do in 2019. Some of the issues we're working on include:



DAIRY POLICY

Implementation of the 2018 Farm Bill – Passage of the bill was no small feat, and while the government experienced an unprecedented shutdown period, FarmFirst actively worked to get the bill passed by December 2018 knowing that any further delay in passage would mean assistance not getting out to dairy farmers. Since passage FarmFirst has urged immediate implementation of the 2018 Farm Bill and its programs.

The Dairy Margin Coverage Program, an overhaul of its predecessor program (MPP) contained several critical changes that FarmFirst advocated for, including a raised catastrophic level (\$4 to \$5), reduced premium rates, increased Tier 1 production coverage, modified margin calculation (bimonthly to monthly), and waived the \$100 administration fee. FarmFirst encourages members participate in this program. Sign-up started on June 17, 2019.

Improving Milk Prices - While extremely supportive of the 2018 Farm Bill, FarmFirst will continue to work for improvements to the Dairy Margin Coverage program as well as evaluate other policy ideas that are being discussed by the dairy industry including federal milk marketing order reform, that will provide greater returns to dairy farmers. 



Enforcing FDA's existing definition for dairy is a top priority for FarmFirst, and after an extended public comment period, in which FarmFirst submitted comments, by the Food and Drug Administration, the agency appears to be moving forward with acting on dairy imitators. With FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb's resignation, FarmFirst has been telling Congress to keep the pressure on FDA so there are no delays. FarmFirst has been well-engaged on this issue and is participating in campaigns to expose products flagrantly using dairy terms without a drop of milk in their product.

DAIRY LABELING



The Dairy Pride Act, legislation that would force the FDA to make dairy labeling issue a top priority, is strongly supported by FarmFirst. The legislation would require FDA to report to Congress on their progress. Having congressional support on this issue sends the message to the FDA that this is a serious matter that needs to be addressed. FarmFirst will be working to get this bill enacted into law. 

INTERNATIONAL TRADE



Removing tariffs and retaliatory tariffs on trade with Mexico and China is imperative for the future of U.S. dairy trade, particularly with Mexico being the #1 export market for U.S. dairy. For every \$1 of U.S. dairy exports to Mexico, \$2.50 is generated as economic activity in the U.S., according to Informa Economics. China is also an important export market and trading partner that should not be overlooked for potential market growth. FarmFirst vocalized opposition to closing the U.S. border with Mexico until the tariffs and retaliatory tariffs were lifted.

FarmFirst supports a timely passage of USMCA by Congress to allow additional trade and improve trading guidelines for U.S. dairy products going into Canada and Mexico.

Maintaining international market access is ever more important as U.S. domestic production continues to grow. Looking beyond our borders to find demand and establish trade agreements for our quality U.S. dairy products is part of the solution. FarmFirst is supportive of fair and free trade opportunities that benefit U.S. dairy farmers and is actively engaged on this issue with national leaders.

Keeping common cheese names common is critical when it comes to U.S. dairy trade. Quality dairy products come from around the world, including the U.S. which is why generic, well-recognized names like parmesan, feta, asiago and Havarti shouldn't be limited to one specific region of the world. FarmFirst opposes the concept of Geographic Indicators on products that cannot be supported by definitive market and development locations. We support trade agreements that represent fair and free trade and the ability to use common names in marketing dairy products.

ENVIRONMENTAL



A new proposed Waters of the U.S. (WOTUS) was published by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on February 14, 2019, replacing the original rule published in 2015 that was widely criticized. This new proposed definition would be more straightforward and clearly define 'waters of the U.S.' and alleviate any uncertainty among both farmers and regulators.

IMMIGRATION



Immigration reform continues to be an important topic for U.S. dairy farmers. FarmFirst recognizes the need in agriculture to have a stable and legal supply of workers and supports federal legislation that provides comprehensive immigration reform that includes securing our borders.

SAFE MILK SUPPLY



Ensuring a safe milk supply begins with milk residue testing. FarmFirst has been proactive in stating our concerns and providing constructive solutions during national meetings where additional regulations and required testing has been proposed. We are continually engaged on this issue to prevent unnecessary regulations on dairy farmers.

BEGINNING FARMERS



FarmFirst believes it is important to support younger generations interested in dairy farming and to provide opportunities for them to become a dairy farmer. FarmFirst supports incentive programs for beginning farmers, including loans, tax incentives and grants, to assist in beginning dairy farmers to startup or transfer a farm.



NUTRITIONAL GUIDELINES



Existing dietary guidelines should be used when determining when the term 'healthy' can be used on food labels. This is the message FarmFirst has delivered to the FDA on several occasions. Science has proven in several peer-reviewed studies that the consumption of milk and dairy products is essential and beneficial to human health, and in general, under consumed by American consumers. Our message also includes making sure that dairy-alternatives are not included as an option in school milk programs due to their inferior nutritional quality compared to milk.

Current USDA rulemaking allows for 1% flavored milk to be served in schools, an issue that FarmFirst has been an advocate for a number of years. Now, legislation has been introduced to allow whole milk to be served in schools. FarmFirst is seeking cosponsors for this legislation and actively working for its passage.