

Dairy Innovation Hub Advisory Council

August 11, 2026

Meeting minutes

Notes by Elisabeth Berndt

Participants In-Person: Maria Woldt (DIH), Elisabeth Berndt (DIH), Troy Runge (UW-Madison), Dave Daniels (WFBF), Chad Zuleger (DBA), John Umhoefer (WCMA) *arrived late*, Tera Montgomery (UW-Platteville), Sierra Howry (UW-River Falls), Heidi Johnson (ex-officio, UW Extension), Mike Orth (UW-River Falls), Mat Bartkowiak (WCMA), Tom Crave (DBA), Jessica Cederquist (UW-Madison), Shelly Mayer (PDP)

Participants Virtually: Tim Fiocchi (WFBF), Carolyn Keller (UW-Platteville), Scott Rankin (UW-Madison)

Proxy Participants: Ashely Andre for Randy Romanski (DATCP)

Absent: Jimena Laporta (UW-Madison)

Meeting was held at Kinnard Farms in Casco, Wis. from 10 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. Tours ran from 12:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Ice cream social from 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

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

Approval of Minutes (1.23.26 meeting): A motion to approve the minutes as presented was made by Tera Montgomery. Mike Orth seconded. All were in favor. The minutes were approved.

Dave Daniels overviewed the meeting and welcomed everyone. Jessica Cederquist (UW–Madison) and Mat Bartkowiak (Nelson-Jameson/WCMA) were introduced as incoming council members.

Council industry member updates: Representatives from WCMA, WFBF, DBA, DATCP, PDP, and Extension shared updates highlighting current issues, opportunities, and activities across Wisconsin's dairy community, including legislative priorities, dairy markets, industry events, export activity, workforce development, and ongoing animal health and biosecurity efforts.

Industry/association representatives: *Dave Daniels* (farmer perspective) thanked everyone for being at the meeting. Crops look good after recent storms and boughs of humidity.

Mat Bartkowiak (WCMA) introduced himself as the VP of corporate responsibility for Nelson Jameson from Marshfield. His background is in food safety and quality. Making connections with researchers to leaders is important to Mat. Memberships [WCMA] are reaching 45+ states and 700+ suppliers. Cheese Expo in Milwaukee was well attended. WCMA continues to monitor governmental functions at state and national levels.

Jessica Cederquist (Director of Animal Operations for Ag Research Stations) oversees all on-farm dairy research at UW-Madison. Jessica attended the University of Arizona Tucson for her bachelor's and master's degrees.

Tim Fiocchi (WFBF) shared relevant impacts of the federal farm bill and efforts to address labor issues. Early endorsements for upcoming state elections are in full swing. Policies on New world screwworm are ongoing. Applications for the ARIP program (\$70 million) are open; decisions will be announced in October. [Act 161](#) took effect in August that allows six-axle trucks carrying specific agricultural loads to weigh up to 91,000 pounds took effect in August 2026.

The proposed BECI project, a 190-mile, 765-kilovolt high-voltage transmission line crossing southern Wisconsin, is starting conversations in the communities for which the line would affect.

Chad Zuleger (DBA) shared that the Ag Coalition is closing following ARIP proposals. Focus continues on farm succession planning and water quality policies. Additional programming includes N optimization to enhance crop yields, cover crops, and farm-led watershed participation from approx. 49 groups.

Ag exports continue to be strong with a 200% increase in dairy. Workforce issues continue to persist. Planning for the 2027 [Dairy Strong](#) conference is in progress; Lambeau Field is the host site for all programming.

Tom Crave (DBA) added that cyber security in the ag industry has been compromised on several farms. He advised folks to ensure insurance policies are updated with protocols.

Ashely Andre, on behalf of Randy Romanski, (DATCP) shared appreciation for support of the [NASDA](#) meeting in Madison in June that highlighted dairy and showcased the industry. The [Avian Influenza](#) continues to be monitored locally and nationally. New orders for the [New World Screwworm](#) have been issued.

Ag exports have had a record breaking five (5) years with support from 85+ organizations. Wisconsin is the 11th largest ag export.

Shelly Mayer (PDP) shared that education outreach programming is focusing on dairy farmer partnerships in Europe, labor efficiency, and cost of production. [STRIDE](#) returns to UW-Madison on Tues., Nov. 17. The last [ACE On-The-Farm Twilight Meeting](#) is Thurs., Aug. 27. An agenda for “Dairy Insights” will be live soon for event in December with emphasis on protein. The [Idaho Dairy Tour](#) is scheduled for mid-October. The [Business Conference](#) in March will be hosted at the Kalahari in Wis. Dells. The Hub is an example of how the best and the brightest researchers collaborate with industry.

Heidi Johnson (UW-Madison, Division of Extension) shared that Extension is focusing on the needs of producers and specialized position hiring. Science assessments on conservation and water issues remain priorities. Several producer led efforts are guiding conversations surrounding conservation, cropping, soil health, farm succession, and labor. Extension employees are invested and engaged; youth development is positive.

John Umhoefer (WCMA) shared that staff is growing. Cheese Expo attendance and the annual meeting surpassed expectations. The team is in process of strategic planning. Cheese prices remain flat while milk is plentiful with high yields; protein is affecting cheesemakers. Several specialty plants in the area are growing.

Discussion: Approx. 90% of the state's cheese and 80% of nation cheese is produced in Wisconsin.

Campus updates and Hub highlights: Campus leaders from UW–Madison, UW–Platteville, and UW–River Falls provided updates on faculty recruitment, student success, research initiatives, and campus developments

UW–Madison – CALS Interim Dean Troy Runge shared that Trevor Woolley joined the Department of Agricultural & Applied Economics as an assistant professor, strengthening dairy economics capacity. A search is also underway for a [staff-level dairy economist position](#). Applications are due Sept. 15.

Discussion: DIH staff economist will be physically located with Hub staff at Madison and will answer the industry related concerns and initiatives. The intention of the position is to build capacity in collaboration with faculty economists at each campus and Extension specialist, Leonard Polzin.

Several leadership changes were highlighted, including Troy Runge serving as interim dean of CALS and Jennifer Van Os becoming the Hub's new faculty associate director at UW-Madison. Updates were shared regarding federal research funding priorities and ongoing efforts to align research with emerging opportunities in artificial intelligence, data science, food systems, and industry partnerships. The Hub's trainee proposals are currently under review, with selections expected in early September.

Badger Dairy Camp welcomed 63 middle and high school students this summer, introducing participants to dairy careers and higher education opportunities. The Hub at UW-Madison awarded organizers with a short-term, high-impact grant to get the program up and running.

Discussion: Campuses should support youth programming, but long-term Hub support for the outreach initiative for youth development campus may not be the best use of DIH dollars.

UW–Platteville – BILSA Dean Carolyn Keller shared that Maverick Guenther will join the School of Agriculture as an assistant professor, funded by the Hub, later this month. His focus will be on dairy management and nutrition.

Enrollment remains steady, and the School of Agriculture introduced a [new precision agriculture certificate](#) available to students across agriculture majors, and builds skills in data management, precision technologies, and data-driven decision making. Students earned recognition through national and regional competitions, including strong performances in animal science, dairy products evaluation, and agricultural marketing events.

Faculty continue to strengthen industry partnerships, including a new grant awarded to support Joseph Sanford's biochar research and biogas applications.

UW–River Falls – CAFES Dean Mike Orth shared that college enrollment continues to grow, with approximately one-quarter of all incoming students enrolling in the Department of Animal and Food Science.

New campus leadership appointments were announced, including Provost Amy Clark and Assistant Chancellor for University Advancement Jeff Lamie.

Construction continues on a new swine facility that will provide additional research and laboratory opportunities, including support for Dairy Innovation Hub projects. There will be 2-3 upcoming searches to recruit for open Hub-funded faculty positions

Administrative update: The deans and Maria shared updates on the Hub's evolving leadership structure and ongoing program growth.

Troy Runge announced that Maria Woldt has been named the director for the Dairy Innovation Hub. This transition was a natural progression from a faculty position to a staff-led model as the time needed to support the Hub is too much commitment for a faculty member. The deans made the decision earlier this year to internally appoint Maria to the role who has been vital for onboarding faculty and researchers, and whose forward momentum in connecting university affiliates with industry promotes the “Wisconsin Idea.” Under this leadership model, Maria can focus on all three Hub campuses.

Maria is grateful to the deans and the council for trusting her in this position and for the continued support. She is looking forward making more connections. She is meeting with faculty from all three Hub campuses and welcomes continued innovation interfacing with farmers and researchers.

Maria shared the Dairy Innovation Hub research portfolio to date. The following highlights were shared. A total of 298 awards supporting research, equipment, outreach, instruction, and faculty recruitment across the three campuses.

The Hub currently supports 18 faculty positions, has engaged approximately 432 graduate students and trainees to date, and has provided nearly 1,000 undergraduate research opportunities since its inception.

Leaders emphasized the continued growth of collaborative projects across campuses and the Hub's focus on research addressing dairy sustainability, farm profitability, animal welfare, human health, and emerging technologies.

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

Dairy Symposium: The event on May 12 in Madison went well and event data has been distributed to the committee.

Stakeholder meetings and engagement opportunities: Council members will contact Maria with future opportunities.

Dairy Summit: UW-Platteville will be the host university for 2026. An invite-only breakfast will begin at 8 a.m. with registration beginning at 9 a.m. and scheduled speakers at 10 a.m.

Annual report: The Hub's Annual Report is currently in development and will feature Badger Dairy Camp (It's UW-Madison's turn for the cover story), faculty and student impact stories, new

faculty profiles, and research highlights from across all three campuses. The executive summary will be available at World Dairy Expo. The final annual report will be finished in late October and will be distributed to stakeholders and legislative partners.

Next year's summer advisory council meeting: To avoid conflicts with Wisconsin State Fair, the meeting may be moved to the third week of August [2027].

Motion to adjourn the meeting: A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Dave Daniels. Shelly Mayer seconded.

Dave Daniels adjourned the meeting at 11:50 a.m.

Following lunch, council members invited guests, and stakeholders participated in an on-farm tour hosted by Lee Kinnard and the Kinnard Farms team. Tour stops highlighted dairy facility management, nutrient and water stewardship efforts, farmer-led watershed initiatives, UW research collaborations, autonomous leachate application systems, and emerging manure management technologies, including the Sedron Varcor system.

Future meetings: The next meeting is virtually on January 19 via Zoom