

Dairy Innovation Hub Advisory Council

January 23, 2026

Meeting minutes

Notes by Elisabeth Berndt

Participants Virtually: Matt Ruark, Maria Woldt, Elisabeth Berndt, Carolyn Keller (UW-Platteville), Troy Runge (UW-Madison), Glenda Gillaspy (UW-Madison), Dave Daniels (WFBF), Chad Zuleger (DBA), Tim Fiocchi (WFBF), John Umhoefer (WCMA), Randy Romanski (DATCP), Tera Montgomery (UW-Platteville), Sierra Howry (UW-River Falls), Jimena Laporta (UW-Madison), Holly Dolliver (UW-River Falls), Scott Rankin (UW-Madison), Heidi Johnson (ex-officio, UW Extension), Mitch Breunig (PDP), Tim Fiocchi (WFBF), Chad Zulegar

Proxy Participants: Hailey Schoenherr for Shelly Mayer (PDP)

Absent: Mike Orth (UW-River Falls), Tom Crave (DBA)

Meeting was held on Zoom from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Dave Daniels called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m.

Approval of Minutes (8.12.25 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.

Council term renewals + new members: Maria presented the seats up for nomination and council retirements.

The following seats are up for nomination: WMCA – John Umhoefer (eligible for 3rd term), UW-Madison – Jimena Laporta (eligible for first 3-year term), Rotating Industry – (rotates to WCMA for one, 3-year term), Rotating UW – Jessica Cederquist (rotates to Madison for one, 3-year term).

Discussion: Jessica Cederquist is not at the meeting [today] but will be at the August meeting to represent the rotating UW seat. John Umhoefer has several possible candidates to represent the rotating industry seat; he will let Maria know who WCMA selects. There were no objections to Jessica Cederquist's appointment and the pending appointment per John's recommendation.

The following seats are retiring: Mitch Breunig (Farmer, PDP), Holly Dolliver (UW-River Falls). Dave thanked Mitch and Holly for serving on the board. Mitch said, "It was a sincere pleasure to be on the council. Sitting in the farm office and seeing the vision of DIH come together is [was] really cool." Holly said, "I really appreciated being involved with DIH. It is exciting and inspiring to witness the accomplishments, and I look forward to and remaining connected with the Hub."

Dave Daniels will continue to serve as the chair of the council for 2026.

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) shared that the cold weather in Wisconsin has been difficult on the cattle and producers, but it is keeping unwanted critters away. Farmers are using all risk management tools to their advantage to combat the 2026 challenges of milk prices dictated by cheese and butter.

John Umhoefer (WCMA) shared that event season is underway. The [Cheese Expo](#) April 14-16 is expected to double in size from years' past, including contest entries. Cheese prices are flat and low due to the excess supply. The demand of protein continues to add value and stability to cheese production.

Tim Fiocchi (WFBF) shared that the legislative session is ending soon. The "[Ag Day @ the Capitol](#)" on Wednesday was well attended. Several bills are anticipated to be approved while there is uncertainty for others.

- [2025 Senate Bill 456](#) – “Aviation bill” adds additional market for soy and corn growers. The bill aims for sustainable aviation fuel using milk products
- [2025 Senate Bill 474](#) – “Soybean fire suppression bill” removes PFAS from firefighting foam
- [2025 Assembly Bill 554](#) – “Lab meat bill” creates new regulations for sale and labeling of lab grown meat
- [2025 Assembly Bill 766](#) – “CDL training” expands eligibility beyond schools
- [2025 Senate Bill 323](#) – “Dairy Cattle Innovation” establishes a program that will help small and medium dairy farms implement technology
- [2025 Senate Bill 501](#) – “veterinary loan repayment grant program”
- Tweaks to the [2023 Senate Bill 24](#) – “ARIP” project improves improving rural road conditions will be addressed by committees in both houses in a couple of weeks.

Chad Zuleger (DBA) shared that bills are moving through rapidly, a critical time for the success of agricultural related bills. The [Dairy Strong Conference](#) in Green Bay last week was well attended with focus on labor shortages/issues, providing resources to farmers, and legislative updates. Focus for the legislature in the coming weeks will remain in session and then turn attention to the election year.

Randy Romanski (DATCP) shared that there have been no new national cases reported in the last 30 days for the highly pathogenic avian influenza (H5N1); Wisconsin's last case was reported in Dec. 2025. The Dec. 1 report in Dodge County (dairy cattle) was detected using gene sequencing by tracking wildlife to dairy cattle spread. DATCP continues to work through adjustment of fees for preventative disease or trace diseases. Bio security is a priority for Wisconsin as the state continues to promote commercial dairy supplies safely.

Dairy exports have been the third highest in the third quarter on record internationally, and DATCP will continue to strengthen and promote dairy product exports. Wisconsin has moved to 11th in agricultural production with a diversity of products (forestry, food, dairy) and has an

export presence in 150 of 195 countries. Exports have decreased 2.5% due to impacts of the market disturbances (tariffs), especially trade with China and Canada.

Recently, the Governor announced \$1M available to support 49 farmer-led groups with bipartisan support.

Hailey Schoenherr (PDP) shared that [2026 PDP Business Conference](#) is March 4-5 in Madison and will feature a reverse career fair for students to showcase their employability skills for potential employers. Applications close on Jan. 28. There are 46 speakers, including Hub funded researchers and affiliates, and several keynotes throughout the two days. DIH will feature posters in Innovation Lane.

Heidi Johnson (UW-Madison, Division of Extension) directed folks to check out the [calendar of events](#) for a complete list of Extension activity. DIH is looking for additional ways to connect with Extension throughout the state. The recent [UW-Madison] short-term, high-impact call funded three Extension projects. Extension continues to work with farms to keep employees and animals safe from the avian influenza.

University representatives: *Tera Montgomery* (UW-Platteville rep.) shared that PDP adopted the reverse career fair from UW-Platteville's idea, and it is a great way for students to market themselves to potential employers. Beginning yesterday [Thur., 1/22], one hundred students from the Midwest traveled to UW-Platteville for the Midwest Regional ADSA – USD Conference. On-farm tours will continue as scheduled tomorrow [Sat., 1/24] with an award ceremony on Sunday.

Jimena Laporta (UW-Madison) shared that the poster session at the capitol went well. Interviews for the open AAE faculty position are happening this week and next week. Research funding decisions for short-term, high-impact research projects spanning all four priority areas were announced last week.

Troy Runge (UW-Madison) shared that Jessica Cederquist (Director of Animal Operations for Ag Research Stations) oversees all on-farm dairy research at UW-Madison.

Scott Rankin (UW-Madison) shared that Dairy Innovation Hub funds for dairy foods are making a significant impact for researchers, and the department is grateful for innovative energy brought to campus by DIH. Dr. Rankin and his colleagues will continue to steward CALS initiatives forward with Hub support.

Campus updates and Hub highlights: Campus leaders shared the following updates for their campus emphasizing research/faculty projects, innovation, and student spotlights.

UW-Madison – CALS Dean Glenda Gillaspy shared that UW-Madison has ten faculty with a search underway. Requests for research proposals for combined trainees and capital equipment will launch this spring. Funding for six new trainee grants will start this summer. Planning for the Dairy Symposium on May 12 is ongoing. DIH is instrumental for creating a pipeline of potential faculty at all three campuses through trainee supported grants.

Innovation/impact: Dr. Michaela Hoffelmeyer, a social scientist, is exploring support gaps for farmers' childcare needs. This research also includes dairy labor market and robotic milking.

Student spotlight: Sadie Stark, from Eau Claire, is majoring in Animal and Veterinary Biosciences. She is mentored by Hilario Mantovani and uses natural compounds to treat bovine mastitis, reducing antibiotic use. With no previous dairy experience, a required biology course led to passion for lab work and animal health, and she hopes to find a career in the dairy industry.

Emma Strickland is majoring in Biological Systems Engineering and is mentored by Margaret Kalcic. She has no previous dairy experience and uses mathematical modeling to predict phosphorus run-off to solve real-world problems. She hopes to have a future in water management/engineering.

UW-Platteville – BILSA Dean Carolyn Keller shared that engagement with faculty is a priority on their campus. Requests for proposals for faculty fellowships and capital equipment will be live this spring. UW-Platteville is excited for collaborative support with UW-Madison; shared opportunities have been useful in the past. Three faculty are hired with a search for an asst. professor in Dairy Management coming soon. Collaborative planning for the 2026 Dairy Summit has begun.

Innovation/impact: Dr. John Obielodan & Dr. Joseph Wu filed a patent for [Development of Bio-Composite Materials for 3D Printing Using Milk Proteins](#). Dr. Joe Sanford is up for tenure, the first DIH hire at UW-Platteville to reach this career milestone.

Student spotlight: Gillianne Wagner, from Slinger, is majoring in Molecular Biology and Genetics and is exploring plasma-activated water as an alternative to chemical cleaners to improve food safety. Her interest in research led to dairy-related projects through Zifan Wan's lab, and she hopes to pursue graduate studies in genetics research.

UW-River Falls – CAFES Dr. Sierra Howry (proxy for Dean Mike Orth) shared that the new SciTech building is open and home to the Physics, Chemistry, Biology, and Psychology Departments. The building also houses University Business Collaboration Center (UBCC), a catalyst for faculty, staff, and students to interact with businesses to have a positive impact on the local and regional economies. Bringing the DIII national football championship to UW-River Falls has been a great morale boost for the university.

UW-River Falls is seeking to fill two faculty positions, one in atmospheric studies and the second in dairy animal welfare. These positions will be posted soon.

Funding has been secured in the 2025-27 budget for infrastructure improvements at Mann Valley Farms; bids are open for a new swine building. CAFES is anxious for more laboratory space for DIH researchers on the floor vacated by the Biology department (move to SciTech).

Student spotlight: Kylie Beilke, from Hortonville, is majoring in Animal Science w/ an Equine Emphasis and explores immune response and intramammary infection to improve milk quality and farm economics. She is mentored by Maria Jose Fuenzalida and was led to dairy-related projects through lab work with Dr. Fuenzalida. She hopes to become a mixed species large animal veterinarian.

Discussion: UW-River Falls has four faculty and is searching for two more which would make a total of six (6) faculty hires. UW-Madison's faculty hiring will be complete at eleven (11) positions upon the hire of the dairy economist. UW-Platteville has three faculty on board and will be at capacity with four (4) faculty when open position is filled.

Faculty hires at each campus span all four priority areas.

Administrative update from DIH faculty director: Matt shared an administrative update through student impact data and the Dairy Innovation Hub research portfolio.

In FY25, there were 187 undergraduate research opportunities, approx. 837 to date (109 at Madison, 41 at Platteville, 37 at River Falls). Graduate students and trainees working on Hub research in FY25 totaled 110 individuals with 310 to date. The data presented captures projects and research that are directly Hub funded or are indirectly Hub-adjacent. Many of the researchers have presented at either the Dairy Summit or Symposium.

Matt provided overviews for projects in each priority area to provide a snapshot of Hub funding portfolio.

- **Stewarding land and water resources**
 - UW-Madison & UW-River Falls: Collaborative groundwater nitrate monitoring in Western Wisconsin (Jingyi Huang & Jill Coleman-Wasik + grad student)
 - UW-Platteville: Impact of biochar on composting dairy manure and soil health (Joe Sanford)
- **Ensuring health and welfare**
 - UW-Madison: Genomic solutions to reduce fetal loss in dairy cattle (Francisco Peñagaricano + grad student)
 - UW-Platteville: Small-scale feed mill for student learning and research (Pete Lammers)
 - UW-River Falls: Housing & management factors affecting milk components in WI dairy herds (Maria Fuenzalida)
- **Enriching human health and nutrition**
 - UW-Madison & UW-River Falls: Milk lipids in IV systems (Joseph Pierre & Grace Lewis + postdoc)
 - UW-Platteville: Ongoing applications of cold plasma for food safety and environmental sustainability (Zifan Wan)
- **Growing farm business and community**
 - UW-Madison: Understanding the impact of new milk pricing formulas (Chuck Nicholson & Jack Myers)
 - UW-Platteville: Integrated data framework for Pioneer Farm: Enhancing analytics and security (Xiaoguang Ma)
 - UW-River Falls: Understanding U.S. milk preferences: dairy & plant-based (Azhar Uddin)

Matt provided summaries for the following short-term, high-impact research projects funded at UW-Madison. Funding decisions were sent to PIs last week.

 Dairy Management	Milo Wiltbank – <i>Understanding pregnancy loss in dairy cows</i>
 Sustainable Dairy	Francisco Penagaricano – <i>Measuring methane emissions in young bulls – fast track to sustainable dairy farming</i>
 Nutrient Management	Chris Bandura* – <i>On-farm evaluation of nutrient export from alfalfa fields</i>
 Building Dairy Workforce	Laura Hernandez – <i>Re-establishing dairy youth programming in America's Dairyland</i>
 Farm Health & Safety	John Shutske – <i>Wellness on Wheels: health and safety across Wisconsin dairy farms</i>
 Workforce Training	Carolina Pinzon* – <i>Practical educational tools for dairy teams to improve milk quality and udder health</i>
 Conservation	Abby Augarten* – <i>Farmer-led research for sustainable practices</i>

* Division of Extension faculty/staff member

Discussion: All PIs (both funded and not funded) are provided with feedback noting strengths and weaknesses for the research project populated by reviewers comments and panel discussion. Projects that are not recommended for funding are encouraged to submit for a future DIH call or a funding agency that may be a better fit.

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

Capitol poster session reap: Twelve (12) posters from all three campuses circled the rotunda at the co-located session with WFBF's "Ag Day @ the Capitol." There were approx. 300 people in the capitol talking about agriculture issues with legislature and making positive connections.

Dairy Symposium: The next Dairy Symposium will be on May 12 in Madison. The focus of breakout sessions will be analytical and high-level data presentations; all sessions will be recorded for on demand viewing. The audience for this event is academic versus public facing (unlike the Summit in November).

Dairy Summit: Data for the 2025 Summit is included in packets. This data is used to evaluate events trends over time. The 2026 Dairy Summit will be in Platteville on Nov. 17.

PDP Business Conference (March 4-5): DIH has four (4) speakers on the preview stage: graduate students partnered with their mentoring PI who will talk about their dairy-related research. The Hub will be present at a booth on the trade show floor and research posters will be available for public viewing in Innovation Alley of the exhibition hall.

Special guest: new faculty research presentation: Matt introduced Dr. Kelvin Amon, an assistant professor at UW-Platteville. Dr. Amon's research focuses on stakeholder driven agriculture as 95% of Wisconsin farms are considered family owned and operated. He aims to develop solutions to keep Wisconsin farms in business. Dr. Amon shared his journey of Ag Business from Ghana to Platteville.

Dr. Amon's strives to help people and farmers when combatting challenges with structural and policy changes. He hopes to develop a cost support program when weighing feed costs with production, potentially answering the question: *"How much will it cost farmers to get in business and stay in*

business?” Based on in-depth research, farmers are invested with on-board support and want to get “boots on the ground” while encouraging sustainable technologies.

Discussion: Globally, profitability is leading the way to sustainability.

As more farmers are turning to beef on dairy cross, Dr. Amon is researching to find solutions for consistent ups and downs that farmers experience when beef prices fluctuate seasonally. (Beef prices are up when milk is down, but beef is down when milk is up.) When making decisions to sell cows, Dr. Amon suggests that taking ratios into consideration is vital to be profitable and sustainable. He encourages farmers, producers, and processors to pivot based on desired outcomes, whether intentional or spontaneous. The “sweet spot” for a decision should be planned and anticipated instead of reacting on impulse.

Consumer behavior dictates the trends seen in dairy product consumption. The demand for the product type/specification is driven by the customer. Dr. Amon follows the economics of the trends to make allowances for the demand of the consumer that are profitable and sustainable.

Motion to adjourn the meeting: A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Randy Romanski. Mitch Breunig seconded.

Dave Daniels adjourned the meeting at 11:48 a.m.

Future meetings: The next meeting is August 11 in-person with a location TBD.