

# MILKLINE

NEWSLETTER

**FARM FIRST**  
DAIRY COOPERATIVE

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## Advocating During a Pandemic



On March 10, I flew to Washington, D.C. to attend the National Milk Producers Federation Board of Directors meeting and do my normal lobbying after the meeting to discuss dairy issues with Congressional members from the Upper Midwest. When I first got to D.C., the coronavirus was just starting to become a concern to the U.S. At the meeting, board members and staff still casually greeted each other however, it was by touching elbows instead of shaking hands.

My, how things changed and in a hurry. By the afternoon of March 12, when I was all set to meet with Congressional members, meetings were cancelled, offices started to close, and everyone headed to the airport to get home before we were stranded in D.C.

Then on March 16, the bottom began

to fall out of the dairy markets when “shelter-in place” orders were enforced. Everyone knew there would be adverse effects, but no one could predict how bad or how long it would last. For our Family Dairies USA division, we came really close in March to dumping milk, but we found a buyer – not at the price that we wanted but a more appealing solution than pouring it on the ground or in a manure pit. Other cooperatives and proprietary plants weren’t so fortunate.

***“By leaning in on the valuable relationships we’ve built over the years, FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative members were top of mind the moment these pandemic policy discussions began taking place.”***

After five years of depressed prices, the dairy industry knew it needed to do something and to do something fast, but how do you get anything done when the normal ways of doing business are not an option?

You continue to roll up your sleeves and get to work, just in a different way. This time lobbying took place via webinar, video conference and many, many phone calls.

For FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative, that work included collaborating with nationally recognized dairy leaders, the National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF), and our regionally-based, Midwest Dairy Coalition (MDC). Professionally, I have been friends with Jim Mulhern, NMPF President & CEO, and Steve Etko, the coordinator

for MDC since the mid-1980s. More importantly, from my recent experience working with these two associations, I knew that Jim and his team of Paul Bleiberg, Jaime Castaneda and Claudia Larson at NMPF and Steve with MDC are highly-respected due to their experience, knowledge of the issues, and their ability to work with both sides of the aisle. Further, NMPF and MDC are a highly regarded trade association and coalition, respectfully.

When you can’t get into legislative or USDA offices to meet, these are the people that get their emails and phone calls returned.

By leaning in on the valuable relationships we’ve built over the years, FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative members were top of mind the moment these pandemic policy discussions began taking place.

As we all know, NMPF submitted a proposal to provide relief to farmers and address the impacts of the pandemic on the economy. The NMPF proposal had its supporters as well as detractors. The USDA wanted to go in a bit of a different direction. Knowing that the solution comes from teamwork and not division – and that time was of the essence, NMPF


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Dedicated to serving and representing you, our family farm members, FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative represents farms in Wisconsin, Minnesota, South Dakota, Michigan, Iowa, Illinois and Indiana through policy advocacy, dairy marketing services, laboratory testing opportunities and industry promotion.

## FarmFirst Serves on WLIC Board of Directors



FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative believes in collaborating with industry partners and supporting organizations aligned with the cooperative's priorities, including the market protection of animal agriculture and ensuring effective traceability

measures if there would ever be an animal disease outbreak. Director of Communications & Marketing, Julie Sweney, was recently re-elected to a three-year term serving on the Wisconsin Livestock Identification Consortium (WLIC) board of directors, an organization that is dedicated to protecting the livestock industry through premise registration and traceability. In her leadership role, she will advocate for ways for continual improvement of current traceability methods and protocols while promoting and educating others about the organization's mission to protect the industry. Learn more at [www.wiid.org](http://www.wiid.org). 

## Advocating During a Pandemic


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maintained its principles and worked with the Administration and Congress on a new proposal to secure the best deal possible for the dairy industry.

Where was FarmFirst during all of this? On the phone - with Jim at NMPF, with Steve at MDC, with Congressional aides and more importantly, with members. I found myself fielding several phone calls and emails from members concerned about the future of their farms. Members offered their own plans and suggestions on the proposals being considered. I appreciated all the input and took that information and relayed it to our D.C. contacts so they could better explain what was going on in the countryside and ultimately, continue to advocate for assistance that would serve the industry best.

Well, in a few weeks we've witnessed a complete turnaround with demand increasing and tight milk supplies. I don't believe we're out of the woods yet and assistance from the federal government is still needed for dairy. We are still working to make sure dairy is included in future stimulus bills. Congressional leaders need to be continually reminded of the importance of agriculture at a time when families are struggling to put food on the table.

Clearly, we are not done with COVID-19, and we don't know what the future holds. However, the world is opening up slowly and communities are working together to get businesses back up and running safely, and to keep them in business. While the higher prices for milk are a welcome sight, hopefully the dairy industry will be content and not increase production to levels that put us back into the predicament we've experienced for too long.

How do you advocate in a pandemic? You surround yourself with people that know their job and know the people that they represent, who are dedicated to advocating for you and have built lasting relationships with decision makers that listen to your members and will do their best for them. That's the very foundation and work of FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative. 

Article by Jeff Lyon  
FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative

CONTACT INFORMATION

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**President:** John Rettler  
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**Vice-President:** Steve Brock  
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**FarmFirstDairyCooperative.com**

## USMCA Enters into Force on July 1, FarmFirst Encourages Steadfast Attention to Trade Details



FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative recognizes the forward progress the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) continues to make as the agreement officially


enters into force today. However, FarmFirst also recognizes the need for steadfast attention to details so the agreement is fully implemented as written.

"Today is a cause for celebration, as the USMCA officially takes hold and enters into force," says Jeff Lyon, FarmFirst General Manager. "Yet, U.S. dairy needs to remain vigilant to ensure that all aspects of this hard-fought trade agreement come to fruition. While we all - the U.S., Mexico and Canada - have much to gain from this new agreement, it must be enforced to the same extent it was written and agreed upon during the negotiation process. The past few months have caused a lot of extra stress on dairy farmers due to the pandemic, so it is incredibly important that no

benefit for U.S. dairy be considered too small."

The USMCA reflects significant changes from its predecessor agreement, addressing in particular the challenging Canadian Class 6 & 7 pricing programs. This new agreement also reaffirms the quality trade relationship U.S. has with Mexico while establishing important protections for common cheese names.

"USMCA is an example of true bipartisan support with U.S. Congressional leaders working together to bring this long-standing trade agreement up-to-date. If you think of this agreement as a roadmap, today simply marks the beginning of our journey, our path that we have chosen to follow together," says John Rettler, dairy farmer from Neosho, Wis. and President of FarmFirst. "If either of us veers off the agreed upon path or makes a detour, it is up to the rest of us to get back on course. By working together and staying true to this determined path, we all have much to benefit today and down the road."

FarmFirst looks forward to working with our industry partners to ensure the agreement is enacted in full force so U.S. dairy farmers will reap the full benefits of the trade ambassadors' hard work. 

## CFAP Dairy Payments Top \$1 Billion

U.S. dairy producers have received more than \$1.04 billion in direct payments through the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) as of June 29. The Farm Service Agency (FSA) began taking applications May 26, and by June 29, they had processed 17,633 dairy applications.

The top states for CFAP dairy payments at the end of June were:

- Wisconsin: \$224,355,698 - 4,501 applicants
- California: \$140,655,620 - 759 applicants
- New York: \$111,269,527 - 2,082 applicants
- Pennsylvania: \$59,777,557 - 1,799 applicants
- Minnesota: \$57,719,913 - 1,694 applicants
- Michigan: \$54,849,737 - 692 applicants
- Idaho: \$45,851,317 - 257 applicants
- Iowa: \$31,943,750 - 704 applicants
- Washington: \$31,788,932 - 234 applicants
- Ohio: \$29,333,742 - 674 applicants
- Texas: \$26,721,998 - 207 applicants

A full listing is available at [www.farmers.gov/cfap/dairy](http://www.farmers.gov/cfap/dairy).

Beyond dairy, payments to livestock producers totaled \$2.43 billion, \$1.27 billion to producers of

non-specialty crops and \$112.8 million to producers of specialty crops. Overall, about \$4.86 billion in payments has been approved to more than 319,544 agricultural producers who applied for assistance through the CFAP as of June 29.

Applications will be accepted through Aug. 28, 2020, with application numbers and program payments announced each Monday on the CFAP website.

### USDA Adds Digital Options for Farmers to Apply for CFAP

FSA offices can now accept CFAP applications through an online portal, expanding options available to producers to apply for the program. FSA is also leveraging commercial document storage and e-signature solutions to enable producers to work with local service center staff to complete their applications from home. Learn more about these digital options by visiting [www.farmers.gov/sign-in](http://www.farmers.gov/sign-in). 



## Dairy Margin Coverage Payments for April and May Milk

Following March's indemnity payments for DMC with \$0.35/cwt at the \$9.50 level, the U.S. average milk price for both months of April and May have triggered an indemnity payment for all DMC coverage levels.

The USDA released its latest Ag Prices report on June 30, including factors used to calculate DMC margins and payments. Based on USDA calculations, the May DMC margin is estimated at just \$5.37 per hundredweight (cwt), down 66 cents per cwt from April. For a second consecutive month, it's the smallest milk income over feed cost margin since the DMC was created in 2019 and the smallest margin since June 2016 under the

Month	DMC Margin (\$ per cwt)	Payment Rate for Margin Coverage Level			
		\$9.50	\$9.00	\$8.50	\$8.00
May 2020	\$5.37	\$4.13	\$3.63	\$3.13	\$2.63
April 2020	\$6.03	\$3.47	\$2.97	\$2.47	\$1.97
March 2020	\$9.15	\$0.35	--	--	--
February 2020	\$10.06	--	--	--	--
January 2020	\$10.72	--	--	--	--

Sourced from [fsa.usda.gov](http://fsa.usda.gov).

program's predecessor, the Margin Protection Program for Dairy (MPP-Dairy), which utilized different margin calculations and indemnity payment triggers. 

## Get to Know Your Board: Rich Meyer of Unity, Wis. - District 7 Director



**Name:** Rich Meyer  
**Location:** Unity, Wis.  
**First Joined the Board:** 1998

### Tell us more about your dairy farm.

Our family farm, known as REM-JEM Dairy, includes myself, my wife Judy, two of our sons, Dennis and Thomas, and our grandson Trevor as well as a few employees. While we're the first generation on this specific

*Rich Meyer joined the FarmFirst board in 1998.*

farm, our family has been dairy farming for generations, making Trevor a fifth-generation dairy farmer. Our herd is 100% registered Holsteins. We grow all our feed for our farm, and also sell between 30-50 dairy heifers each year.

### Why do you choose to be a member of FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative?

The very basic answer is that I sell my milk to a privately-owned factory, and therefore I have to belong to a test verification cooperative like FarmFirst. I have always shipped to a private factory, but it wasn't I began to get more involved with my cooperative that I understood all that they were doing on the farmer's behalf. Today, I say that I belong to FarmFirst because they serve as a national voice for Midwest dairy farmers.

### What motivated you to run for a director seat on the board?


At the time, I had a few years of experience being involved with the young farmer program with a different cooperative and had served on the board as the young farmer representative. I quickly learned how a cooperative operated, how they served members and I really enjoyed the experience. A few years later, I decided to take the chance as becoming the board member

for this cooperative for my area of the state. I was in a position at home where I could attend meetings during the day. Being a board member has led me to learn so much more about our industry and to meet so many people, locally and across the U.S. Through national conferences, I have witnessed what our membership with the National Milk Producers Federation has accomplished for our members and how national dairy leaders listen to and advocate for our needs.

### What do you hope to achieve while on the board?

My top priority as a director is to ensure that FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative continues to offer programs and opportunities that best serve its members, like our unique disaster benefits program. I believe that if the cooperative focuses on our members' needs and continually improves our member benefits based on membership feedback, we will continue to succeed. Additionally, I believe this service includes being well-represented at the national level on federal issues. Maintaining strong leadership and involvement at this national level is key.

### When it comes to advocacy efforts, what issues are most important to you?

A handful come to mind - dairy labeling, animal welfare, and others - but perhaps the programs I am most vocal about revolve around supporting today's young farmers. I am passionate about programs that support our young cooperators, like our leadership program that kicked off this year, and I have always been an advocate for our long-standing scholarship program. (This MilkLine edition features our 2020 scholarship award winners on page 5). These programs are so incredibly valuable as they help younger members learn more about what their cooperative is doing for them and they meet other ambitious members and learn about their operations. Eventually, we hope to see these young members get more involved in cooperative leadership roles. 

# Announcing 2020 Scholarship Recipients

In its eighth year of the program, FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative is proud to announce its 2020 scholarship award recipients.

This year continues the tradition of significant support made by the cooperative for members' children, awarding \$21,000 to 27 applicants this year. In total, more than \$166,000 has been given to 192 students since 2013. Scholarship recipients were selected based on leadership, scholastic achievement, and extracurricular activities in addition to essay responses and their future career goals. **Congratulations to the 2020 FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative Scholarship Award recipients!** 🎓



Wyatt Artac  
Greenwood, Wis.



Claire Bangart  
Stratford, Wis.



Carley Jo Ciolkosz  
Thorp, Wis.



Judsom Doman  
Rib Lake, Wis.



Abby Frisk  
New Lisbon, Wis.



Katie Gindt  
Boyd, Wis.



Rebecca Havelka  
Wallace, Mich.



Jordan Helle  
Worthington, Iowa



Serenity Hetke  
Ladysmith, Wis.



Paul Hoesly  
Granton, Wis.



Paul Kollross  
Arpin, Wis.



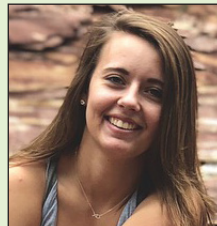
Makenna Koopmans  
Cambria, Wis.



Kari Kreklau  
Stetsonville, Wis.



Wyatt Lebal  
Kennan, Wis.



Morgan Lebal  
Kennan, Wis.



Makayla Loppnow  
Reedsville, Wis.



Kaitlyn Martin  
Pulaski, Wis.



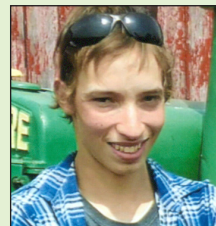
Anastasia McCourt  
Fond du Lac, Wis.



Grady Moose  
Minneota, Minn.



Laura Mueller  
Newton, Wis.



Benjamin Page  
Gresham, Wis.



Amber Post  
Lake Wilson, Minn.



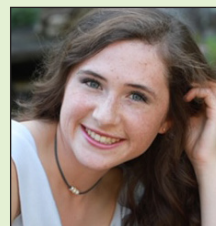
Bailey Sellent  
Almena, Wis.



Olivia Smidel  
Kewaunee, Wis.



Reanna Stowe  
Athens, Wis.



Abigail Tomandl  
Medford, Wis.



Brianna Wanek  
Cashton, Wis.

MAY 2020

Federal Milk Order  
Market Information

	UPPER MIDWEST	CENTRAL	MIDEAST
Order Name and Number	Order 30	Order 32	Order 33
Producer Milk (lbs.)	2,779,134,593	1,394,210,472	1,786,810,438
Producer Price Differential @ base zone	\$ 0.17	\$ 0.10	\$ 0.59
Statistical Uniform Price/cwt @ 3.5% BF*	\$ 12.31	\$ 12.24	\$ 12.73
Class I Price/cwt	\$ 14.75	\$ 14.95	\$ 14.95
Class II Price/cwt	\$ 12.30	\$ 12.30	\$ 12.30
Class III Price/cwt	\$ 12.14	\$ 12.14	\$ 12.14
Class IV Price/cwt	\$ 10.67	\$ 10.67	\$ 10.67
<b>Component Prices &amp; Test Avg. % aves</b>			
Butterfat/lb.	\$ 1.3756	3.91%	3.89%
Protein/lb.	\$ 2.0918	3.11%	3.17%
Other Solids/lb.	\$ 0.18820	5.78%	5.80%
SCC Adjust Rate/1000	\$ 0.00065		
<b>Producer Milk Classified %</b>			
Class I	7.90%	27.31%	31.20%
Class II	2.90%	10.21%	19.70%
Class III	83.90%	39.35%	33.10%
Class IV	5.30%	23.13%	16.00%
	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%



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## Cone or Dish?

July is National Ice Cream Month - so help us celebrate and earn the chance to win a Culver's gift card!

Snap a photo of you or of a family member enjoying your favorite ice cream or custard and send it to us at FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative! Send it by August 15, and we'll pick our top ten favorites, each receiving a \$10 Culver's gift card! These top ten will then have 1 randomly selected to receive the grand prize of a \$100 Culver's gift card! Learn more by visiting [bit.ly/FarmFirstIceCreamContest](https://bit.ly/FarmFirstIceCreamContest). Photos can be submitted online or emailed to [jsweny@farmfirstcoop.com](mailto:jsweny@farmfirstcoop.com) by August 15.