

## Dairy Innovation Hub Advisory Council

January 24, 2025

Meeting minutes

Notes by Elisabeth Berndt

Participants Virtually: Matt Ruark, Maria Woldt, Elisabeth Berndt, Dave Daniels (WFBF), Troy Runge (UW-Madison), Wayne Weber (UW-Platteville), Mike Orth (UW-River Falls), Mitch Breunig (PDPW), Chad Zuleger (DBA), Holly Dolliver (UW-River Falls), Tim Fiocchi (WFBF), Scott Rankin (UW-Madison), Shelly Mayer (PDPW), John Umhoefer (WCMA), Heidi Johnson (ex-officio, UW Extension), Tom Crave (DBA)

Proxy Participants: Ashley Andre for Randy Romanski (DATCP), Sierra Howry for Steve Kelm (UW-River Falls)

Absent: Tera Montgomery (UW-Platteville), Chuck Nicholson (UW-Madison)

Virtual Zoom meeting.

Dave Daniels called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m.

**Approval of Minutes (8.13.24 meeting): A motion to approve the minutes as presented was made by Scott Rankin, Mitch Breunig seconded. All were in favor. The minutes were approved.**

Dave Daniels overviewed the meeting and welcomed everyone. Dr. Matt Ruark was introduced as the new Dairy Innovation Hub Faculty Director.

**Administrative update:** Matt was appointed faculty director in October. He has been involved with the Hub since its inception as advocate and inaugural steering committee member. Dr. Ruark is a soil scientist focusing on manure/nutrient management and overall soil health.

**Advisory council nominations:** The following seats are up for nomination.

- WFBF – Dave Daniels (eligible for third term)
- PDPW – Shelly Mayer (eligible for third term)
- UW-Platteville – Tera Montgomery (eligible for third term)
- UW-River Falls – Steve Kelm, (Sierra Howry for next term)

Dave Daniels, Shelly Mayer and Tera Montgomery have agreed to reappointment.

The following roles are not up for nomination, but appointments have been reassigned.

- DBA – Tom Crave filling the spot for Aric Dieter
- UW-River Falls – Sierra Howry is assuming the role of campus liaison for UW-River Falls and is filling the spot for Steve Kelm
- UW-Madison – Chuck Nicholson is stepping down from his role and Jimena Laporta is filling the spot

Heidi Johnson will be serving in a new ex-officio role.

**Motion to approve council nominations: A motion to approve all council nominations and reassignments was made by Holly Dolliver. Mitch Breunig seconded. All were in favor.**

**New committee member introductions:** Tom Crave is a co-owner of Crave Brother Farmstead Cheese in Waterloo with his brothers. Their family farm expanded from 80 to 2,200 cows over the past twenty-two years. The farmstead has a cheese factory onsite.

Heidi Johnson is the Agriculture Institute Director and the assistant program director for UW Extension making decisions around extension for CALS and staffing. Extension programming has moved away from a county-based agency system and discipline specific.

**Council member updates:** Each council member provided a working update from their areas/departments since the Aug. 13<sup>th</sup> meeting.

**Industry/association representatives:** *Dave Daniels (WFBF)* shared that all milking orders passed vote and will take effect June 1. From a farmer perspective, he shared that the cold and dry winter has been interesting. Milk prices have been up but appear to be trending down in the coming week.

*Shelly Mayer (PDPW)* reported that the manager's academy in Dallas was successful. Registration for the Carbon 3.0 event on Tues. (1/28/25) in Madison is open. The PDP Dairy Wellbeing Workshop (partnering with American Foods) on Feb. 11-12 in Green Bay will focus on the entire harvest process. Communication and finance literacy trainings are scheduled from February to March.

The business conference in March will feature more than fifty speakers and panels and will focus on rural labor and educating the next farming generation. The conference will conduct a reverse career fair at which students will exhibit themselves to potential employers.

The Dairy Signal continues to thrive. DIH remains a priority as dairy food systems are being fueled by current research.

*Mitch Breunig* offered a farmer perspective. The dairy industry is short of cattle replacements and the price of cows is high which is encouraging farmers to focus on improving the longevity of their herds. There are no records of H5N1 in Wisconsin to date.

*Ashley Andre (DATCP)* provided an update regarding the H5N1 in dairy cattle and provided resources for the federal order for testing and how DATCP is responding. Another round of dairy processor grants will be awarded, totaling \$200k in available funds, in addition to the seven recipients who received funding in December.

Kara Kasten-Olson has been announced as the dairy economist development consultant. DATCP is recruiting for the 78<sup>th</sup> Alice in Dairyland.

*John Umhoefer* (WCMA) shared that recommendations for price formulas based on a study from Cornell University have been included with current data for producers, specifically pasteurization temperatures. Steady milk prices have affected classes 3 & 4.

WCMA will continue to monitor counter tariff data and unknown deportation initiatives that would greatly affect workers on farms and in processing plants. CheeseCon is in Madison on April 15-17.

*Chad Zuleger* (DBA) shared that the legislation session just started with 37 new members, of which only four have farming backgrounds and/or connections. DBA's focus will be focused on educating and sharing dairy stories surrounding land and water sustainability to new members. "Dairy Day @ the Capitol" will advocate directly for dairy on April 16.

Governor Evers delivered the State of the State Address on 1/23/25 that touched on agriculture issues and will work with DATCP to identify priorities for upcoming sessions. DBA continues to keep up with testing orders for H5N1.

*Dave Daniels* gave updates on behalf of WFBF including outcomes from the recent annual meeting in December. Like DBA and WCMA, WFBF is working during the new legislative session to advance agriculture policy initiatives. Ag Day at the Capitol is March 26, more information is available [on the website](#).

**Campus updates and Hub highlights:** Campus leaders shared the following updates for their campus.

**UW–River Falls** – CAFES Dean Mike Orth shared that that the UW-River Falls Crops & Soils team [won the Quiz Bowl](#) at the "Students of Agronomy, Soils and Environmental Sciences Conference" in November in San Antonio, TX. Holly Dolliver is outlining a vision for the newly gifted 75-acre Wildflower Farm near campus. The property will be used for conservation purposes for wetlands, prairies, forests, and creeks.

CAFES had 1,248 students this fall, which is a slight increase over the previous year. A new online MBA in Agribusiness will launch this fall in conjunction with the School of Business and Economics. The SciTech building on campus is on schedule to open in January 2026 which will be a hub for regional partnerships and students. UW–River Falls continues to face challenges with budget cuts and interim leadership. The first batch of ice cream was produced at the Dairy Pilot Plant!

Sierra Howry, an ag/econ professor at UW–River Falls, introduced herself as the incoming DIH liaison and is taking Steve Kelm's place on the council.

**UW–Platteville** – BILSA Dean Wayne Weber reported that University leadership continues to work through budgets as it relates to faculty and staff transitions. UW–P had a balanced budget in 2024 and 2025 and is submitting balanced budget for 2026. UW–P is embarking on a strategic plan that is focused on teaching/learning and wholistic wellness.

Three faculty members continue to thrive by obtaining external funding leveraged by DIH dollars. A fourth DIH faculty position in Regional Dairy Business and Economic Development is currently being recruited. DIH DI3 (fellowship) grants are due in March

BILSA continues to plan and fundraise for the new Dairy Pilot Plant at Pioneer Farm, the Beef Center project, and efforts to support student access. Enrollments for UW–Platteville are unpredictable due to direct admissions, but BILSA enrollments are increasing.

**UW–Madison** – CALS Associate Dean Troy Runge (proxy for Dean Glenda) thanked committee for hard work to ensure the success of DIH. He shared that the second cohort of graduate students entered their final semester. Six new graduate assistantship grants will begin summer 2025. Eleven faculty have been hired and the most recent three hires starting in August. There is an open call for trainees (grad students or postdocs) due on March 7. Funding for six new postdocs began in July 2024 and planning for Dairy Symposium on May 14 has begun.

The Dairy Summit in November hosted legislators, students, farmers, professionals, and researchers. Troy thanked the council for feedback and impact stories that led to the program format. The tours and the tag-team (researcher/famer) presentations were well received.

CALS is part of the [RISE hiring initiative](#), a federal program to support over \$1.7 billion research funding at UW-Madison and other land grant colleges/universities. Due to higher new student enrollments, more faculty are needed to support additional students. CALS continues to advocate for improvement of facilities at research stations. The [Ag Outlook Forum](#) (1/21/25) magnified the need for facility improvement and support from trade organizations. The Dean's team will be in Washington D.C. with APLU representatives discussing impacts of the farm bill.

**Discussion:** The outlook for the Spooner Research Ag Station will be discussed with donors. Overall, CALS is trying to be more efficient with animal operations. The potential for small ruminant research may be explored.

Heidi commented that UW Extension staff have opportunities for merging fruit and vegetable crops with a combination of research staff.

Since the FISC program's move to UW-River Falls, the curriculum looks different but remains very robust with more hands-on components. DIH supported the latest cohort in Madison last week and continues to brand itself through FISC.

**Outreach updates:** Maria provided updates for the following events.

**Industry conferences:** The Hub has had a presence at several conferences this season with attendance, speakers and posters. Specifically, The Hub had representation at the recent Dairy Strong conference and will be present at PDP's business conference in March with speakers, 30+ posters and more. Maria also gave a talk at the recent [FISC Ag Forward](#) event to the students pursuing the residential [FISC certificate at UW–River Falls](#). The best way to engage at conferences/business meetings is by sharing funded research with presentations and posters

**Dairy Summit:** Event data is included in the meeting packet. The event was well attended.

**Capitol poster session:** DIH will have research posters on the capitol rotunda and will engage with legislators and farmers during Ag Day at the Capitol on March 26.

**Dairy Symposium:** Symposium is on May 14<sup>th</sup> at the Memorial Union at UW-Madison and will feature the most advanced research, formatted for an academic audience. Mike Brown, chief economist for International Dairy Foods Association, has been secured as the keynote speaker to discuss dairy supply chains.

**Special guest presentations:** The most recent Dairy Innovation Hub faculty hires presented an overview of their research and impact on the dairy community. Matt Ruark introduced each of the researchers prior to their research presentations.

**Yun Jiang, UW-Madison:** Dr. Jiang is an assistant professor of adaptive dairy cattle nutrition in the department of animal and dairy sciences at UW–Madison.

Her research focuses on sustainability in the dairy industry, improving animal health and productions, reducing feed intake, and understanding probiotics. The two objectives of Dr. Jiang’s research program are:

- Improve resistance to heat stress in cattle
- Reduce environmental impacts by reducing methane emissions

**Discussion:** All dairy farmers struggle with effects of greenhouse gases emissions. Dietary interventions can help reduce methane emissions.

**Gregg Sanford, UW-Madison:** Dr. Sanford is an assistant professor of soil carbon science in the department of soil and environmental sciences at UW–Madison.

His research focuses on soil carbon and cropping system ecology. The four objectives of Dr. Sanford’s research program are:

- Study dairy and soil water regeneration
- Understand ecological intensification
- Monitor soil organic carbon network and carbon crediting for farmers
- Manage the Wisconsin Integrated Cropping Systems Trail (lead summer projects for undergraduate students, create outreach opportunities in-state and out-of-state)

**Rebecca Smith, UW-Madison:** Dr. Smith is an assistant professor of translational plant science in the department of plant and agroecosystems sciences at UW–Madison.

Her research focuses on leveraging the power of the plant cell wall and bio energy crops (choice of crops, composition of cell walls, producing projects sustainably) as a pipeline to dairy sustainability. The three objectives of Dr. Smith’s research program are:

- Improve cell wall digestibility

- Decrease forage crops (methane emissions)
- Reduce winter damage in root systems

**Discussion:** BMR corn has a natural mutation that reduces the amount of lignin in the plant. Growth and development are impacted even if costs are less to produce. Her research aims to maintain nutritional benefits.

**Md Azhar Uddin, UW-River Falls:** Dr. Uddin is an assistant professor of agriculture economics, in the department of agriculture economics at UW–River Falls.

His research focuses on the economic impact of sustainability, marketing, consumer behavior and perceptions. The five objectives of Dr. Uddin’s research program are:

- Analyze Wisconsin dairy farms exit and expansion decisions
- Study dairy farms exit and its effect on local economy
- Estimate preferred and premium Wisconsin dairy products, mainly cheese
- Analyze and understand consumption trends for fluid milk
- Develop a sensory lab

**Discussion:** A survey will be sent to industry partners to assess the need/demand for the establishment of a sensory lab. In conjunction with the survey, Dr. Uddin is pursuing grants to fund the sensory lab.

The value of cheese will be analyzed with farmers on working Wisconsin farms.

Due to lack of additional agenda items, Dave Daniels adjourned the meeting at 12:07 p.m.

**Future meetings:** The next meeting is August 12<sup>th</sup> in southwestern Wisconsin (more details to come).