

Dairy Innovation Hub Advisory Council

August 12, 2025

Meeting minutes

Notes by Maria Woldt and Elisabeth Berndt

Participants In-person: Matt Ruark, Maria Woldt, Elisabeth Berndt, Gracie Krahn, Carrie Keller (UW-Platteville), Mike Orth (UW-River Falls), Troy Runge (UW-Madison), Glenda Gillaspay (UW-Madison), Dave Daniels (WFBF), Chad Zuleger (DBA), Tim Fiocchi (WFBF), John Umhoefer (WCMA), Tom Crave (DBA), Randy Romanski (DATCP), Chuck Steiner (UW-Platteville), Tera Montgomery (UW-Platteville), Sierra Howry (UW-River Falls), Jimena Laporta (UW-Madison)

Participants Virtually: Holly Dolliver (UW-River Falls), Scott Rankin (UW-Madison)

Proxy Participants: Emily Vander Grinten/Hailey Schoenherr for Shelly Mayer (PDPW)

Absent: Heidi Johnson (ex-officio, UW Extension), Mitch Breunig (attended afternoon tours only)

Meeting location at Lancaster Agricultural Research Station in Lancaster, WI.

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

Approval of Minutes (1.24.25 meeting): A motion to approve the minutes as presented was made by Scott Rankin, Tera Montgomery seconded. All were in favor. The minutes were approved.

Dave Daniels overviewed the meeting and welcomed everyone.

Council member updates: Each council member from WCMA, WFBF, DBA, DATCP, and PDP shared organizational updates, highlighting key developments from across the dairy community.

Industry/association representatives: *Dave Daniels* (farmer perspective) recently stepped down from the WFBF board. He shared that the week's rainfall has been affecting the greater-metro Milwaukee area. Overall, the majority of crops, specifically corn and beans, look great.

John Umhoefer (WCMA) shared that he recently returned from the Idaho Milk Processors conference. Processing capacity in the western states continues to expand. There are plant renovations and modernizations happening in Wisconsin, but there are no new plants coming online. Butterfat continues to increase in milk, which means a higher cheese yield. There is a growing trend for colostrum for human use. Glanbia is interested in building a plant that would process colostrum from cow's milk for human consumption through products like supplements, bars, energy bars, bakery, drinks etc.

Chad Zuleger (DBA) overviewed the current legislative session and budget process. There were several programs included in the budget that are positive for agriculture including additional funding for [ARIP](#), which is \$150 million to enhance rural roads, bridges, and culverts in Wisconsin's rural communities. A few programs did not receive funding this cycle, but they still have support. DBA will continue moving forward with the pilot grazing initiative and the Farm &

Industry Short Course (FISC) program. Plans are underway for the [Dairy Strong Conference](#) in January.

Tim Fiocchi (WFBF) echoed several of Chad's comments and reiterated that the recent budget was positive for agriculture. There were positions added for land and water conservation, funds for nitrogen optimization, cover crop insurance rebates, and funds for farmer mental health. County farm bureaus will begin holding their annual [meetings in August/September](#).

Randy Romanski (DATCP) reiterated that the recent state budget is good for agriculture. Agriculture brings people together and there is bi-partisan support for the programs and initiatives in the budget. There were funds added for dairy processing grants and meat processing grants, which are critical to protecting the state's supply chain. DATCP continues to offer [updates on H5N1 in dairy cattle](#) and resources for farmers and human health.

Emily Vander Grinten (PDPW) shared several event updates and stated that PDP has more than 200 education content days planned for the year. Upcoming programs in August include the [Wisconsin Farm Technology Tours](#) and the [ACE On-The-Farm Twilight Meetings](#). [The Dairy Signal](#) is going strong and new episodes are available weekly.

Jimena Laporta (UW-Madison rep.) was welcomed by Dave. She provided her background as an associate professor at UW-Madison focusing her research on dairy cow management. Her interests include heat stress and environmental interventions to maximize cow comfort and welfare. She serves on the DIH steering committee and conducts many research trials on both campus research and private farms.

Campus updates and Hub highlights: Campus leaders shared the following updates for their campus emphasizing progress in research, student training, and industry engagement.

UW–River Falls – CAFES Dean Mike Orth shared that the new the [SciTech building](#) plans to open in January 2026. This will free up the 4th floor of Ag Sci when Biology relocates to the new building. Enrollment is holding steady with a slight increase, and the college is up more than fifty students compared to this time last year.

The Dairy Pilot Plant is now producing ice cream regularly and has a presence at the Hudson Farmers Market. Thanks to Chernobus Chevrolet for donating a truck to haul the milk tank.

The [Farm & Industry Short Course](#) will welcome a bigger third cohort this fall, with plans to hire a campus specialist to oversee the program. Related to Hub faculty and staff, Bob Zeng from Agricultural Engineering now has a 25% appointment with the Hub. Campus is recruiting three positions: an Analytical Technician, a tenure-track faculty member in Ensuring Animal Health & Welfare, and another in Steward Land & Water Resources.

UW–Platteville – BILSA Dean Carrie Keller shared that the year is starting with a solid incoming first-year class and a positive budget outlook. On campus, several capital improvement projects are in the works, including updates to Karrmann Library, Ottensman Hall, and HVAC upgrades in Russell Hall.

The next cohort of Dairy Innovation Hub fellowships are tackling exciting projects: Topics include

long-term biochar research plots to study how they fit into dairy rotations; precision livestock farming tools to improve calf health and welfare; novel cold plasma treatment to make organic fertilizers safer and more usable; and exploring seed priming to boost alfalfa feed quality and value to name a few.

New Hub faculty Kelvin Amon starts this month in Agribusiness/Applied Economics. UW-Platteville will begin searching for a new faculty member in dairy nutrition.

Pioneer Farm remains vibrant. BILSA/UW-Platteville accepted the invitation to host the Lafayette County Dairy Breakfast on the Farm this June which will provide opportunities to highlight DIH research.

UW–Madison – CALS Dean Glenda Gillaspy and Associate Dean Troy Runge shared that the college has been working hard to reach more rural students through programs like the [CALS Rural Scholars precollege program](#), Rural Youth Scholarship, [Wisconsin Guarantee](#), [STARS College Network](#), and [Bucky's Pell Pathway](#). New student numbers are strong for the 2025-2026 academic year, including many students recruited to CALS during new student orientation.

On the grant funding side, CALS saw \$44 million in new awards from January to June 2024, compared to \$17 million during the same period in 2025.

During the state budget process, a proposal to give agricultural research stations on Board of Regents land more flexibility for building projects under \$2 million was not included in the final budget. The change would have allowed less costly construction methods, but for now, all ARS building projects still require both State Building Commission and Board of Regents approvals.

Discussion: Federal grant support affects many faculty on the UW-Madison campus. Faculty and staff continue to work creatively during unpredictable times. Current federal funding shifts leaves UW-Madison near levels similar to 2020. In five years, UW-Madison has made significant strides in research and investments.

Campus is facing cuts in state GPR-related funds and continues to work through budgets.

Discussion: Concerning the new teaching load requirements, all three Hub campuses will continue to focus on research efforts. Leadership teams at each campus are working through appointments internally.

Administrative update from DIH faculty director: Matt reflected on his first year in the role, noting progress in connecting research projects to on-farm applications and strengthening collaboration across campuses.

Highlights from early annual reporting were shared. Since 2020, the Dairy Innovation Hub has awarded 263 grants supporting equipment, research, outreach, instruction, and top-talent recruitment, with a focus on pressing topics like greenhouse gas reduction, runoff management, antibiotic reduction, product innovation, and technology management.

Collaboration is on the rise with more than twenty new faculty hired across the three campuses. In FY25 alone, 110 graduate students and trainees are engaged in Hub research—over 310 to date—alongside 171 undergraduate research opportunities this year, bringing the total to roughly 821.

Discussion: Faculty hiring at UW-Platteville is at full capacity with one replacement hire in process. UW-River Falls is at full capacity for faculty-envisioned hires but is currently replacing two of the original positions. UW-Madison is at full capacity with one faculty position open for replacement.

Outreach updates from DIH program manager: Maria provided updates for the following events.

Dairy Symposium: This event serves as a gathering place for faculty and staff at the end of the spring semester. DIH staff continues to track event progress over time.

Stakeholder meetings and engagement opportunities: The Hub continues to provide a presence during the spring months to maintain great partnerships.

Dairy Summit: This event provides the opportunity for farmers to engage with Hub research. Calendar invites for the event on Nov. 18 in River Falls have been sent. [Registration is open](#) and attendance is encouraged. An invite-only breakfast before the Summit will be open for the advisory council, DIH faculty, and stakeholders.

The morning session will focus on research talks while the afternoon will feature research tour stops on the UW-River Falls campus/surrounding areas.

Annual report update: Work on the Hub's annual report is also underway. An executive summary will be available at World Dairy Expo, and the full report will be released near the end of October. DIH strives to remain transparent to the state and stakeholders to show the value of research happening state-wide.

World Dairy Expo: The Hub will have a presence at the three campus receptions on Thursday, Oct. 2. More info to come.

Future Hub event dates: The following event date were shared.

- Oct. 2, Madison – World Dairy Expo receptions
- Nov. 18, UW-River Falls – Dairy Summit
- Jan. 21, Madison – Posters at the Capitol (Ag Day)
- May 21, Madison – Dairy Symposium

Due to lack of additional agenda items, Dave Daniels adjourned the meeting at 11:32 a.m.

Future meetings: The next meeting is January 2026 via Zoom. The August meeting is in-person with a location TBD.

The on-farm research tours began at 12:15 p.m. at the following stops:

Lancaster Agricultural Research Station: Arin Crooks provided an overview of current research projects and highlighted future opportunities for collaboration. Matt Ruark presented data sets on healthy soils as foundation for crop and dairy productivity.

Stone Front Farm: Andy Buttles welcomed the group and showcased strong partnerships between university and private dairy farm research. Ryan Pralle, a former assistant professor at UW-Platteville shared a research study conducted in collaboration with the Buttles family at Stone Front Farm. Tera Montgomery, the Director of the School of Agriculture at UW-Platteville, emphasized the importance and value of student/intern training opportunities.

UW-Platteville Pioneer Farm: Leadership, faculty and staff greeted the group onsite to share and showcase DIH investments within that last couple of years. Features included the automated milking system, Ric2Discover feeding gates, and Greenfeed machine. Asst. professor Joseph Sanford, discussed manure processing, specifically turning manure into value-added projects while reducing environmental impacts. The day ended in the Ag Tech building that featured research posters, engaging conversations, and complimentary ice cream from Pioneer Sweets.

The event culminated around 4:15 p.m.