

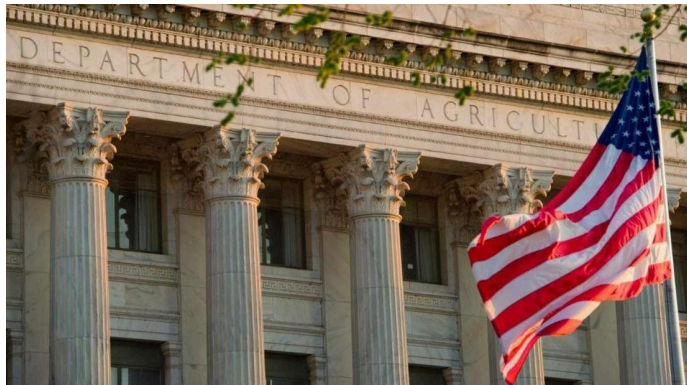


February 17, 2026
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NEWS

House Farm Bill Draft Released



House Agriculture Committee Chairman Glenn "GT" Thompson (R-PA 03) on Friday released draft text of the 2026 Farm Bill, titled the [Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026](#).

Committee markup - when committee members debate, amend, and rewrite the bill before sending it to the full House - is scheduled for next week.

The draft includes the following provisions important to dairy processors:

- **SNAP Dairy Nutrition Incentives:** The bill would expand Healthy Fluid Milk Incentives into broader Dairy Nutrition Incentive Projects (DNIP), encouraging purchases of all varieties of milk as well as cheese. Funding authorization levels are increased, though annual appropriations will still be required. Industry partners are exploring an amendment opportunity to include yogurt and cultured dairy products during Committee consideration.
- **Mandatory Cost Surveys:** The legislation would permanently authorize Mandatory Cost Surveys, helping ensure Federal Milk Marketing Order make allowances accurately reflect current manufacturing costs. Permanent authorization would provide long-term pricing stability and better alignment with actual processing costs — critical for capital investment, innovation, and demand growth.
- **Dairy Forward Pricing Program:** The bill permanently authorizes the Dairy Forward Pricing Program for Class II, III, and IV plants and their producers, providing long-term certainty for processors and farmers utilizing forward contracting tools.
- **Whole and 2% Milk in School Breakfast:** The draft reinforces service of whole and 2% milk in the School Breakfast Program consistent with the recently enacted Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act, strengthening dairy's role in child nutrition programs.
- **Food for Peace Transition to USDA:** The bill transfers administration of the Food for Peace program to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), creating potential new opportunities to integrate U.S. dairy products into international food assistance programs.

While the proposal lacks specificity around the Dairy Business Innovation Initiatives (DBIs), this program was permanently authorized in the 2018 Farm Bill, and will be funded through annual appropriations. In January 2026, USDA awarded more than \$11 million to the current DBI centers, thanks to 2025 appropriations. WCMA is lobbying for increased appropriations later this year.

Wisconsin Legislature to Take Up WCMA Priorities This Week

As legislative leadership signals its plans to wrap up the current session, the Wisconsin Legislature is expected to take up a number of WCMA priorities this week.



Here's a look at what we expect will see debate and votes in the coming days:

- [Assembly Bill 130/Senate Bill 127](#), which exempts certain parties, including wastewater landspreaders operating in compliance with the Department of Natural Resources, from liability and remediation of PFAS contamination
- [Assembly Bill 222/Senate Bill 284](#), which creates a Sustainable Aviation Fuel Tax Credit and includes dairy byproducts in the list of renewable fuels eligible for the credit
- [Assembly Bill 664/Senate Bill 645](#), which requires butter to be served in restaurants, schools, and state institutions unless an exception is ordered by a parent or guardian
- [Assembly Bill 408/Senate Bill 402](#), which designates *Lactococcus lactis* as the official Wisconsin state microbe

WCMA also expects movement on [Senate Bill 154](#), which bans recipients of the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), called FoodShare in Wisconsin, from purchasing candy and soda with their benefits – a move that, due to an outdated definition in state statute, could jeopardize protein bar purchases as well. This bill appears to be moving now as a vehicle to address the \$69.2 million funding need for FoodShare, created by recent federal changes that shifted 75 percent of the program's administrative costs to states.



WCMA worked with the bill authors to secure an amendment that ensures protein bars are exempted from the definition of "candy". WCMA Senior Director of Programs & Policy Rebekah Sweeney also [testified last week](#) on the bill, noting its value as a way to stabilize FoodShare administration and modernize state law. Members with questions about this bill, or any of WCMA's advocacy efforts should contact [Rebekah Sweeney](#).

WCMA Leads Broad Coalition to Urge FoodShare Fix



Last week, ahead of a powerful State Advocacy Day with record WCMA member turnout, [WCMA led a broad coalition of organizations](#) in urging Wisconsin lawmakers to provide necessary funds for FoodShare. The fix would prevent costly administrative penalties, a lapse in benefits for Wisconsin families, and potential market disruption for Wisconsin food producers and processors.

Thanks to the voices of WCMA members, our joint news conference with Wisconsin agricultural and hunger relief groups garnered significant media attention:

- WMTV: [Wisconsin organizations call for more than \\$69 million to protect FoodShare benefits amid federal changes](#)
- WMSN-TV: [Agriculture and hunger relief groups call upon state lawmakers for SNAP funding](#)
- WISC-TV: [Agriculture and hunger relief groups call upon state lawmakers for SNAP funding](#)
- Q106 Radio: [Wisconsin agricultural groups call for action to support FoodShare](#)
- WKOW-TV: [Local leaders push for funding to support Wisconsin FoodShare Program](#)
- Midwest Farm Report: [Wisconsin agriculture calls for action to support FoodShare](#)
- Morning Ag Clips: [Wisconsin ag, hunger relief groups call for action to support FoodShare](#)

Our thanks go to all those who have joined the call to fund FoodShare. There's still time for WCMA members operating in Wisconsin to participate - [act now](#) to send your legislators a message.

DBIA Grant Period Opens February 23



Midwest dairy businesses can [prepare now to apply for the next round of grants](#) through the Dairy Business Innovation Alliance (DBIA), a partnership between WCMA and the Center for Dairy Research (CDR). Applications will open February 23 for Dairy Business Builder grants, available to small- to mid-sized dairy farmers and processors seeking to diversify on-farm activities, develop value-added products, enhance dairy by-products, or expand export programs. [READ MORE...](#)

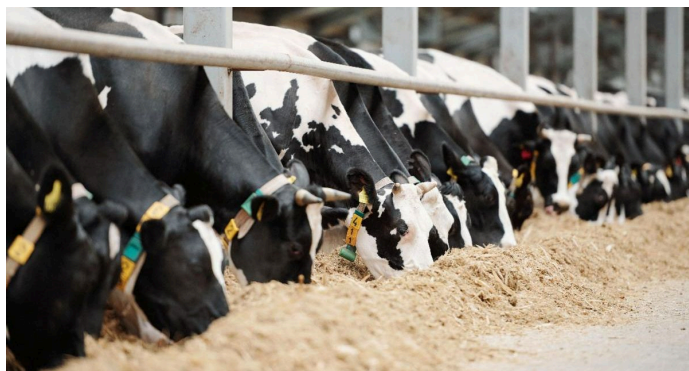
Looking for application tips?

Applicants are encouraged to [watch DBIA's new "Helpful Hints" video](#) for additional details on grant eligibility, step-by-step instructions on how to apply, and helpful tips for a strong application.

GET THE RECORDING



USDA Releases Webinar on Preventing HPAI on Dairy Farms



The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has posted [additional guidance online for dairy farmers](#) on preventing the spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI or H5N1) among U.S. dairy herds. The resources include a recording of USDA's [January 28 webinar](#), focused on ways farm personnel can ensure biosecurity and prevent the further spread of HPAI in dairy cattle. [READ MORE...](#)

Headlines

Wisconsin

- WITI-TV: [Valentine's Day with cheese manufacturer from Third Ward](#) (Featuring WCMA member Hill Valley Dairy)
- Wall Street Journal: [The state that churns out beer, cheese-and the fastest speedskater alive](#)

National & Global

- FoodNavigator: [Good Culture lands additional \\$55M investment](#)
- 60 Minutes: [RFK Jr. says ultraprocessed food manufacturers hijacked GRAS "loophole" to use questionable ingredients](#)
- NBC News: [Trump administration says it is ending its immigration surge in Minnesota](#)
- Dairy Herd Management: [Agropur announces \\$130 million investment in South Dakota and Wisconsin dairy plants](#) (Featuring WCMA member Agropur)

EVENTS & CONNECTION

Build a Thriving Network at CheeseExpo



Forge new connections and create lasting business opportunities at [CheeseExpo 2026](#). From First Taste: A Reception for First-Time Attendees to the interactive World of Cheese experience on the exhibit floor, and much more - there's a wealth of brand-new, exciting opportunities to grow your network and your business at CheeseExpo. Don't delay: [Register by February 24](#) to save 10 percent!

[REGISTER NOW](#)

WCMA Announces Cheese Technology Tour in Denmark, Sweden



WCMA is pleased to announce a 2026 WCMA Cheese Technology Tour in Denmark and Sweden, set for August 26-September 6 - an opportunity for members to visit cheese factories and key supplier research facilities and enjoy the culture of Scandinavia. WCMA can welcome up to 30 travelers for this special event, which includes five days in and around Aarhus and Copenhagen, Denmark, and five days in Sweden, including Stockholm.

Five cheese factory tours are planned, including a rare stop at Bornholm Island to see World Champion blue cheese production at St. Clemens Dairy. In addition to cheese factory visits, Arla Foods, Novonesis and Tetra Pak will open their technology centers to our group.

[Download the tour brochure](#) for complete information. Prior to registering or making a deposit for the tour, interested parties must contact [WCMA Executive Director John Umhoefer](#) to express interest in registering for the tour. Initial deposits from travelers are sought by March 31. WCMA reserves the right to apportion availability to assure that active dairy processors and young professionals have opportunities to register, as well as legacy (retired) professionals.

For any questions related to the tour or to payment, please contact [John Umhoefer](#) or tour partner [Jaume Romera](#) or [Flavio Duz](#) at Pangea Tours.

February 18	March 3-5	March 12	March 17
Dairy Sustainability Group Meeting (Hybrid)	2026 World Championship Cheese Contest	Food & Dairy Joint Annual Meeting with Wisconsin DNR (Hybrid)	Health & Safety Group Meeting (Hybrid)

EDUCATION

Industry Training Spotlight: Cheese Judging with CDR



Learn the ins and outs of cheese judging at the Center for Dairy Research's [Cheese Judging short course](#) on March 6. This course is designed to help attendees build their confidence and focus their sensory and grading abilities to be an effective contest judge and understand the criteria against which cheeses are judged. Successful completion of the CDR Cheese Grading & Evaluation Workshop, and/or experience as a cheese grader or sensory evaluator, is recommended prior to taking this course. [READ MORE...](#)



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