



# WCMA NEWS

AN EXCLUSIVE UPDATE FOR MEMBERS OF THE  
WISCONSIN CHEESE MAKERS ASSOCIATION



## SIGNATURE EVENTS



## World Championship Cheese Contest to Host Public Hours, Livestream Champion Ceremony



Submit entries of cheese, butter, yogurt, and dry dairy ingredients now through January 26 at [WorldChampionCheese.org](https://WorldChampionCheese.org) and mark your calendar for Thursday, March 7, at 2:00 p.m. (CT) for the live announcement of the 2024 World Champion Cheese!

**ENTER NOW**

Following an impressive showing in 2022 with 2,978 entries, the [2024 World Championship Cheese Contest](#) promises another year of exciting competition. For the first time since 2020, the 2024 Contest will again be open to the public during preliminary rounds of judging on Tuesday, March 5 and Wednesday, March 6 from 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. (CT). Judging will occur at Monona Terrace Community & Convention Center in Madison, Wisconsin. All entries will be evaluated by a team of internationally renowned technical experts, culminating in the live announcement of the Top 20 cheeses in the world

- and the newest World Champion.

The entry window closes January 26, so [act now to compete](#) in the world's largest technical dairy products evaluation.

Have questions? Please contact [WCMA Contest Director Kirsten Strohmenger](#).

# CHEESE EXPO

## Global Technology for Dairy Processors

April 16-18, 2024 | Baird Center | Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Special Events: April 16, 2024 | Exhibits & Seminars: April 17-18, 2024

### Register Today for Best CheeseExpo Rates



The best available rates on the nation's largest gathering of dairy processors expire soon. Visit [CheeseExpo.org](#) by January 30 to save big on your all-access pass to the industry's must-attend event of 2024!

Join over 4,000 colleagues, customers, and friends for unparalleled networking, education, and celebration - all focused on the dairy processing industry. [Register now and save 20 percent](#) on full, single-day, and exhibits and networking events registrations for most attendees.

Please contact the [WCMA Events team](#) with questions.

[REGISTER NOW](#)

## GRANTS





## \$27M Available in Food Infrastructure Grants

Wisconsin dairy manufacturers and processors have until 5:00 p.m. (CT) Wednesday, March 6 to apply for the state's [Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure \(RFSI\)](#) grant program, offering a total of \$27 million in awards.

**APPLY FOR  
FUNDING**

The RFSI program aims to expand capacity and infrastructure for the production, processing, and distribution of locally- and regionally-produced foods, including dairy products. Funding for the grants is provided through the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Businesses may apply for one of two grant tracks.

**Infrastructure Grants** range from \$100,000 to \$3 million each. The funding can be used for building design, renovation & construction, equipment, staff time, plan development, market development, and system modernization. A match is required, and may be as low as 25 percent for applicants who qualify as underserved.

**Equipment-Only Grants** range from \$10,000 to \$99,999 each. This funding may only be used for new, used, or refurbished equipment. No match is required for Equipment-Only Grants.

Questions about the program can be emailed to [RFSI@wisconsin.gov](mailto:RFSI@wisconsin.gov), or shared with [WCMA Senior Director of Programs & Policy Rebekah Sweeney](#).

### Learn More in Free WCMA Webinar February 13

Get an inside look at the RFSI program and learn how to submit your best application in [a free webinar for WCMA members](#) on Tuesday, February 13 at 1:00 p.m. (CT)!

Register today to join WCMA and WDATCP staff for an informative, concise session. Bring your questions, or submit them in advance to [WCMA Communications Director Grace Atherton](#).

RSVP NOW



## ADVOCACY



## Join WCMA Advocacy Day February 6



You're invited to join WCMA's open Policy Committee for an in-person meeting at the Concourse Hotel and State Capitol in Madison, Wisconsin on Tuesday, February 6 from 10:30 a.m.- 3:00 p.m. (CT)!

[Register now at WisCheeseMakers.org](https://www.wischeesemakers.org) to hear from federal and state lawmakers about the session ahead - and to advocate for industry priorities.

SIGN UP TODAY

From the Farm Bill to FMMO reform, and from state grant programs to regulatory change,

WCMA's voice makes an impact in Washington and Wisconsin. Join us in our effort to strengthen the dairy processing community through direct advocacy. Here's a look at our meeting agenda:

- 10:00 a.m.: Sign-In & Networking
- 10:30 a.m.: Introductions & Overview of WCMA Advocacy Efforts
- 11:00 a.m.: Key Speakers
- 12:00 p.m.: Networking Lunch
- 12:30 p.m.: Legislative Leaders' Panel Discussion
- 1:30 p.m.: Legislative Meetings Briefing
- 2:00-3:00 p.m.: Meet with Lawmakers in State Capitol
- 3:00 p.m.: Return to Concourse Hotel & Adjournment

Stay tuned for additional details as speakers are confirmed in the coming days. Please contact [WCMA Senior Director of Programs & Policy Rebekah Sweeney](#) with your questions and ideas.

## Sponsor WCMA's Advocacy Efforts!

Show your support for the dairy processing industry, and its advocacy efforts at the federal and state levels, with a [low-cost, high-visibility sponsorship](#) of WCMA's Policy Committee Meeting & Advocacy Day event. Benefits include:

- Two complimentary registrations for your staff to attend
- Company logo on event sponsor signage and agenda
- Company logo on registration page on WisCheeseMakers.org
- Company logo in WCMA e-newsletter the week prior and the week following event, acknowledging sponsorship
- Company tag in social media posts on Facebook and Twitter the day of the event, acknowledging sponsorship

Only a few sponsorships are available, so act now for this unique opportunity. Have questions? Please contact [WCMA Senior Director of Programs & Policy Rebekah Sweeney](#).

**SECURE SPONSORSHIP**



## Voice Support for Wisconsin Dairy Labeling Bills

Act now to [advocate for newly introduced proposals](#) in the Wisconsin legislature



designed to protect dairy names and provide consumer clarity in the marketplace. These proposals - recently introduced by Senator Howard Marklein (R-Spring Green), Representative Peter Schmidt (R-Bonduel), and Representative Joy Goeben (R-Hobart) - ban the labeling of foods as "dairy products" or "dairy ingredients" if the food is not made from the milk of a cow, sheep, goat, or other camelid mammal.

With [WCMA's easy-to-use advocacy tool](#), you can message your elected officials with just a few clicks, letting them know you want to see them support these bills and move them forward.

Please contact [WCMA Senior Director of Programs & Policy Rebekah Sweeney](#) with any questions.

## CONTACT LAWMAKERS



## WCMA Pushes for Regulatory Flexibility on Fertilizer Use

Together with a coalition of food and agriculture industry organizations, WCMA has been working to address recent actions by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) to threaten dairy processors' use of production wastewater residuals as valuable commercial fertilizer.

Following a [letter sent by the coalition in late November](#), a group of stakeholders including WCMA leaders met with WDNR leadership and legal counsel to discuss next steps and proposals to provide regulatory flexibility in managing these material streams moving forward.

WDNR reaffirmed its position that land application of industrial wastewater and sludge is subject to regulation under Chapter NR 214 of Wisconsin regulations. At the same time, agency leaders emphasized a commitment to working collaboratively with stakeholders to identify a viable path forward.

In the short term, WDNR is willing to grant certain facility-specific exemptions to NR 214 requirements. Agency staff will work with industry to identify ways to streamline the exemption process when certain conditions are met, develop a predictable process for reviewing and approving exemption requests, and develop a guidance document addressing facility-specific exemptions. WDNR aims to complete this document within the next three months (by the end of March 2024). The agency has agreed that the development of this document will include opportunities for stakeholder input, including at least one meeting with industry. In the longer term, WDNR also remains open to considering rulemaking to amend to NR 214.

Several Wisconsin dairy processors received letters late last year from WDNR seeking

information about their distribution of wastewater residuals as fertilizer, with a deadline of December 15. Those who have not yet responded to these letters need not do so at this time. WDNR will follow up with recipients later this month to establish a new deadline for providing information. We have been assured that information provided in response to this request will not be used for enforcement purposes.

WCMA will continue to provide updates on this effort as it advances. Please contact [WCMA Executive Director John Umhoefer](#) or [Senior Director of Programs & Policy Rebekah Sweeney](#) with questions.



## Total Federal Spending Set at \$1.59 Trillion

Congressional leaders this week [announced an agreement](#) on the total amount to be allocated in the next round of federal spending bills. Lawmakers settled on a total of \$1.59 trillion in government spending for fiscal year 2024. The agreement clears the way for more detailed spending bills to be drafted and passed before January 19 - when funding for agriculture, energy, housing, and transportation programs is set to run out. WCMA will continue to share developments with members.

### WCMA NOTES

# WCMA NOTES



Offered by:

**John Umhoefer**  
WCMA Executive Director



# U.S. Sheep Cheeses Ever-Poised for Growth

Sheep cheese, a category that has seen U.S. retail sales rise 14 percent in the past year, remains dominated by imports, while quality domestic sheep cheeses strain to find mass appeal. But the question remains: How do the high-quality, diverse U.S. sheep dairy offerings break through to broader success? WCMA Executive Director John Umhoefer shares his findings in this month's [WCMA Notes column](#).

## IN THE NEWS

### Wisconsin

- *Food Safety News*: [Raw milk bill filed in Wisconsin legislature](#)
- *UpNorthNews*: [Wisconsin's top 10 cheeses](#)

### National/International

- *Dairy Processing*: [DFA first to buy credits via new carbon insetting marketplace](#) (Featuring WCMA member Dairy Farmers of America)
- *Dairy Foods*: [Danone sells Horizon Organic and Wallaby](#)
- *Financial Post*: [Lino A. Saputo appointed Member of the Order of Canada](#) (Featuring WCMA member Saputo)
- *WJJO-FM*: [Central MN creamery offering cheese & chocolate boxes for sale](#)

## EDUCATION



## Learn with Friends and Peers at WCMA Young Professionals Event

WCMA members under 40 can [register now](#) to join a day of networking and education at Meister Cheese in Muscoda, Wisconsin on Thursday, February 8, hosted by WCMA's Young Professionals group.

The event kicks off at 10:00 a.m. (CT) and will include lunch, in addition to tours of the company's cheese and whey plants and wastewater treatment facility.



Registration costs just \$25 per person. Only 30 spaces are available, so early sign-up is strongly encouraged!



**RSVP TODAY**

Please contact [WCMA Contest Director Kirsten Strohmenger](#) with questions.



## RSVP for WCMA's All-New, Virtual Train the Safety Trainer Course

Limited space remains available in the [January 30 virtual edition](#) of WCMA's all-new Train the Safety Trainer Course. This interactive class is designed to equip the industry's safety trainers with the knowledge, skills, and strategies to effectively communicate safety expectations and protocols for maximum compliance.

Taught by instructors from Chippewa Valley Technical College (CVTC) with significant experience in dairy processing plants, the course covers best practices for design and delivery methods used by successful workforce safety trainers.

For just \$219 per person, each participant will come away with a wealth of new skills and strategies, a packet of training materials, and a certificate of completion from CVTC and WCMA that they and their employer can retain as a record of instruction.

**REGISTER NOW**

### Basic Safety Training for Dairy Processors

For safety education geared toward all dairy processing



employees, register your team members for Basic Safety Training for Dairy Processors.

Offered six times this year, both **in-person and virtually**, Basic Safety Training for Dairy Processors will teach attendees about their rights; employer responsibilities; and how to identify, abate, and avoid job-related hazards.

The curriculum concentrates on the key focus areas of the Occupational Safety & Health Administration's ongoing Local Emphasis Program for food processors: machine guarding, lockout/tag out, prevention of slips, trips, and falls, chemical controls, and control of hazardous energy.

In-person classes cost \$179, including lunch and snacks. Virtual sessions are offered at just \$149. These classes are capped at 24 attendees, so act quickly.

**REGISTER NOW**

Have questions? Please contact **[WCMA Senior Director of Programs & Policy Rebekah Sweeney](#)**.



## Act Now for Top-Rated, Affordable Employee Trainings from WCMA

Join the ranks of over 1,000 WCMA member employees who have sharpened their leadership skills and expanded their networks through WCMA's popular **[Front-Line Leadership Trainings!](#)**

**SIGN UP**

Each class is a one-day offering, running from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. (CT). All Front-Line Leadership classes are offered a la carte and may be taken in any order. Here's a look at

our fully virtual offerings this spring:

- Part A will focus on developing essential leadership skills.
  - ~~January 23~~ - **SOLD OUT**
  - ~~January 24~~ - **Only seven seats left!**
- Part B will provide strategies to help supervisors boost staff performance.
  - ~~February 26~~
  - ~~February 29~~
- Part C will help trainees learn to foster a collaborative team mindset in their workplace.
  - ~~April 2~~ - **Only three seats left!**
  - ~~April 3~~

Questions? Please contact [WCMA Membership Director Sara Schmidt](#).



## Industry Education Spotlight: Innovation Center Hosts Free Foreign Material Prevention Webinar

Sign up now to [attend a free webinar](#) on January 31 at 1:00 p.m. (CT) hosted by the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy focused on [Foreign Material Prevention in Dairy Products](#). In this free session, presenters will share a structured approach and specific guidance for cheese, ice cream, powders, and other dairy products as well as practical proven strategies to prevent foreign material issues. Key speakers are:

- Dave Wentz - Sargento Foods
- Amanda Fischer - Schreiber Foods
- Gale Beard – Grande Cheese & Ingredients
- Adam Bolain – Commercial Quality and Food Safety Solutions

A closing Q&A panel will also be held with additional experts:

- Jeremy Travis – Hilmar Cheese & Ingredients
- Stacy Eckert – Blue Bell Creameries
- EJ Brady – Prairie Farms
- Brian Kraus – Wells Blue Bunny
- Steve Couto – Hilmar Cheese & Ingredients
- Dave Kedzierski – United Dairywomen of Arizona
- Dave Cook – Commercial Quality and Food Safety Solutions
- Chad Galer – Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy/DMI
- Tim Stubbs – Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy/DMI

Have questions? Please contact [Innovation Center's Tim Stubbs](#).

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## Additional Industry Educational Opportunities

WCMA is pleased to share opportunities for industry training and enrichment. Here's a look at upcoming offerings from WCMA partners:

- February 12-April 22: [Certificate in Dairy Processing](#) - Center for Dairy Research
- March 19-21: [Cheese Grading & Evaluation](#) - Center for Dairy Research
- March 22: [Cheese Judging](#) - Center for Dairy Research
- On-Demand:
  - [Introduction to Food Safety Principles \(English and Spanish\)](#) - Cornell University



- [Online Dairy Science and Sanitation \(English and Spanish\)](#) - Cornell University
- [Artisan Dairy Food Safety Coaching](#) - Cornell University
- [Online HACCP Training](#) - North Carolina State University
- [Environmental Monitoring in the Dairy Industry](#) - North Carolina State University
- [Preventive Controls for Dairy Processors](#) - North Carolina State University
- [Food Safety Basics For Artisan Cheesemakers](#) - North Carolina State University

## MEMBERSHIP



## Apply By February 7 for WCMA Scholarships

Undergraduate, graduate, and technical students - including WCMA member employees and their children - have until February 7 to apply for WCMA's [annual student scholarships](#). On April 17, WCMA will present a total of \$19,000 in scholarship awards will be presented at [CheeseExpo](#) in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Seven awards are available across three scholarships:

- The [WCMA Myron P. "Mike" Dean Cheese Industry Student Scholarship](#), open to WCMA dairy processor and manufacturer member employees and their children;
- The [WCMA Cheese Industry Supplier Student Scholarship](#), open to WCMA supplier member employees and their children; and
- The [Brian Eggebrecht Student Scholarship Supporting Skilled Trades in the Dairy Industry](#), open to all students attending or registered to attend a technical school in Wisconsin.

Applicants for all WCMA scholarships must supply school transcripts, a letter of recommendation, and a completed application form. All applicants will be notified of their application status in March. Full details on all WCMA scholarships are [available online](#).

Have questions? Please contact [WCMA Communications Director Grace Atherton](#).

**DOWNLOAD APPLICATIONS**

**WisCheeseMakers.org**  
**(608) 286-1001**



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