



# CHEESE REPORTER

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## Kroger, Albertsons Decide To Delay Closing Of Their Merger

### Washington State's Attorney General Files Lawsuit To Block Merger Nationwide

Cincinnati, OH—In light of their continuing dialogue with regulators, The Kroger Co., Albertsons Companies Inc., and C&S Wholesale Grocers, LLC, on Monday updated the anticipated closure of the Kroger-Albertsons merger and the divestiture to C&S, the three companies said in a joint statement.

The companies said they remain “in active and ongoing dialogue” with the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and individual state attorneys general regarding their proposed merger and divestiture plan. They believe Kroger’s merger with Albertsons and the divestiture to C&S will result in the “best outcomes for customers, associates and our communities.”

Originally, when they announced plans to merge in October 2022, Kroger and Albertsons expected their merger to close in early 2024.

Kroger and Albertsons now anticipate that the closing will

occur in the first half of Kroger’s fiscal 2024, which ends on Aug. 17, 2024.

“We remain committed to closing the transaction and providing the meaningful and measurable benefits that we promised when we originally announced the transaction,” the joint statement said.

Meanwhile, Washington state Attorney General Bob Ferguson filed a lawsuit Monday to block the proposed Kroger-Albertsons merger.

Ferguson asserts the proposed merger of the two largest supermarket companies in Washington state will severely limit shopping options for consumers and eliminate vital competition that keeps grocery prices low.

Ferguson also asserts that a proposal by Kroger and Albertsons to mitigate the impacts of their merger, which includes selling off more than 100 stores in Washington, does not change the fact that Kroger would still enjoy a near-

monopoly in many markets in the state. In addition, the plan to sell the stores to a company that is primarily a wholesale supplier could set up many of the divested supermarkets to fail, endangering Washington jobs and further diminishing choices for Washington shoppers.

The lawsuit, filed in King County Superior Court, seeks to block the merger of Kroger and Albertsons nationwide. Ferguson asserts the merger eliminates Kroger’s closest competitor and decreases customer choice by significantly increasing the concentration of stores owned by the same company throughout Washington.

More than half of all supermarkets in Washington state are currently owned by either Kroger or Albertsons, and they account for more than 50 percent of all supermarket sales in the state, according to the lawsuit. Albertsons owns Safeway and Haggen, while Kroger owns QFC and Fred Meyer. Collectively, Kroger and Albertsons operate more than

• See **Merger Delayed**, p. 4

## Dairy, Food Groups Urge Congress To Ensure WIC Program Has Adequate Funds

Washington—A number of dairy and food industry organizations and companies this week urged congressional leaders to ensure that the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) has the needed funds to ensure that all eligible women, infants, and children who wish to enroll can be served by the program.

“Funding the WIC program to meet the unexpected increase in participation will build upon the more than 25 years of bipartisan support for healthier outcomes for nutritionally at-risk mothers and young children across the country while also reducing healthcare costs and promoting local economies,” the groups and companies said in a letter to the chairs and ranking members of the Senate and House Appropriations Committees.

The letter was signed by the National Milk Producers Federation, International Dairy Foods Association, American Frozen Food Institute, Consumer Brands Association, FMI-The Food Industry Association, American Bakers Association, National Grocers Association, Sustainable Food Policy Alliance, International Fresh Produce Association, Danone North America, General Mills, and Ahold Delhaize USA.

• See **WIC Funding**, p. 17

## Coalition Of Food Groups Form Sustainable Food Packaging Alliance

Washington—A coalition of industry and non-governmental dairy, food and related organizations this week announced the formation of the Alliance for Sustainable Packaging for Foods (ASPF).

The ASPF brings together a diverse group of global stakeholders to engage with regulators and governments around the world to encourage the adoption of a holistic and harmonized approach to food packaging regulation in order to achieve environmental sustainability without compromising on food safety and public health, and without increasing the environmental footprint of the food sup-

• See **Food Packaging**, p. 10

## Federal Order Hearing Reconvenes; Focus Is Class I Differential Proposal

Carmel, IN—The United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) national federal milk marketing order (FMMO) hearing resumed here this week, with testimony focusing on a proposal to lower the current base Class I differential from \$1.60 per hundredweight to \$0.00 per hundred.

That proposal, hearing Proposal 20, was submitted by the Milk Innovation Group (MIG). Members of the Milk Innovation Group include Anderson Erickson Dairy Co., Inc.; Aurora Organic Dairy; Crystal Creamery; Danone North America; fairlife; HP Hood LLC; Organic Valley/CROPP Cooperative; Shamrock Foods Company; Shehadey Family Foods, LLC (Producers Dairy Foods, Inc.); Model Dairy, LLC; Umpqua Dairy

Products Co.); and Turner Dairy Farms.

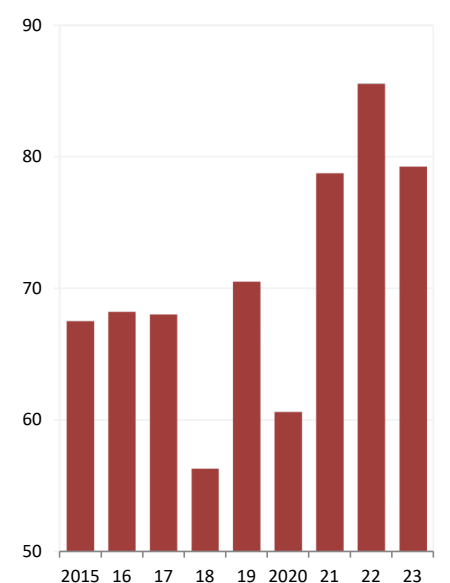
Sally Keefe, owner and principal of skFigures, a company that provides dairy consulting services to all verticals of the dairy industry, testified Tuesday as a consultant and expert for Milk Innovation Group, in support of Proposal 20.

Keefe noted that, currently, the effective Class I differential ranges from \$1.60 to \$6.00 per hundredweight, and has four parts: 40 cents as compensation for Grade A status; 60 cents for the marketing/balancing costs incurred in supplying the Class I market; 60 cents to incentivize producers to supply milk for fluid use, and \$0.00 to \$4.40 county-level location adjustment.

• See **Class I Proposal**, p. 20

## US Lactose Exports

November 2015 – 2023 millions of pounds





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## EDITORIAL COMMENT



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an important demographic change causing a decrease in milk demand is the proportion of young children in the population, which is lower than it was in 2013.

### A Couple Of Interesting Price Elasticity Perspectives

One of the benefits of the federal milk marketing order program is the volume of information it produces. This includes everything from class prices and milk pooled by order to utilization and component tests.

But as impressive as this information is, it pales in comparison to the amount of information generated by federal order hearings, particularly the national hearing that reconvened this week in Indiana.

Just to cite one example of this information: price elasticity, particularly for Class I (fluid) products, isn't something that's necessarily "top-of-mind" for most folks in the dairy industry, but it was the focus of testimony from at least two witnesses at the hearing.

Harry M. Kaiser, a professor of applied economics at Cornell University, testified back at the end of August as an expert witness on behalf of the National Milk Producers Federation concerning the expected impacts on milk product demand accompanying regulated price changes.

"The price elasticity of demand for milk is inelastic, which means that consumers are not very sensitive to adjusting their purchases in response to price changes," Kaiser testified.

He explained that a price elasticity measures the percentage change in demand, given a 1 percent change in price. Technically, any elasticity that is lower in absolute value than 1.0 indicates that demand is relatively price inelastic since changing the price by 1 percent results in a less-than-1-percent change in quantity demanded.

The "overwhelming majority" of empirical studies that have measured the price elasticity of milk have found it to be inelastic, Kaiser said. Based on 38 peer-reviewed studies that have measured the price elasticity of demand for milk at the retail

level, the average estimated elasticity indicates that a 1 percent increase in the retail price of milk would cause a 0.35 percent decrease in per capita quantity demanded, holding all other milk demand drivers constant.

Demand for milk is inelastic because it's considered a "staple good," in that milk buyers regularly consume it usually in the same amount regardless of price level, Kaiser noted. For regular milk consumers, milk is considered more of a necessity than a luxury, which explains why consumers are not very sensitive to price changes.

There are at least three reasons for the steady decline in per capita milk demand over time, Kaiser continued, "and they do not include the retail price of milk." First, the beverage market has become increasingly competitive, with milk losing "significant market share" to soda in the distant past and, more recently, bottled water, sports drinks, and plant-based milk products have taken "tremendous market share" away from milk.

Another cause of declining per capita milk consumption has been the increasing trend in food consumed away from home. And third, an important demographic change causing a decrease in milk demand is the proportion of young children in the population, which is lower than it was in 2013.

The bottom line in the context of the national federal order hearing is that NMPP's proposal to increase Class I differentials, therefore increasing Class I prices, "will increase gross revenues to dairy farmers while not having a significant negative impact on milk sales volume," Kaiser testified.

A couple of months after Kaiser testified at the hearing, Oral Capps, Jr., a professor of agricultural economics at Texas A&M University, testified as an expert

witness on behalf of the International Dairy Foods Association concerning the own-price elasticities of demand for milk products.

Capps noted that his research serves to provide a more up-to-date demand systems analysis for fluid milk products as well as for plant-based beverages and other alternatives to milk currently lacking in extant literature. This research is the first to deal with a "granular array" of fluid milk product segments as well as alternatives to fluid milk.

Among the major points associated with Capps' analysis: the more expensive milk sub-categories had higher own-price elasticities, except for lactose-free milk in the pre-COVID period; and the own-price elasticities for the granular array of fluid milk categories are indicative of elastic demands, not inelastic demands as suggested by Kaiser.

And among Capps' conclusions: to better understand the demand for fluid milk, it is necessary to disaggregate this category into various segments, namely traditional white milk, traditional flavored milk, organic milk, lactose-free milk, and health-enhanced milk.

Also, Capps noted, it's necessary to consider the interrelationships with plant-based milk alternatives, bottled water, juices, sports drinks, refrigerated yogurt, and protein beverages. The prices of these alternative beverages and refrigerated yogurt had statistically significant impacts on the quantities purchased of the respective milk sub-categories.

Price elasticity isn't discussed all that often in the dairy industry, but it was kind of nice to hear two different perspectives on elasticity at the ongoing federal order hearing. And the bottom line from that testimony seems to be that prices matter more for some products than others.

## Global Dairy Trade Price Index Rises 2.3%; Only Mozzarella Price Declines

Auckland, New Zealand—The price index on this week's semi-monthly Global Dairy Trade (GDT) dairy commodity auction increased 2.3 percent from the previous auction, held two weeks ago.

That's the fourth straight increase in the GDT price index.

In this week's auction, which featured 167 participating bidders and 100 winning bidders, prices were higher for Cheddar cheese, skim milk powder, whole milk powder, butter, anhydrous milkfat and lactose; and lower for Mozzarella cheese. An average price for buttermilk powder wasn't available.

Results from this week's GDT auction, with comparisons to the auction held two weeks ago, were as follows:

**Cheddar cheese:** The average winning price was \$4,217 per metric ton (\$1.91 per pound), up 1.0 percent. Average winning prices were: Contract 1 (February), \$4,127 per ton, down 3.3 percent; Contract 2 (March), \$4,181 per ton, up 2.5 percent; Contract 3 (April), \$4,180 per ton, up 0.4 percent; Contract 4 (May), \$4,300 per ton, up 2.3 percent; Contract 5 (June), \$4,300 per ton, up 1.2 percent; and Contract 6 (July), \$4,221 per ton, up 1.8 percent.

**Mozzarella cheese:** The average winning price was \$3,830 per ton (\$1.74 per pound), down 3.3 percent. That was for Contract 2.

**Skim milk powder:** The average winning price was \$2,638 per ton (\$1.20 per pound), up 1.2 percent. Average winning prices were: Contract 1, \$2,601 per ton, up 0.7 percent; Contract 2, \$2,606 per ton, up 0.4 percent; Contract 3, \$2,668 per ton, up 2.4 percent; Contract 4, \$2,709 per ton, up 2.9 percent; and Contract 5, \$2,731 per ton, up 1.7 percent.

**Whole milk powder:** The average winning price was \$3,353 per ton (\$1.52 per pound), up 1.7 percent. Average winning prices were: Contract 1, \$3,335 per ton, up 2.3 percent; Contract 2, \$3,325 per ton, up 1.3 percent; Contract 3, \$3,395 per ton, up 1.9 percent; Contract 4, \$3,418 per ton, up 1.2 percent; and Contract 5, \$3,426 per ton, up 2.1 percent.

**Butter:** The average winning price was \$5,906 per ton (\$2.68 per pound), up 5.8 percent. Average winning prices were: Contract 1, \$5,941 per ton, up 1.5 percent; Contract 2, \$5,913 per ton, up 7.3 percent; Contract 3, \$5,900 per ton, up 4.4 percent; Contract 4, \$5,860 per ton, up 4.9 percent; and Contract 5, \$5,895 per ton, up 5.3 percent.

**Anhydrous milkfat:** The average winning price was \$5,842

per ton (\$2.65 per pound), up 4.3 percent. Average winning prices were: Contract 1, \$5,859 per ton, up 4.6 percent; Contract 2, \$5,804 per ton, up 4.1 percent; Contract 3, \$5,848 per ton, up 4.4 percent; Contract 4, \$5,871 per ton, up 4.5 percent; and Contract 5, \$5,868 per ton, up 3.9 percent.

**Lactose:** The average winning price was \$760 per ton (34.5 cents per pound), up 1.3 percent. That was for Contract 2.

ASB Bank, in its "Commodities Weekly" report, noted that the first two dairy auctions of 2024 have gotten off to a "healthy start," with most dairy commodities gaining ground, and whole milk powder prices up a little over 4 percent over the last two auctions. Dairy prices are at their

highest levels in almost 12 months heading towards the end of the season.

ASB Bank has been surprised by the resilience in dairy auction prices.

Dairy prices have outperformed where ASB expected them to be based on (reasonably decent) global dairy production and the (comparatively soft) global economic backdrop, particularly among major dairy importers like China.

ASB has long highlighted the relative absence of Chinese processors at this season's Global Dairy Trades and expected that a more sustained uptick in demand from China would be necessary to push dairy prices higher, it was noted.

But dairy prices have continued to press higher despite China only buying low volumes of product on offer (including its lowest

proportion of whole milk powder in around six months at this week's auction).

With so much of the season's product already sold, ASB's 2023/24 farmgate milk price estimate has been mechanically pushed higher.

Dairy prices would need to undergo a meaningful correction in the next few auctions to produce a milk price at or below the midpoint of Fonterra's forecast range around \$7.50 per kilogram of milk solids.

As a consequence, ASB has revised up its Fonterra farmgate milk price forecast for the season, adding 50 cents to around the \$7.85 per kilogram of milk solids mark.

Westpac, meanwhile, is retaining its milk price forecast for this season at \$7.50 per kilogram of milk solids, in line with the midpoint of Fonterra's guidance.

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## Merger Delayed

(Continued from p. 1)

300 supermarkets in Washington, including approximately 194 in the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue metropolitan area.

The proposed merger will eliminate head-to-head competition between the two largest grocery operators in the state, the lawsuit alleges. The lawsuit details that QFC, which is owned by Kroger, considers Safeway/Albertsons as its main competitor in the Seattle area. Across Washington, Albertsons considers either Fred Meyer or QFC — also Kroger owned — its primary competitor in every local market in Washington.

The supermarkets monitor each other's prices and adjust the cost of products as part of that competitive relationship, the lawsuit alleges. Albertsons' Seattle Division, for example, has lowered its prices to compete with Fred Meyer and QFC, and highlighted in its advertisements products where it offers a better deal.

The merger eliminates that competition, the lawsuit states.

In September, Kroger and Albertsons announced that they had entered a definitive agreement with C&S Wholesale Grocers, LLC, for the sale of select stores, banners, distribution centers, offices and private label brands in connection with their proposed merger. That divestiture transaction includes 413 stores along with QFC, Mariano's and Carrs brand names.

However, Ferguson asserts the plan does not do enough to address the new combined company's market dominance, and it could actually reduce competition. C&S Wholesale Grocers does not currently operate any supermar-

kets in Washington. If the merger succeeds, C&S would become the second-largest supermarket operator in Washington state overnight.

The newly combined Kroger-Albertsons brands would be immediately positioned to out-compete their former supermarkets while they transition to a new owner, one that is still trying to adjust to becoming a large-scale nationwide supermarket operator, the lawsuit stated. If those stores fail, hundreds of Washingtonians could lose their jobs and grocery choice could be diminished even further for Washington shoppers. Even if the locations are ultimately sold off to another company better equipped to operate them, a second sale only increases the time these supermarkets are in transition, giving the newly merged company a further competitive advantage.

Washington has seen a very similar divestiture plan fail in the not-too-distant past, Ferguson noted. The current proposed divestiture plan bears a striking resemblance to Albertsons' failed divestiture of Washington-based stores to a similarly unqualified buyer, Washington-based Haggen, less than a decade ago.

As a part of Albertsons' 2015 merger with Safeway, 146 Albertsons and Safeway stores, including 26 in Washington, were sold to Haggen, Ferguson stated. At the time, Haggen was a regional supermarket chain with only 18 stores that lacked the infrastructure to rapidly expand to a multi-state, national grocery retailer.

It struggled to operate the divested stores, and less than a year later, Haggen was forced to file for bankruptcy, Ferguson continued. Albertsons was able to reacquire more than 50 of

its divested stores, including 14 Washington locations, in some cases paying only \$1 per store at auction. It now owns and operates Haggen stores in Washington.

If C&S fails, it is also possible Kroger could be allowed to reacquire its divested supermarkets, just like Albertsons did after Haggen's failure, Ferguson said.

The lawsuit asks the court to find that the merger violates Washington antitrust law, and to issue an injunction permanently blocking the merger nationwide.

### Congressional Concerns

Meanwhile, six members of the US Senate and House recently wrote to Lina Khan, chair of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), to express their "continuing concerns" with Kroger's proposed acquisition of Albertsons.

A 2022 letter to Khan from US Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) outlined both Kroger's and Albertsons' records of profiteering and worker exploitation, and how those conditions stand to worsen if this merger is finalized.

The divestiture plan announced last September "will not ameliorate harms to consumers, workers, and the grocery industry as a whole if the merger is allowed," the six members of Congress noted in a Dec. 11, 2023 letter to Khan. Past experience with Albertsons' structural remedies indicates that the new proposal will not cure the anticompetitive harms of the deal.

When Albertsons acquired Safeway in 2015, the companies agreed to sell 168 of their stores to four buyers as part of a settlement with the FTC. This effort to preserve competition through structural remedies "was an unmitigated failure," the December letter to Khan stated.

## FROM OUR ARCHIVES

### 50 YEARS AGO

**Jan. 18, 1974: Washington**—In spite of increases in income, rising employment rates and stiffer competition for available food supplies, overall US food consumption was at its lowest point in several years. Although milk production declined in 1973, per capita dairy product consumption is up slightly and cheese consumption increased 5 percent.

**Alto, WI**—Leonard Bruins, 72, who served as president of the Alto Cooperative Creamery for 19 years, passed away this week. Bruins was elected at the organizational meeting of the co-op in 1943, and continued to serve until 1962.

### 25 YEARS AGO

**Jan. 22, 1999: Naples, FL**—With the dairy price support program scheduled to end in less than a year, IDFA is floating the concept of a margin support program to provide income protection to farmers. The government would guarantee a percentage — between 75 and 90 percent — of the margin between feed costs and milk prices.

**Naples, FL**—Hans Epprecht, founder and president of Great Lakes Cheese, Hiram, OH, was honored with the NCI Laureate Award here this week. A native of Switzerland, Epprecht came to the US in 1948 and began his career at Ohio's Brewster Cheese.

### 10 YEARS AGO

**Jan. 17, 2013: Chicago**—The CME settling price for 40-pound Cheddar blocks reached a new record high today of \$2.3100 per pound. The previous record high for the CME block price was \$2.2850 per pound, set in May of 2008. Meanwhile, 500-pound barrels also set a new record today, reaching \$2.2750 per pound on an unfilled bid for one car at that price.

**Madison**—Dairy industry innovators Len. E Ivarson and William Urschel will be honored this spring with the WCMA Distinguished Service Award. The award recognizes those who have played a significant role in building the success of the US dairy industry.

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## Bipartisan House Bill Aims To Boost USDA's Organic Dairy Data Collection

Washington—Bipartisan legislation introduced in the US House earlier this month aims to enhance organic dairy data collection at the US Department of Agriculture.

The Organic Dairy Data Collection Act was introduced by US Reps. Marc Molinaro (R-NY) and Chellie Pingree (D-ME). Both are members of the House Agriculture Committee.

The Organic Dairy Data Collection Act:

- Directs USDA to collect and publish cost-of-production data for organic milk, including the costs of major organic feedstuffs, domestically produced or imported.

- Directs USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) to gather and report monthly data about the prices that organic dairy farmers are being paid for organic milk.

- Directs NASS, the Economic Research Service (ERS) or Agricultural Research Service (ARS) to publish reports on the cost of production data by state, regional data on the quantity of organic milk production, and prices.

The bill is supported by the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association, Organic Trade Association, Organic Farmers Association, National Organic Coalition, Organic Farming Research Foundation, Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance and Western Organic Dairy Producers Alliance.

“Improved organic data collection and reporting, bolstered by this bill, is going to provide more reliable and consistent information on organic dairy production costs and markets. The reality is that this type of information can vary region by region so this effort can help farmers like me plan for the year and make decisions on what actions I need to take on my organic dairy,” commented Annie Watson, Organic Valley farmer-member and owner of Sheepscot Valley Farm in Whitefield, ME.

“The famous business adage ‘You can’t manage what you don’t measure’ applies to the organic dairy market. The Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance supports the Organic Dairy Data Collection Act as it will provide that necessary measurement by requiring the collection and publication of data that will shed light on the state of the organic dairy sector,” said Kathie Arnold, a New York organic dairy farmer and chair of the Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance’s policy committee.

“Family run organic dairy farms provide healthy food and envi-

ronmental stewardship to rural communities across the country. The Organic Dairy Data Collection Act can provide valuable data collection to inform future support for an industry facing economic crisis,” said Kate Mendenhall, executive director of the Organic Farmers Association.

“A perfect storm of adverse effects, including escalating costs of production, low pay-prices, a labor shortage, unstable international supply chains, and dramatically shifting weather patterns have created a crisis for the organic dairy sector,” said Sarah Alexander, executive director of

the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association.

“This legislation is a critical component of an urgently needed rescue plan for organic dairy. Having a clear national picture of all costs associated with organic dairy production in each state, regional production data and pay prices will help ensure that technical and financial assistance goes where it is needed most,” Alexander continued.

“Farmers, like all business managers, depend on solid and trustworthy data to make decisions. With the continued fluctuations in market conditions from global events impacting domestic organic dairy farmers, it is more important than ever for producers, stakeholders, and USDA to have access to accurate data,” said

Matthew Dillon, co-CEO of the Organic Trade Association.

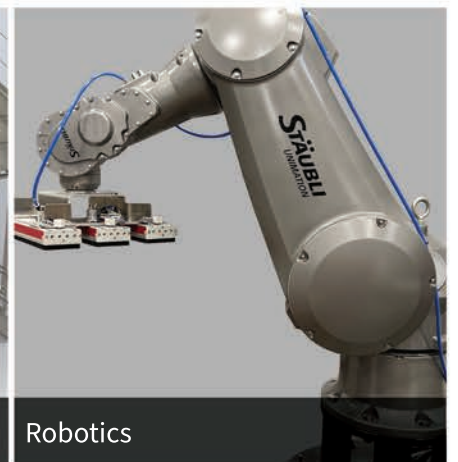
“The USDA collects pricing and production cost data so dairy farmers can have access to competitive markets, keep a pulse on industry challenges, account for feed costs, and make accurate decisions with reliable information. Unfortunately, this same data isn’t available to organic dairy farmers,” Molinaro said. “I am proud to introduce the bipartisan Organic Dairy Data Collection Act to give organic farmers the data they need to make smart decisions for their farm and family.”

The Organic Dairy Data Collection Act “will ensure USDA can better understand and address the challenges organic dairies face,” Pingree said.

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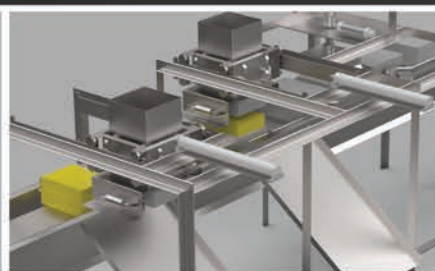
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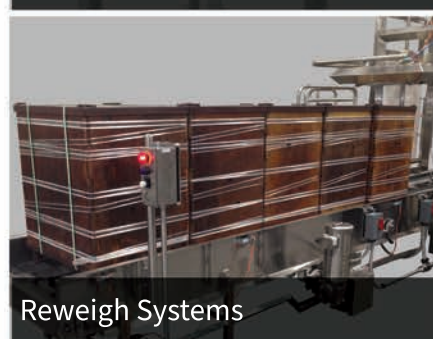
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## December Class IV Volume On Seven Federal Orders: 815.2 Million Pounds

Washington—The volume of milk pooled in Class IV in December on the seven federal milk marketing orders that pay dairy farmers a producer price differential (PPD) totaled 815.2 million pounds, up 133.5 million pounds from November but down 80.7 million pounds from December 2022, according to the uniform price announcements for those orders.

Class III volume on all the orders totaled 6.92 billion pounds, up 237.8 million pounds from November but down 563 million pounds from December 2022.

All seven orders reported positive PPDs, ranging from 36 cents per hundredweight on the Upper Midwest order to \$3.67 per hundred on the Northeast order.

On the California order, Class III volume totaled 1.44 billion pounds, up 45 million pounds from November and up 22 million pounds from December 2022.

Class III utilization was 72.6 percent, up from 71.7 percent in November and up from 70.4 percent in December 2022.

Class IV volume on the California order totaled 60.2 million pounds, up 10.2 million pounds from November but down 38.9 million pounds from December

2022. Class IV utilization was 3.0 percent, up from 2.6 percent in November but down from 4.9 percent in December 2022.

A total of 1.99 billion pounds of milk was pooled on the California order, up 36 million pounds from November.

Class III volume on the Upper Midwest order totaled 2.48 billion pounds, up 89 million pounds from November but down 471 million pounds from December 2022. Class III utilization was 92.4 percent, up from 92.3 percent in November but down from 93.0 percent in December 2022.

Class IV volume on the Upper Midwest order totaled 16.9 million pounds, up 5.7 million pounds from November and up 1.7 million pounds from December 2022. Class IV utilization was 0.6 percent, up from 0.4 percent in November and up from 0.5 percent in December 2022.

A total of 2.69 billion pounds of milk was pooled on the Upper Midwest order in December, up 93 million pounds from November.

Class III volume on the Southwest order totaled 661.1 million pounds, up 28.3 million pounds from November but down 74.1 million pounds from December

2022. Class III utilization was 63.3 percent, up from 61.2 percent in November.

Class IV volume totaled 9.4 million pounds, up 2.1 million pounds from November but down 29.7 million pounds from December 2022. Class IV utilization was 0.9 percent, up from 0.7 percent in November.

A total of 1.05 billion pounds of milk was pooled on the Southwest order, up 19.8 million pounds from November but down 113 million pounds from December 2022.

Class III volume on the Central order was 667.9 million pounds, up 17.9 million pounds from November but down 57.9 million pounds from December 2022. Class III utilization was 52.3 percent, down from 53.0 percent in November.

Class IV volume on the Central order was 163.6 million pounds, up 40.3 million pounds from November and up 31.4 million pounds from December 2022. Class IV utilization was 12.8 percent, up from 10.1 percent in November.

A total of 1.28 billion pounds of milk was pooled on the Central order, up 52 million pounds from November but down 41 million pounds from December 2022.

Class III volume totaled 685.6 million pounds, up 18.6 million pounds from November but down 2.6 million pounds from December 2022. Class III utilization was 50.5 percent, up from 44.9 percent in November and up from 49.7 percent in December 2022.

December Class IV volume on the Mideast order totaled 26.0 million pounds, down 26 million pounds from November and down 37.7 million pounds from December 2022. Class IV utilization was 1.9 percent, down from 3.5 percent in November and down from 4.6 percent in December 2022.

A total of 1.36 billion pounds of milk was pooled on the Mideast order, down 128 million pounds from November and down 28 million pounds from December 2022.

Class III volume on the Northeast order totaled 672.3 million pounds, up 32.8 million pounds from November and up 15.1 million pounds from December 2022. Class III utilization was 29.8 percent, up from 29.6 percent in November and up from 29.1 percent in December 2022.

December Class IV volume on the Northeast order totaled 392.0 million pounds, up 76.4 million pounds from November but down 22.8 million pounds from December 2022. Class IV utilization was 17.4 percent, up from 14.6 percent in November but down from 18.4 percent in December 2022.

2.26 billion pounds of milk was pooled on the Northeast, up 92 million pounds from November and up less than 1.0 million pounds from December 2022.

On the Pacific Northwest order, Class III volume totaled 305.6 million pounds, up 6.3 million pounds from November and up 4.8 million pounds from December 2022. Class III utilization was 50.3 percent, down from 51.4 percent in November but up from 50.2 percent in December 2022.

Class IV volume on the Pacific Northwest order totaled 147.1 million pounds, up 24.9 million pounds from November and up 15.2 million pounds from December 2022. Class IV utilization was 24.2 percent, up from 21.0 percent in November and up from 22.0 percent in December 2022.

A total of 607.1 million pounds of milk was pooled on the Pacific Northwest order, up 24.6 million pounds from November and up 7.3 million pounds from December 2022.

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## Value Of Ireland's Dairy Exports Fell 8% In 2023; Cheese Export Value Rose

**Dublin, Ireland**—The value of Ireland's dairy exports declined by 8 percent in 2023 to 6.3 billion euros, according to Bord Bia's Export Performance and Prospects report 2023/24, which was launched earlier this month.

Milk collections in Ireland last year declined by almost 2 percent from 2022 to approximately 8.7 billion liters. That's the first year the Irish milk supply has declined since milk production quotas were lifted in 2015, the report said.

From a value perspective, the strong pricing available in global markets throughout the second half of 2022, and the contracts written during that period, were reflected in the value of transactions in the first quarter of 2023. This masked underlying demand issues at the time and insulated trade values from the rapidly decreasing prices quoted.

According to Eurostat, European Union (EU) butter prices fell below 4,500 euros per ton in September 2023, a sharp contrast to the period between June and October 2022 when prices over 7,000 euros per ton were available.

The equivalent high to low range for cheese and skim milk powder prices on a year-on-year basis showed differences of 25 per-

cent and 40 percent, respectively. These three categories account for over 45 percent of dairy export volumes and reflect the challenges for Irish exports during 2023.

From a market perspective, the widespread price decline meant that all priority regions were challenged from a value perspective, the report stated. The dairy market showed more positive sentiment in the final quarter of 2023, which indicates some positivity heading into 2024.

Irish cheese exports increased by around 55 million euros in 2023 to approximately 1.3 billion euros, up 4 percent from 2022. Market values were relatively robust, with average weekly European prices of approximately 3,900 euros per ton during the year, only 8 percent behind 2022 prices and well ahead of the five-year average of 3,330 euros per ton.

Overall, Irish cheese export volumes to the United Kingdom grew by over 15 percent in 2022. North American import demand was challenged with domestic production of cheese in the US estimated to have grown by less than 2 percent. Volumes to the Middle East and North African markets returned to growth in 2023 with double-digit increases into the key

regional markets of Egypt, Libya and Saudi Arabia.

Irish butter exports declined by an estimated 175 million euros in 2023 to 1.3 billion euros, down 12 percent from 2022. German retail volumes declined by 5 percent, while the lower-cost margarines category grew by 4 percent, indicating trading down by shoppers.

Exports of fat filled milk powder (FFMP) decreased by around 80 million euros to an estimated 825 million euros, a 9 percent decline from 2022. Factors included affordability challenges in West African markets of Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal and Mali as volumes to Africa declined by about 25 percent from 2022.

Irish exports of specialized nutritional powders increased by around 45 million euros in 2023 to reach 800 million euros, an increase of 6 percent from 2022. The increase in exports to North America recorded in 2022 was retained and China's sourcing from Ireland looks to have returned to 2021 levels after supply chain challenges in 2022.

Casein contributed most to the overall dairy category decline, with exports valued at an estimated 500 million euros, down 185 million euros from 2022. The key driver was a significant devaluation in unit prices compared with 2022 prices, in part attributable to a focus on moving high-price

inventory through businesses as quickly as possible.

SMP export volumes exceeded 2022 levels with significant stocks released in the first half of the year. However, value declined by more than 30 million euros to an estimated 585 million euros.

WMP exports grew by 4 percent to reach a value of 220 million euros. Latin America contributed to some of this increase.

The EU whey price dropped to 640 euros per ton in August, which is close to half the levels seen in 2022. When coupled with lower volumes (down 12 percent), the value of Irish whey exports fell by 90 million euros to an estimated 250 million euros.

Exports to the EU declined by 9 percent, to 2.2 billion euros, accounting for 35 percent of exports. Exports to the UK declined by 15 percent to a value of 1.1 billion euros, with the UK's share of Irish dairy exports standing at around 17 percent.

Irish dairy exports to North America declined by 8 percent to a value of 750 million euros, accounting for 12 percent of exports. A decline in casein and cheese exports were recorded. Irish butter exports to the US continue to increase, with growth of more than 10 percent seen in the first nine months of 2023 compared with the first nine months of 2022.



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# Prairie Farms' Investments Keep Luana Plant Producing Quality Products

**Luana, IA**—Prairie Farms Dairy's Luana, IA, plant has a rich tradition of making quality dairy products through constant improvements to their operations and the latest state-of-the-art technology.

Prairie Farms celebrated its 85th anniversary in 2023 and has extended its reach and products over the years by conducting more than 50 acquisitions and a dozen mergers, including six cheese manufacturing plants under the Prairie Farms Cheese Division.

Prairie Farms acquired the Luana cheese operation from Swiss Valley Farms Cooperative in December of 2016, thus providing the 600 farmer-family owned dairy cooperative opportunity for growth in the cheese industry.

The acquisition also included Swiss Valley cheese plants in Faribault, MN, Mindoro, WI, and Rochester, MN.

In 2020, two more cheese operations were added to the Prairie Farms Cheese Division portfolio with the acquisitions of Shullsburg Creamery and White Hill Cheese, both located in Shullsburg, WI.

Rod Kregel has been in plant operations at the Luana cheese plant since 1978. He continues to work in the operation half-time.

During his 45 years, Kregel said the company made Swiss cheese and varieties, and until the mid-1980s, Cheddar cheese.

"We had and continue to have a highly-sought after Swiss cheese and we stopped making Cheddar due to increased demand for our Swiss," Kregel said.

Back in the late 1970s, the plant was pretty small.

"We were making about 14 or 15 vats a day back in 1978-79," Kregel said. "We probably ran about 500,000 pounds of milk a day. Probably 25,000 pounds of Swiss and another 20,000 pounds of Cheddar."

Today, Kregel thinks the Luana operation is one of the largest Swiss cheese plants in the US, with total production somewhere in the top 10.

"We produce a quality Swiss cheese here," Kregel said. "That has driven growth. When you produce a consistently high quality product, you have no problem selling it."

Prairie Farms Luana makes about 120,000 pounds of Swiss a day.

"We're running about 1.2 million of milk into our Swiss cheese. I'd say in a day's time, we are in excess of 1.5 million pounds of milk a day here," Kregel estimated.

The plant processes nearly 440 million pounds of milk into nearly 45 million pounds of cheese a year, mostly into Swiss.

The plant also makes award-winning Havarti, Baby Swiss, Gouda, and Maasdam styles.

Prairie Farms' cheese products are available predominately

for the foodservice market both domestically and for export.

The Swiss cheese is made into 200-pound blocks and then cut into 100-pound blocks, packaged, and aged, primarily for sandwich cuts.

"Everything goes through our cutting room here," Kregel said. "About 95 percent of the cheese is made into profile totes where we take the 200 pounders and cut them into 28" x 3.5" x 7" to ultimately end up in slicers."

In another area of the plant, Cream cheese and Neufchatel are made utilizing cream from the Swiss production.

The plant makes roughly 25 million pounds of Cream cheese in a year's time.

Kregel said the Luana operation began making Cream cheese and Cream cheese styles in 1978, right around the time he started his career.

"It's worked out really well," Kregel said. "The two plants have meshed together perfectly."

Cream cheese is made into 3 pound brick, 8 ounce retail, 15 - 30 pound bags, and 5 pound tubs and 55 gallon drums.

The Luana operation added a new spray dryer a few years back that produces approximately 5,000 pounds per hour of non-hygroscopic sweet whey powder.

## Upgrades And Expansions

Located in northeastern Iowa, the Luana operation has an activated sludge wastewater treatment plant that can treat 280,000 gallons per day.

The plant's evaporator and RO systems allow the plant to recycle water for cleaning processes within the plant.

"Since when I first started, it seems like we have been continuously improving the operation here," Kregel said. "They are constantly adding on and making upgrades to the facility."

The plant has undergone a series of expansion renovations over the years.

A \$20 million investment announced in 2014, upgraded much of its equipment, increased its production capacity, and expanded its cheesemaking capabilities.

The cooperative added a new process room in 2016 and has fin-

ished up adding cooler space this past year, Kregel mentioned.

"We needed the new storage to relieve some of the pressure and movement of the cheese," Kregel said. "Now we can keep the Swiss here until it reaches its birthday."

Kregel explained that the new process room is a new block-forming facility where 200-pound cheese moulds are filled with curd, pressed, cured, and de-moulded before the cheese goes into brine.

"We've remained on top technologically speaking," Kregel said. "The Alpma system is as good as it gets. The addition of the Alpma system, that line where you direct fill is really nice. It has a curd measurement system on it that tells it how much curd to put into the mould. It is very nice."

Production never ceased due to expansions and upgrades, Kregel said.

"We always needed to meet production. We were never down for an extended period of time. The latest technology and automation we have put in here will reduce shipping and movement of the cheese, alleviates some of the pressure brought on by labor shortages and for employee safety reasons," Kregel said.

"All these little pieces of the puzzle we continue to put together gets you a darn good, consistent piece of cheese," he said.

## Reflectronics Milk Coagulation Sensor - FluorLite

In March of 2023, Prairie Farms Luana added milk coagulation process control sensors to all seven of their Tetra Pak 45,000 pound cheese vats.

Named FluorLite, the sensors are said to improve product consistency, keep production on schedule, and improve cheese yield.

"We've been playing with the sensor for about two years," Kregel said. "We had it in one vat but made the decision to add the sensor to all of the vats. I think it was a good decision."

The sensor monitors the milk in the vat. It starts when the rennet is added. While the milk is in the setting phase, FluorLite determines the cut time and then will automatically cut the vat based off that data.



A 200-pound Swiss cheese block exits the block forming and filling room, and enters the brine flume at Prairie Farms' Luana, IA, plant



## Prairie Farms

Continued from p. 6

“It gives you some flexibility,” Kregel said. “It gives you monitoring capability of the coagulation itself. You control your sets a little better. You can see where you are and, if needed, make adjustments if you need to.”

Fred Payne is the developer of FluorLite and owner of Refletronics.

Payne said the FluorLite sensor monitors the milk, controls the cutting time and the gel firmness.

**“We recognize cheese as an art. But it is backed by science and this is one of the great aspects of technology that keeps us on track and as consistent as we can.”**

—Raymond Downes,  
Prairie Farms

“The FluorLite cutting time control technology provides the most advanced process control available for monitoring and controlling the milk coagulation step in cheesemaking,” Payne said. “It provides control of the cutting time set-point and desired gel firmness.”

Kregel reviewed the last 10 vats made at the Luana operation. The numerical number assigned to each vat showed the firmness being consistent.

“Firmness gives you good indicators of moisture, whey retention, moisture control, etc.,” Kregel said. “The closer you can get to that at cut, the better control.”

Kregel said he trusts the sensors so much that the vats are now in auto-cut mode.

“This is state-of-the-art technology. I’ve got to think they’re pretty good,” Kregel said. “We’ve run them in auto ever since we put them in. We have our parameters and it watches the coagulum come to the gel-firming point. We are happy with them.”

Raymond Downes is the director of operations for the entire Prairie Farms Cheese division.

Downes worked alongside Kregel and Payne to put the FluorLite technology in at Luana.

“We recognize cheese as an art,” Downes said. “But it is backed by science and this is one of the great aspects of technology that keeps us on track and as consistent as we can.”

Downes acknowledges that not all vat operators are cheese makers.

“This technology takes the away the variable of having different operators,” Downes said.

“This keeps us on the mark. Keeping the vats as consistent as possible. They can push a button to acknowledge a step. With this technology we have been able to make the same piece of cheese January 1 through December 31 of every year. We’ve really come a long way in our consistency of our Swiss cheese.”

Payne said one of the unique features of the FluorLite sensor is in the PLC software that alerts the operator if no enzyme was added, confirms the addition of enzyme, and assists in establishing set-points for each recipe.

“That’s a nice feature. It tells you if you have rennet in there,” Kregel said. “Cheese quality never dropped off and actually improved because I think we are more consistent at this point in the process which is an extremely important part.”

The next phase of this technology for Prairie Farms is adding the FluorLite to cheese vats at White Hill Cheese, Downes said.

### Prairie Farms Cheese Division

While the Luana operation is the largest cheese operation in Prairie Farms Cheese Division, the other five operations are also very successful and making highly sought-after products.

White Hill Cheese, which began as a joint venture operation in 2010, also produces Swiss cheese, and Baby Swiss, as well as other specialty varieties.

Downes said the White Hill facility is undergoing a line extension that will allow the company to make 12-pound wheels in addition to the 5-pound wheels they have been making.

In 2020, Prairie Farms acquired full ownership of the Shullsburg, WI, cheese facility.



Luana’s latest expansions include a new process room. The Alpma system fills the 200-pound cheese moulds with curd, presses the block, cures, and then de-moulds the cheese before hitting the brine.

While Prairie Farms is one of the leading producers of Swiss cheese in the US, the company also has two operations making award-winning Blue cheese.

Prairie Farms makes Blue cheese, Gorgonzola and affinage cheese varieties at its historic Caves of Faribault cheese plant in Faribault, MN.

Prairie Farms Mindoro, Mindoro, WI, also makes award-winning Blue cheese and Gorgonzola.

Prairie Farms’s Rochester, MN, plant, recently went through a renovation. The plant produces cold pack club cheese varieties and pasteurized process cheeses.

The acquisition of Shullsburg Creamery, also in Shullsburg, WI, boasts an expansive portfolio of varieties. The plant manufactures Colby, Monterey Jack, Pepper Jack, and Cheddar styles.

In 1938, a group of Illinois dairy farmers created Prairie Farms to improve market conditions for selling cream. By 1949, the company expanded its prod-

ucts to include bottled milk, cottage cheese and ice cream.

Today, the average size farm consists of approximately 120 milk cows.

The Luana plant was originally a milk drying operation owned by Mississippi Valley Milk Producers.

“Swiss Valley had a lot of small cheese plants. That was part of their growth,” Kregel said. “There were a pile of cheese plants nearby and they’d buy them, acquire their milk source, and then they’d consolidate operations. Many of those farms are still with us.”

The base of milk collection, Kregel said, is southern Minnesota, eastern Iowa, Wisconsin, and some from Illinois.

“The future is bright for this operation here,” Kregel said. “We have a great milk supply. To sit here and to watch it grow, especially since 2000, to where we are today, it’s impressive. I think this plant will be around a long time. It makes great products.”



**It has been a privilege to be a part of the dairy industry for the past 10 years.** Thank you to our employees, customers, and suppliers who have helped us along the way.

## Food Packaging

(Continued from p. 1)

ply chain. The alliance prioritizes engagement with the ongoing inter-institutional negotiations in the European Union (EU) on the revision of applicable packaging and packaging waste rules, and the P2 and other packaging-related regulatory developments in Canada.

Founding members of the ASPF include National Milk Producers Federation, US Dairy Export Council, FMI-The Food Industry Association, National Council of Farmer Cooperatives, Organic Trade Association, Reusable Packaging Association, STOP Foodborne Illness, National Wooden Pallet and Container Association, North American Meat Institute, Western Growers Association, International Fresh Produce Association, Aneberries, Canadian Produce Marketing Association, Fruit South Africa, and Frutas de Chile.

"Members of ASPF are clear: we are committed to significantly reducing packaging waste, just not at the expense of food safety. We will work hard with the regulators and policy makers around the world to do so," said IFPA chief science officer and chair of ASPF, Max Teplitski, PhD.

"We must take into account the footprint of the entire lifecycle of

packaging use while maintaining food safety and addressing phytosanitary concerns," Teplitski added. "The purpose of ASPF is to find opportunities for partnership across global stakeholders to create a holistic and harmonized approach to packaging regulation, which reflects and accounts for the key outcomes central to a sustainable food supply."

"Sustainable packaging solutions for food, such as reusable packaging, can also lead to superior product protection and temperature management performance, ensuring food quality and safety and reducing waste," said Todd Hoff, executive vice president at Reusable Packaging Association, and vice chair of the alliance. "The Reusable Packaging Association values our participation in this wide-ranging industry alliance to support the transformation to more circular reuse systems while upholding the highest food standards."

In addition to ASPF executive leadership, the organization will also include working groups to drive priorities and action plans that will focus on the government relations strategies and the technical approach to advocate for packaging regulations that not only are sound in regards to compliance but are also technically pragmatic for industry implementation. The organization also encourages ongoing consideration

and consultation throughout value chains, for extensive buy-in and sustainable success.

"The US dairy industry aims to continue producing safe, high-quality, nutrient-dense dairy foods while minimizing dairy's environmental impact," said Sandra Benson, vice president of market access and regulatory affairs at the US Dairy Export Council. "Dairy product packaging must balance quality and safety with environmental concerns."

"As a founding member of ASPF, the National Wooden Pallet and Container Association is proud of the wooden pallets' role in fostering environmental sustainability without compromising safety or quality," said Jason Ortega, vice president, public affairs at NWPCA.

"Inherently reusable and 100 percent recyclable, wooden pallets support ASPF's goal of significantly reducing packaging waste. By promoting wooden transport packaging, the alliance can advocate for a circular reuse system, minimizing the environmental impact of packaging disposal."

The ASPF also released an analysis of peer-reviewed publications that focus on the food safety versus packaging tradeoffs.

The ASPF position paper notes that, while pending regulations are well-intentioned in their efforts to reduce plastic packaging litter, there is mounting scientific evi-

dence that the implementation of certain provisions will have negative impacts on safety, increase loss and waste, and increase the overall carbon footprint of production and distribution.

Scientific peer-reviewed studies carried out by academic scientists around the world and summarized in the position paper are unequivocal: packaging has an indispensable role to ensure safety and quality of foods, as it:

- Creates a barrier to prevent contamination,
  - Reduces spoilage due to mechanical damage and wounding,
  - Prevents oxidation-associated loss of nutritional value for fresh fruits, vegetables and meats,
  - Lessens temperature shocks and associated loss of product quality and nutritional value,
  - Maintains modified atmosphere,
  - Absorbs moisture (and thus reduces spoilage and leaking),
  - Shields finished product from condensate in refrigeration units,
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## Pooling Of 'Dumped' Milk For Period Of Dec. 22-Jan. 6 OK'd For Northeast Order

**Boston, MA**—Shawn M. Boockoff, market administrator for the Northeast federal milk marketing order, has agreed to temporarily authorize the pooling of milk disposed of or "dumped" at farm or other non-plant locations for the period of Dec. 22, 2023, through Jan. 6, 2024.

Pool handler National Farmers Organization (NFO) had requested a temporary authorization allowing pool handlers to dispose of surplus milk at a farm or non-plant location, with said milk retaining the status of pooled producer milk, Boockoff explained.

The period requested for this temporary authorization is the Christmas-New Year's holiday period. Specifically, the period covered by this action would include Dec. 22, 2023, through Jan. 6, 2024.

In its request, NFO noted last-minute holiday closings or reduced volumes combined with lack of alternatives accepting milk created an inability to get milk processed. Polling some handlers to determine the nature of markets across the marketing area, pool handlers Agri-Mark, Inc.; Cayuga Marketing LLC; Dairy Farmers of America, Inc.; Land O'Lakes, Inc.; and Upstate Niagara Cooperative, Inc. responded either in support of, or did not oppose, NFO's request, Boockoff noted.

The pooling of milk dumped at farm or other non-plant locations was authorized for the requested period, provided these conditions are met:

- Handlers and/or their producers that utilize this temporary policy must have been pooled on the Northeast order for all their commercially marketed production for the months of July through November 2023.

- The milk must have been picked up at the farm, measured and sampled for payment. The tanker test will be a weighted average of the producer tests.

- Notification should be given to the market administrator's office as soon as possible. The milk will be priced at the location that the dump occurred, therefore, at pool time the farm dumps should be reported separately, grouped by location zone. At pool time a separate list must be submitted of all producers whose milk was dumped, along with the component tests of the applicable milk (if available), and the physical location and address, including county, of where the milk was dumped.

## Food Retail For 2030: Smart Carts, Killer Customer Service, Samples

**Middleton, WI**—The supermarket of 2030 is going to look dramatically different than today, with smart grocery carts instead of cash registers, app-powered purchasing and seamless, minimal-contact transactions.

Therein lies the challenge for cheese, dairy and food retailers – employ technology to support daily operations and free up staff to provide shoppers a personalized "experience" when they walk through the door.

Zak Romanoff, president of OMNI Food Sales, recently sat down with the International Dairy Deli Bakery Association (IDDBA) to discuss marketing strategies for enhancing the retail shopping experience.

OMNI is a principal food broker for food retailers in the New York, New Jersey, and New England area.

"I'm going to start with technology," Romanoff said. "There's technology all around us – that which we know, and new technology being developed and coming out right now."

"Technology is giving convenience to customers in all industries, all across the country," he said. "We're here today to talk about the consumer supermarket experience, which by the way is experiencing a great boom in convenience and efficiency, through technology."

I view technology as a support, not a threat. It's a way to eliminate time-consuming tasks so that people can better use their time for higher-level functions like connecting with consumers or building a brand, Romanoff said.

The supermarket in five years is going to look noticeably different than today, according to Romanoff.

"Smart" shopping carts will be equipped with a computer and handheld scanner for consumers to scan items, weigh them, and pay for them via the cart.

What we have today is, increasingly no cashier, he continued. We have self-checkout, but imagine when this cart rolls out – it's going to save consumers even more time.

Retailers have likewise adopted – or are flirting with the adoption – of a technology where customers have an app on their phone that knows their purchase history, what items they want, and a time to pick up their order.

"You drive to the store, text the store, and within five minutes someone will come out with your groceries and load them into the car," Romanoff said.

### Crossroads Ahead For Retailers

Embracing this technology is critical. Every retailer or food manager that wants to stay relevant needs to have their own app, he continued.

It's a chance to connect with consumers – particularly younger consumers – and let them know about your company's mission and goals, daily operations, special events and shopper incentives, he said.

"People say retail is dead; I don't believe that retail is dead. I believe we need to change the way we view retail," Romanoff said. "It's about entertainment. Customers want an experience."

To that end, retailers need to ask themselves how to enhance the store shopping experience, he said.

"This is a way of life; it's something that people want, and it's cherished by a lot of people," he said. "This isn't the way Uber disrupted the taxi industry or Airbnb disrupted the travel industry. This is different."

People want to shop in supermarkets, but we need to give them a superior experience because if we don't, we're going to leave them with no choice but to rely on the convenience technology, Romanoff said.

Ways to enhance the experience through the lens of entertainment include the possibility of an in-store cooking class, a meaningful presentation from upper management, and taking time to connect directly with shoppers.

Another opportunity is education. Consumers want to make educated decisions – they want to know what they're buying, he continued.

"Customers are more aware of what's in their food; they want to know these things," Romanoff said. "We have a chance to get ahead of this by communication and talking with consumers about what's in their food."

### Product Sampling Is HUGE

Product sampling is one of the best ways to engage with customers, according to Romanoff. A recent survey asked consumers what things would enhance their shopping experience, and the number-one answer was "product sampling."

"People want to eat food when they go shopping," he said. "What if you knew that every time you

• See **Food Retail**, p. 12

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## Food Retail

Continued from p. 11

went to the supermarket, you would have an opportunity to eat something?”

Product sampling is important for a number of reasons – number one is we want people to be comfortable in the store, Romanoff said.

“We don’t want them to rush through the store because they’re going to Chipotle afterwards,” he said. “We want people to take their time, to peruse, to walk around, talk to department managers, try different products and learn about foods that come from different corners of the world.”

“People want romance; they want to hear the stories behind the brands,” Romanoff said.

“With a person who is friendly, engaging, interested in the product, and who actively looks for and engages the consumer – we’ve seen these stores and product samples get sold out, whether it’s a new product or a mature one,” he continued. “It’s all dependent on who’s doing the demo.”

With the man-hours saved from self-checkouts, let’s think about reallocating staff, he added. People are looking for help; let’s solve this need, and a possible solution may be found in artificial intelligence (AI).

Artificial intelligence and Chat GPT is already being ingrained into some of the programs we use today, Romanoff said.

“Chat GPT – I don’t think anybody knows where the ceiling is on that one – but in the food

industry, we’re dealing with thousands, millions of transactions, pieces of information, orders of reconciliation, and inventory management,” he said.

Embracing AI could put staff to better use.

“What if there were staff floating through the store, or at the ends of each aisle, whose sole purpose was to help the consumer find their product, educate them, or introduce them to new products,” Romanoff said.

“This is an example of enhancing the store experience, and giving people something that technology cannot – person-to-person interaction,” he said. “We have the people to do it, and we know the demand is there.”

Customer rewards are another option to provide “experience.”

“Costco has hot dogs available at checkout for \$1.50 for their customers, so they’re not rushing right out to a restaurant,” Romanoff said. “Going to Costco is an experience; there are always product samples, and then you can tie it up at the end with a hot dog or a pie, at a very reduced price.”

**“People want to be heard. Going all out with customer service is a way to combat the rise of impersonal technology.”**

Zak Romanoff, OMNI Food Sales

And lastly, customer service. Exhibit A is the Apple store, Romanoff continued. There’s a reason Apple is so big and profitable – they doubled-down on customer service. You are not ignored in an Apple store.

“I strongly urge food manufacturers and food reps to take the concepts here – think about the value put on customer service, and what that can do in your supermarket,” he said.

“People want to be heard. Going all out with customer service is a way to combat the rise of impersonal technology,” he said.

Another way to enhance the store shopping experience is with QR codes.

“Good old QR codes have been around for about 20 years, but it’s really been in the last five years that these codes have been in supermarkets,” Romanoff said.

This is a chance for you to connect directly with your consumers, he said. They take their phone out, scan the code and it takes them directly to your web page.

What do you want to show them – your leadership, your location, your values, your goals, and any new items that are coming out? This is the wave of the future.

### Must Have: Four Socials & An App

Every food retailer, marketer or manufacturer in the food industry needs to have four social media pages: LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, according to Romanoff, and all four should be used differently.

“Social media is becoming mass media. It’s on par with tv,” he said. “We’re seeing it every day, with the way that news stories and trends go viral.”

Regular people are becoming influencers, and why shouldn’t they feature your product on their channel? The key is integration with retailers and distributors, Romanoff said.

“How can we work together so that we get our ardent supporters, and your ardent supporters, and combine them? It’s always been said that together we achieve more – this is the way to do it.”

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## USPTO Awards Patents For Numerous Cheese-, Dairy-Related Inventions

Washington—The US Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) in recent weeks has awarded patents to several companies for cheese- and dairy-related inventions.

A patent was awarded to **GENERAL MILLS, INC.**, for cheese compositions and related methods. Inventors are Amelia E. Frazier, Nathan S. Morris and Aaron P. Wlaschin. The patent relates to cheese compositions that include relative reduced amounts of casein. As a substitution for casein, the cheese composition may include fiber. The cheese compositions may include ingredients that include fat, casein, fiber, and water, optionally also starch, non-casein protein, or both starch and non-casein protein.

Desirably, such a cheese composition, having a reduced amount of casein, can still exhibit one or more suitable functional, organoleptic, and nutritional properties.

A patent was awarded for methods for producing cheeses having the desirable properties of process cheese, using phospholipase enzyme(s), without the addition of emulsifying salts. Inventors are Valerie Arechiga and David Perry. The patent was awarded to **GLANBIA NUTRITIONALS LIMITED**.

The invention relates to a method for making a heat-treated cheese, the method comprising admixing with at least one shredded natural cheese a composition comprising at least one phospholipase, and heat-treating the shredded natural cheese to produce a heat-treated cheese. This invention also relates to a method for making a heat-treated cheese, the method comprising shredding at least one cheese to which phospholipase was added before or during the process of producing cheese curds from cheese milk, and producing a heat-treated cheese by heat-treating the shredded natural cheese using a heating method comprising a preheating step followed by a heating step.

Three patents were recently awarded to **SARGENTO FOODS INC.** related to funnels for use with filling packages with bulk products, such as cheese. The inventors listed for all three of these patents are James Abston, Tim Veldman, Jon Sommer, and Aaron Strand.

A patent was awarded for denatured milk proteins and methods of making them. Inventors are Paulos Tesfe, Jiancai Li, Bradley Maier, and Richard K. Merrill. The patent was awarded to **LEPRINO FOODS COMPANY**.

In general, embodiments of this invention include a denatured whey protein composition. The

composition includes at least 60 weight percent protein on a dry weight basis, less than 8 weight percent native glycomacropeptide (GMP), greater than 2 weight percent enzymatically hydrolyzed GMP relative to the total weight of the protein, a proteolysis index of at least 8 weight percent, and greater than 50 weight percent denatured whey proteins relative to the total weight of the protein.

In some embodiments, the denatured whey proteins can include denatured enzymatically hydrolyzed cheese whey proteins.

**CHR. HANSEN A/S** received a patent for variants of chymosin with improved milk-clotting prop-

erties. Inventors are Johannes Maarten Van Den Brink, Jesper Langholm Jensen, Jonas Jacobsen, Martin Lund, Iben Jeppesen, and Christian Jaeckel.

The inventors have identified improved camel and bovine/camel chymosin variants.

**CRYOVAC LLC**, has received a patent for an apparatus and process for packaging products. Inventors are Peter Thurig and Riccardo Palumbo.

A first object of this invention is to provide a quick and highly flexible packaging apparatus and process which can therefore reduce production costs to a minimum. It is an object of this invention to provide a compact packaging apparatus which can be manufactured with modest investment but which at the same time exhibits

an excellent production speed of the packages. A further object of the invention is to provide a packaging apparatus and process capable of efficiently removing an adequate amount of air from the package or creating a modified atmosphere within the same.

**GEHL FOODS, LLC**, received a patent for a food product dispenser and valve. Inventors are Michael Gehl, Michael Sowieja, Christoph Albiez, Paul Hatch, Thomas Mitchell, David Mucci, and Anders Olof Rostlund. One embodiment of this invention relates to a system for dispensing of a flowable food product, such as cheese sauce, from a reservoir. Another embodiment relates to a dispenser for dispensing a flowable food product from a flexible reservoir supported by a dispenser.

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## Stephanie Clark, Iowa State Professor, Joins New Mexico State University

Ames, IA and Las Cruces, NM— Stephanie Clark, professor of food science and human nutrition, and director of the re-established Iowa State University (ISU) Creamery, has transitioned to the role of affiliate professor at New Mexico State University.

Clark, who is now an ISU emeritus professor, retired from ISU in December 2023, and officially joined the New Mexico State faculty this month.

“She will continue to share her love for dairy, and teaching in whatever avenue she sees best,” said pilot plant manager and business administrator Sarah Canova. “They’re lucky to have her!”

Clark joined the ISU dairy science faculty in 2009 as an associate professor, and earned full-time professor status in 2016.

One of her milestone achievements was the successful re-establishment of the ISU Creamery in August 2020 after many years of hard work.

ISU first established its campus creamery in 1927 to equip students for careers in the dairy industry.

However, after significant planning and preparation, the Cream-

ery launched the first product in its new cheese line: White Cheddar Cheese Curds, in 2021.

“Ultimately, cheesemaking was what I always wanted to do at the creamery,” Clark said.

“Her legacy will continue on with the ISU Creamery as the creamery’s mission remains to educate and prepare students for competitive jobs in their industry, provide services to dairy farmers and entrepreneurs, and increase consumers’ love for dairy,” Canova said.

Clark also served as associate director of the Midwest Dairy Foods Research Center, and has provided service and leadership for the American Dairy Science Association (ADSA), Institute of Food Technologists, and the American Cheese Society.

Last summer, Clark was presented with the ADSA Distinguished Service Award.

Iowa State’s department of food science and human nutrition has launched a search for a faculty member to succeed Clark. The candidate will also be responsible for strategic leadership of the ISU Creamery.

## PERSONNEL

WOW Logistics recently hired Michael Zuelsdorf as the company’s new inside sales manager, responsible for collaborating with account managers to execute strategic account plans. Zuelsdorf will also coordinate contract renewals, perform daily customer service tasks, and manage midsize accounts. To start, Zuelsdorf will focus on familiarizing himself with WOW’s portfolio of supply chain solutions. Long-term, he will leverage his experience to garner success, create tailored solutions, and accomplish company growth initiatives. WOW Logistics also promoted RYAN KOLTZ to account manager, responsible for managing a portfolio of customer accounts, help develop new opportunities, and execute strategic account plans. Koltz started at WOW Logistics in 2022 as an operations engineer, in charge of designing more efficient work-flows, enhancing equipment, and optimizing the use of resources.

Milk Specialties Global (MSG) welcomes senior vice president RYAN LANE as the new leader of the company’s Animal Nutrition Division. Lane brings nearly 20 years of experience to his new role, having led innovation and sales for both domestic and international concerns. His vision and experience will drive MSG’s 80 year-old Animal Nutrition Division to new heights, the company noted.

QualiTru Sampling Systems has hired ANDREW GIOINO as the company’s new quality manager.

He brings over 20 years of experience in lean production management and quality management systems to his new role. Specifically, Gioino has extensive experience writing and implementing standard operating procedures (SOPs) used in production and quality departments, and led the development of multiple products from ideation to launch.

RICK PEDERSEN, former president of Ornu Ingredients North America, has joined QualiTech, LLC, as CEO. He succeeds MIKE HODGENS, who led the company for almost 30 years. Prior to his role at Ornu Ingredients, he was president and CEO of Agrana Fruit North America. He also held a variety of leadership positions at Fontterra, including chief financial officer and finance director of the Americas.

JOHN SCHUMA has joined Tosca, Ltd. as the company’s new national sales manager. Schuma brings over 20 years of sales and significant leadership experience to his new role.

STEVE MILLARD, food industry veteran with 22 years, has been named COO for Specialties, Inc. Millard began his career in sales, gaining experience in category management, operations and marketing before moving into general management over the past 12 years. KEVIN WHITTEN has been appointed vice president of sales at Specialties, Inc. Whitten has over 30 years of experience in value-added deli category perishables, and most recently served national sales manager for Specialties, Inc.



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## USDA Awards \$9.75 Million To 10 Organic Market Development Projects

Washington—USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) on Wednesday announced that \$9.75 million is being awarded to 10 grant projects through the Organic Market Development Grant (OMDG).

The funded projects aim to support the development and expansion of new and existing organic markets to increase the consumption of domestic organic agricultural products.

In May 2023, USDA had announced approximately \$75 million available through OMDG to increase the availability and demand for domestically produced organic agricultural products and to address the need for additional market paths. This first round of OMDG awards for the Market Development and Promotion project type is funded by USDA’s Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC).

With these awards, AMS gave priority consideration to projects addressing specific pinpointed market needs for organic dairy, organic grains and livestock feed, organic fibers, organic legumes and other rotational crops, and organic ingredients currently unavailable in organic form.

The Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA) was awarded a grant of \$639,449 for a project that aims to strengthen consumer and institutional demand for local organic dairy products produced in the Northeast US.

Facing challenges such as contract cancellations and rising production costs, the MOFGA project seeks to address this crisis by expanding the farm-to-institutional market for organic dairy, increasing the number of retail outlets promoting organic dairy, and implementing targeted consumer marketing efforts to boost demand for products made with Northeast dairy.

The first main activity is to increase grocery retail partners by onboarding food co-ops, independent grocers, and large-chain supermarkets committed to promoting and selling organic dairy from the Northeast. The Northeast Organic Family Farm Partnership (NOFFP) will develop program pitch materials, increase staff support to onboard and retain retail partners, and establish a retail peer group to share best practices in promoting organic dairy.

The second main goal is to facilitate product innovation for bulk organic dairy. For this goal, NOFFP will collaborate with regional farm-to-institution partners to increase the number

of participating colleges, K-12s, and hospitals buying Northeast organic dairy. Strengthening relationships between buyers, distributors, and processors will enable market developments, including the introduction of bulk formats for organic yogurt, cheese, and fluid milk, in response to institutional buyer demands.

The goal is to develop a marketing campaign through the development of strategies to engage consumers and educate them about the benefits of organic dairy. This includes creating brand awareness and loyalty for local organic brands through point-of-sale (POS) marketing,

consumer food demos, social media, and targeted messaging.

The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-Vermont) will receive a grant of \$1,016,593 to expand market access and increase demand for Vermont organic products.

NOFA-VT, in partnership with Vermont Way Foods (VWF) and Food Connects (FC), proposes to grow and develop markets for Vermont’s organic producers in three ways. First, by expanding access to promising identified markets throughout the Northeast by developing sales channels to large retailers and other wholesale buyers with consumer bases that are validated by market research to value and support the qualities inherent in Vermont organic food.

Second, by developing new dairy, maple, and other Vermont organic wholesale products to be branded and marketed under the VWF brand and distributed regionally by FC. And third, by increasing consumer awareness and demand for organic food through targeted marketing and promotions in Vermont and throughout the Northeast.

Outcomes are expected to include expanded wholesale markets for Vermont organic producers, including an overall increase in the percentage of organic products sold through the Food Connects food hub, and increased sales of VWF organic products. Also, the project is expected to result in increased awareness of and preference for locally produced organic food among regional consumers.

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## Application Period Open For ACS CCP, T.A.S.T.E. Exams; New Virtual Option

Buffalo, NY—The application period for the American Cheese Society's (ACS) certification exams is now open through March 31, 2024, with in-person and virtual/remote options available for the first time.

Qualified cheese professionals can apply online to take the Certified Cheese Professional (CCP) exam or the Certified Cheese Sensory Evaluator T.A.S.T.E. Test, ACS said.

In-person Certified Cheese Professional exams will be held Wednesday, July 10, 2024 from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., in conjunction with the ACS annual conference in Buffalo, NY.

New for 2024, ACS will offer a remote, virtual version of the CCP exam held simultaneously with the in-person exam.

First launched in 2012, the Certified Cheese Professional exam encourages high standards of comprehensive knowledge and service for professionals across the cheese industry, and encompasses a range of topics: raw ingredients, the cheesemaking process, storing and handling cheese, selecting distributors, marketing and commu-

nicating about cheese, nutrition, and regulations and sanitation.

Individuals who pass the exam earn the title of ACS Certified Cheese Professional or ACS CCP. They also receive an official lapel pin, patch, and certificate.

Applications for the virtual exam is the same as in-person, and the same eligibility requirements apply.

However, there are some software programs to download, and technical specs that computers need to meet.

The application fee for both versions is \$35.

Cost of the exam is \$500 for ACS members and \$650 for non-members.

Fees must be paid by May 15 to reserve a seat.

Launched in 2018, the T.A.S.T.E. test evaluates cheese professionals' knowledge and skills in the assessment of cheese – from determining cheese condition and quality, to evaluating cheese flavor, body, texture, and appearance.

The T.A.S.T.E. exam is only offered in-person, and will also be held July 10 in Buffalo, NY.

The application fee is \$35, with exam fees of \$500 and \$650, respectively.

To learn more about eligibility criteria and application deadlines and fees, visit the ACS website at [www.cheesesociety.org/certification](http://www.cheesesociety.org/certification).

## Online Entry Open For ACS Judging, Competition; Deadline Is March 22

Minneapolis, MN—The American Cheese Society (ACS) began accepting entries for its 2024 Judging & Competition this week.

The competition will take place June 3-7 at the University of Minnesota Huntington Bank Stadium.

Growing from just 89 entries 37 years ago, ACS welcomed 1,454 cheese and cultured dairy products in 120 categories and awarded 370 medals in 2023.

The contest is now officially held separately from the ACS annual conference, which takes place this year July 10-13 in Buffalo, NY. Winners will be announced at a special award ceremony during the conference.

Only ACS members are eligible to compete, and entrants will be required to show they have a valid and current federal facility registration number.

Cheese entries must be for sale to the general public at least six months prior to the start of competition. No prototypes or products currently in research and development are allowed.

Sale to the general public includes all retail shop sales, online sales, and farmers' markets. Cheeses sold exclusively to restaurants, or only at venues where an admission fee is charged do not qualify.

Milk must be sourced from North, Central, or South America, and entries must be comprised of at least 51 percent cheese or cultured dairy product.

Any product may only be entered in the competition once per calendar year. This includes products that may be marketed under different labels.

Entrants will be required to provide the production date for each product as part of the shipping requirements.

If a product weighs 25 pounds or more in its whole, original form, a five- to 10-pound cut is sufficient for judging and will be accepted.

Cuts should conform to industry norms for retail, and should reflect the shape of the original form, including the rind.

For block forms, entrants must send 20 pounds of product.

Any cheese or dairy entry that weighs under one pound in whole form will require a minimum of six pieces.

If product integrity will be compromised by shipping less than a full retail case, ACS will accept a full retail case.

Judges work in teams of two – one technical and one aesthetic. Technical judges deduct points for flaws and defects from a perfect score of 50, while aesthetic judges award points for outstanding characteristics and qualities to a maximum of 50.

Shortly after the conference, each participant will receive a copy of the score sheet for each entry, including the judges' comments, overall scores, and number of entries per category. Winners will also receive an official award medal for each winning entry.

A discounted fee of \$75 per entry will be available now through Feb. 16. A regular fee of \$100 per entry will be required Feb. 17-March 22.

For secure online entry and more information, visit [www.cheesesociety.org/acs-competition](http://www.cheesesociety.org/acs-competition).

### USDA News

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## WIC Funding

(Continued from p. 1)

WIC participation “is now rising after a decade of declined enrollment, the letter noted. At the end of 2022, WIC provided assistance to 6.3 million women, infants, and children.

In March 2023, the Biden administration requested \$6.3 billion for WIC for the upcoming fiscal year, anticipating an increase in participation through fiscal year 2024 to 6.5 million participants, the letter continued. In the following months, participation data showed enrollment rapidly rising to 6.7 million participants, significantly higher than anticipated. As a result, USDA indicated an additional \$1 billion in funding would be needed to appropriately serve 6.7 million mothers, infants, and children in the program.

WIC mothers and babies are at nutritional risk during important times of growth and development and benefit from the targeted support provided by WIC benefits, which include supplemental nutritious foods as well as infant formula, nutrition education and counseling, breastfeeding support, and health care referrals, the letter noted.

The WIC food package provides quantities of specific foods and infant formulas tailored to participants to meet specific nutritional and dietary needs for each stage of life, the letter pointed out. These “highly nutritious foods” are widely available and commonly consumed. Additional funding will enable WIC to continue to provide the full food package that is built on evidence-based recommendations and promotes alignment with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

The WIC food package not only provides nutritional benefits to participants, but also provides economic benefits to local producers, farmers, distributors, food retailers and communities across the US, the letter stated. In one month alone, redemption of WIC foods drove more than \$500 million in purchases across the US.

When WIC families use their supplemental benefits to purchase staples like dairy, eggs, seafood, fruit and vegetables, and whole grains every month, it benefits local economies and supports local businesses in the food supply chain, the letter added.

The WIC program has demonstrated meaningful public health impacts over the decades, delivering vital nutrition support and improving overall health outcomes, the letter said. According to the National WIC Association, research into WIC outcomes shows it reduces infant mortality significantly, reduces healthcare costs, and supports WIC families’

access to dairy foods, addressing public health concerns that Americans are not meeting dairy recommendations. Increases in fruit and vegetable benefits have also resulted in a significant increase in produce consumption among participating children.

A significant funding shortfall will impact access to nutritional benefits for new parents wanting to enroll newborn children and those who remain eligible and wish to renew their benefits, the letter stated. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimates that nationwide, over 2 million eligible women, children, and infants could be turned away from WIC by September 2024 without additional funding.

Meanwhile, following last week’s announcement of a bipartisan agreement on topline funding

levels for fiscal year 2024 appropriations and as negotiations still continue in Congress on a final budget, the Biden administration believes it is critical that final appropriations bills fully fund WIC, to allow the program to continue to serve all eligible pregnant women, mothers, infants, and children who apply, according to USDA.

Despite repeated requests from the Biden administration, Congress has not committed to fully fund this vital program, USDA noted. Congress has the ability to act now and fully fund WIC in 2024, and avoid risking nutrition security for nearly 6.7 million pregnant women, new mothers, babies, and young children across the US.

The current funding levels will not cover all eligible participants,

and the longer Congress puts off fully funding WIC, the greater the risk to mothers, babies, and children seeking nutrition and health support from the program, USDA stated.

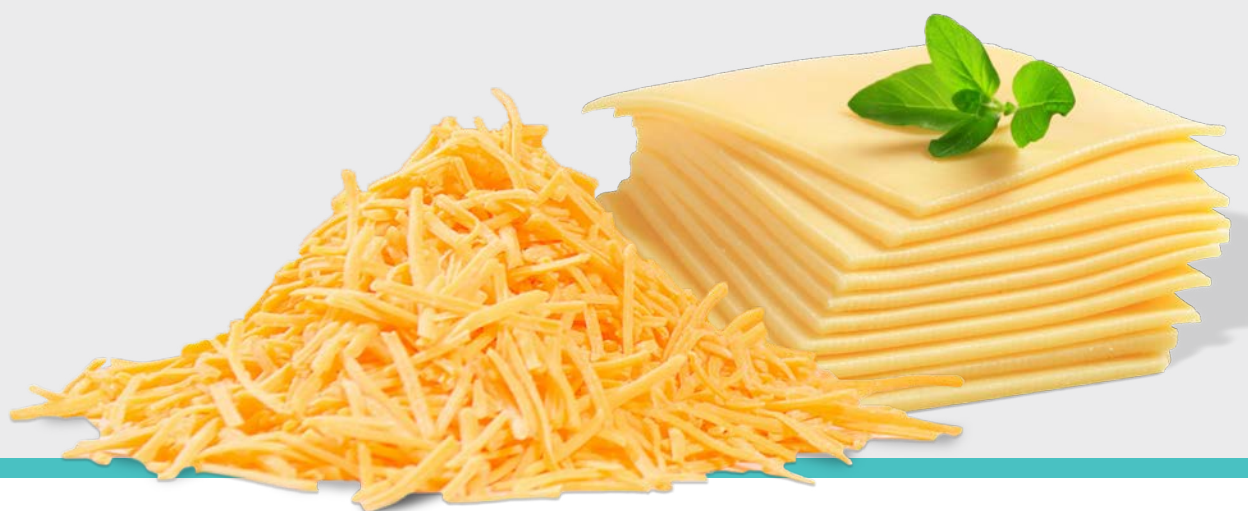
Through the two recent continuing resolutions, Congress has indicated that the USDA and states should spend current funding at a faster rate in order to serve everyone who is eligible through March 2024, but they haven’t provided the funds to cover the program once those resources run out.

That means that if Congress does not provide the needed funding when it ultimately passes final appropriations bills, the impact of cuts would be magnified because USDA will have to absorb all of them in the final months of the fiscal year, USDA stated.

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# New Product Section



## New Dairy Products, Packaging, Promotions

### Organic Valley Debuts Family First Milk With DHA Omega 3 That Supports Brain Health

Organic Valley has just expanded its fluid milk portfolio with the launch of Organic Valley Family First milk with added DHA Omega 3 to support brain health.

Consumer research found that more families are searching for milk that meets the varying nutritional



needs of their families. A 2019 study published by the National Institute of Health (NIH) found that Americans in all age groups did not meet the recommended daily intake of Omega 3s to meet nutritional needs based on US Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

To that end, the co-op's Family First organic milk line provides

50 milligrams of DHA Omega 3 per serving.

"Our new Organic Valley Family First milk tastes just as fresh and delicious as our other organic milks, with the added benefits of DHA Omega 3," commented Organic Valley chief brand officer Jaclyn Cardin.

"And so, we couldn't be more excited to bring our new Family First milk to store shelves nationwide and offer families a great-tasting option from our co-op that provides quality nutrition for the whole family," Jaclyn Cardin continued.

The new line of milk, which can be used for cooking and baking just like other Organic Valley milks, will begin appearing on retailer shelves nationwide beginning this month.

Family First milk is available in Whole and Reduced Fat 2%, 64-ounce cartons.

For more details Organic Valley Family First milk with added DHA Omega 3, visit [www.organicvalley.coop](http://www.organicvalley.coop).

### Laura Chenel Partners With Culinary Institute For Pear, Sauvignon & Herb Chevre

Laura Chenel is set to launch its latest flavor of artisan goat cheese - Pear, Sauvignon & Herb - developed in collaboration with the Culinary Institute of America Consulting.

"Our latest creation, Pear, Sauvignon, and Herb, is a moment of pure excitement for us," said Laura Chenel brand manager, Durae Hardy.

The fresh goat cheese log is infused with sweet and earthy ripe pears, the aroma of Sauvignon Blanc, and finished with fresh rosemary.

"Beyond being quite delicious, this log is not just a cheese but an experience - a journey through flavors that are inspired by the beautiful place we call home," Hardy continued.

It will be available in stores this spring.

For more information on Laura Chenel's latest flavor, visit [www.laurachenel.com](http://www.laurachenel.com).

### Darigold Launches New Belle Coffee Creamers With Real Cream, In Four Flavors

A new line of dairy-based coffee creamers from Darigold, Inc. is now available at grocery stores and other food markets across the Northwest.

Belle Creamers are made with real cream and come in four flavors - Vanilla, Sweet Cream, Hazelnut Latte, and Caramel.

"Looking at the leading brands of coffee creamer today, it's a bit of a misnomer to call them 'creamers' since they're not made with real cream," said Sam Cohen, head of marketing at Darigold.

Consumer demand for premium creamers is growing, and Belle's real cream product will deliver the taste consumers want.

"Belle Creamers are made with just five simple ingredients, including real cream and natural flavors, making them actual coffee cream rather than coffee oilers," continued Cohen.

For more information, visit [www.darigoldbelle.com](http://www.darigoldbelle.com).

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# New Product Section



## New Dairy Products, Packaging, Promotions

### Chobani's New Line Of Dessert-Inspired Greek Yogurt Delivers Healthy Indulgence

Yogurt category innovator Chobani has launched a new line of Greek yogurt in six dessert-inspired flavors, giving consumers a healthy, yet indulgent, snack alternative.

With many people kicking off the new year with a focus on personal care, the new line extends beyond typical breakfast selections and offers a well-deserved "me moment" at the end of the day.

Flavors include Mocha Tiramisu, Apple Pie à la Mode, Cherry Cheesecake, Orange Cream Pop, Bananas Foster and Caramel Sundae.

By pairing our natural Greek Yogurt with dessert-inspired flavors, we're stretching yogurt beyond the breakfast occasion, said Chobani chief innovation officer Niel Sandfort.

"These flavor profiles, whether they be nostalgic like orange cream pop or decadent like mocha tiramisu, hit the spot in terms of food memory, sensory, and satisfaction," Sandfort said.

Chobani Creations are made without artificial flavors, sweeteners, or preservatives.

Each 5.3-ounce cup comes in clear packaging, and all six flavors are now in retail stores nationwide, the company said.

For more details, visit [www.chobani.com](http://www.chobani.com).



### Sweet Grass Dairy Moves To Exact Weight Pieces For Easier Purchasing, Wider Distribution

Award-winning cheeses like Thomsville Tomme and Griffin made by Sweet Grass Dairy are now available in 5-ounce exact-weight pieces.

The new case pack consists of 16 5-ounce wedges that can be received and immediately placed directly on the shelves without having to be weighed and stickered. The back label includes pairing suggestions, awards, and a QR code for customers to scan, offering recipes and pairings.

The move is designed to help retailers who have no cut-and-wrap capabilities, and increase overall distribution. For more details, visit [www.sweetgrassdairy.com](http://www.sweetgrassdairy.com).

### New Petite Garlic & Pepper Brie Style Available From Marin French Cheese Co.

A new Petite Garlic & Pepper Triple Crème Brie has been added to the Marin French Cheese Company's portfolio of flavored cheeses.

Inspired by Gaperon, a fresh cheese that's traditionally made in the Auvergne region of France.



Petite Garlic & Pepper is also a new take on Raclette, folded into baked or scalloped potatoes, or served on a grazing board, the company noted.

The introduction of Petite Garlic & Pepper is a testament to our ongoing commitment to diversifying our collection of small-format cheeses, catering to the evolving tastes of consumers. Petite Garlic & Pepper is available for pre-order in February and will be available in stores and online in March.

For more details, visit [www.marinfrenchcheese.com](http://www.marinfrenchcheese.com).

### Belle Chevre Adds 'Greek Kiss' Goat Cheese Wrapped In Grape Leaves To Flavored Line

Alabama-based Belle Chevre, Inc. will introduce its latest flavor - fresh chèvre wrapped in brined grape leaves - at the 2024 Winter Fancy Food Show next week in Las Vegas.

Belle Chevre's new Greek Kiss cheese already earned a Silver award at the 2023 World Cheese Awards.

Greek Kiss is a four-ounce, fresh chèvre disc enveloped in tender, brined grape leaves, the company explained.

Each package is vacuum-sealed to ensure freshness, featuring a captivating label that artfully depicts an embrace reminiscent of Greek sculpture.

"We're thrilled to offer Greek Kiss. Uniquely wrapping our fresh chèvre in brined grape leaves exemplifies Belle Chevre's commitment to artisanal craftsmanship and innovative flavor combinations," said Pierre Guérin, president and co-owner, Belle Chevre, Inc.

"The Winter Fancy Food

Show provides the perfect platform to share our passion for exceptional goat cheese with the culinary community," Guérin said.

For more details on the 'Greek Kiss' cheese, visit [www.bellechevre.com](http://www.bellechevre.com).

### Brooklyn Cured Enters Snack Sector With Cheese Pairings

Brooklyn Cured is expanding into the convenience and snack sector with four new snack packs featuring top-selling beef charcuterie items paired with premium flavored cheeses.

Snack options include Smoked Beef Salami & Gouda, Tuscan Red Wine Beef Salami & Rosemary Gouda, Bresaola & Gouda, and Bresaola & Truffle Gouda, the company said.

Brooklyn Cured Snack Packs are sold in a case of 12, with a 120-day shelf life.

For more information, visit [www.brooklyncured.com](http://www.brooklyncured.com).



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## Class I Proposal

(Continued from p. 1)

The three elements making up the base Class I differential of 1.60 per hundred (Grade A costs, balancing, and incentive to pull milk from manufacturing) “are no longer applicable in 2023,” Keefe testified. All these factors have “changed dramatically” since federal order reform, and they “actually cause or contribute to disorderly marketing rather than solving it.”

Warren Erickson, president and chief financial officer of Anderson Erickson Dairy Company, testified Wednesday in support of MIG’s Proposal 20.

“I believe that the Class I differentials should be based on facts and actual computations,” Erickson noted in his written testimony. “MIG Proposal 20 looks at three components of the Class I differential and proposes to adjust the amounts based on actual market conditions.”

MIG’s proposal would reduce the Class I differential by \$1.60 to update the computation with the realities of the current mar-

ket, Erickson continued. “Class I differentials were established in a different time when market conditions and transportation realities were significantly different.

“If we are looking at the current realities the Class I differentials should be decreased by \$1.60,” Erickson added.

Mike Newell, sales director for HP Hood, also testified in support of MIG’s Proposal 20.

“Grade A milk is virtually the only milk available on the market, so it no longer makes sense for the base Class I differential” to include 40 cents per hundred-weight for maintaining Grade A status “as Grade A milk is the industry standard,” Newell noted in his written testimony.

Regarding balancing costs, Hood currently bears some of the cost of balancing its milk supply, as it receives all Class I milk directly from the farms, not balancing plants. Hood also pays most of its cooperatives a handling charge to cover the cost of balancing.

It seems “unreasonable and duplicative” for the federal order to include a 60-cent charge “on

top of an operational cost we currently bear,” Newell testified.

And regarding the 60-cent incentive to serve the Class I market, “Hood has not experienced any issues attracting milk to its plants,” Newell stated. Currently, Hood pays over-order premiums on all of its milk.

“There is ample milk to supply all of Hood’s plants,” Newell stated. “If Hood were to ever have difficulty attracting milk to its plants, then it would be more equitable and effective to pay this incentive directly to our milk suppliers than to have it diluted in the pool.”

Grade A milk is abundant and available to Class I processors, and the logic behind the components that make up \$1.60 base Class I differential “is no longer applicable,” Newell continued. “The shrinking Class I market should no longer be burdened with these costs and should be given the freedom to encourage innovation and better serve consumers and the dairy industry as a whole.”

Tim Kelly, senior vice president, general manager for Sham-

rock Foods Company-Dairy Division, also testified in support of Proposal 20.

Today, milk competes on a “much broader scale” with other beverages than in the past, Kelly noted in his written testimony. As it stands, the raw product costs for milk are already “substantially higher” than other beverages on the market, putting fluid milk at a disadvantage.

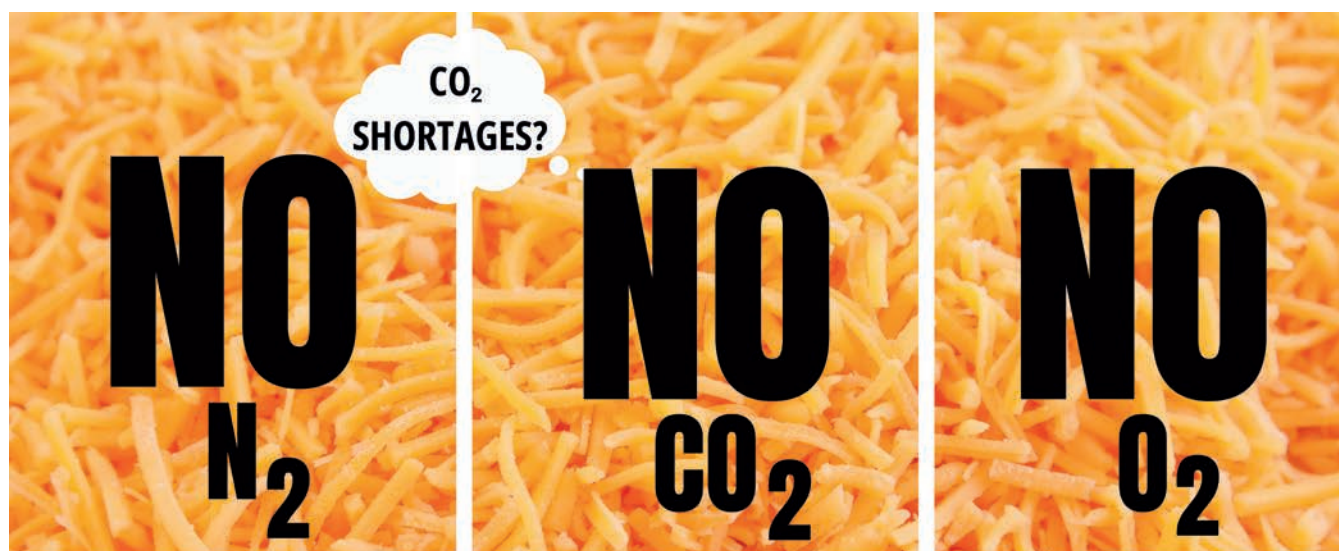
“Continuing to increase Class I prices will raise the price to consumers at shelf, which results in a reduction of milk volume harming both producers and processors,” Kelly testified. “In addition, it puts further pressure on a milk processor’s ability to innovate.”

Chuck Turner, president of Turner Dairy Farms, testified in support of Proposal 20.

The order system “does not help us balance our milk supply with our bottling requirements,” Turner stated in his written testimony. “All of our milk comes from independent producers.”

Turner Dairy believes that having independent producers “is

•See **Class I Proposal**, p. 21



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## GEA Begins Operations At New Wisconsin Facility

Duesseldorf, Germany—Operations have begun at GEA’s new fabrication, repair, logistics and training facility in Janesville, WI.

Representing an investment of \$20 million to meet demand from GEA’s growing Midwest customer base, the 86,000-square-foot facility has production capabilities to finalize separator, decanter as well as valve and pump assembly.

“Opening the new Janesville facility as anticipated in December 2023 represents a significant step toward meeting our customers where they operate,” said Azam Owaisi, CEO, GEA North America. “It highlights GEA’s commitment to product quality and service excellence. We are excited to become a vibrant employer and partner for the Janesville community.”

Over 70 employees work at GEA’s new Janesville facility. Its main production area is used for mechanical equipment fabrication, repair and logistics.

GEA said the new site has a strong emphasis on sustainability, with environmentally friendly measures including solar panels, water reuse systems and a state-of-the-art building management system.

GEA is one of the largest technology suppliers for food processing and a wide range of other industries.

For more information about GEA, visit [www.gea.com](http://www.gea.com).

## Class I Proposal

Continued from p. 20

important to our business and that sourcing better quality milk allows us to better serve our customers," Turner continued. "We believe the milk regulatory system must be able to not only accommodate but support the success of independent producers.

"A general payment into the pool to be distributed amongst all producers does nothing to support Turner's relationship with our high-quality independent suppliers; in fact, it just leaves us with less money to pay our suppliers," Turner testified. "The current system is contributing to the loss of Class I sales to the detriment of everyone and must be fixed."

Jay Luikart, head of supply chain for Horizon Organic at Danone North America, also testified in support of Proposal 20.

Danone helped found the MIG to address concerns from its producers in the FMMO system, Luikart explained in his written testimony. The FMMO system "not only does nothing to support our farmers, but it also sends the wrong signals to the market regarding our operation.

"Requiring organic handlers, and by extension their farmers, to contribute to the FMMO pools distorts market signals by encouraging farmers to produce more non-organic milk," Luikart noted. This problem would be made "many magnitudes worse" if National Milk Producers Federation's proposals are adopted because the spread between manufacturing prices and Class I prices will increase, "resulting in even larger pool payments by Danone and others in the organic industry."

A panel consisting of Shawna Nelson, Chris Dahl and Adam Warthesen testified for Organic Valley/CROPP Cooperative.

The co-op's frustration with federal milk pricing is that the FMMOs "do not distinguish between organic milk and non-organic milk or provide equitable service to farmers, cooperatives, and processors in the business of certified organic milk."

Cammie Garofolo, CFO at Aurora Organic Dairy, stated in testimony that USDA should accept MIG's Proposal 20 and reduce the current Class I differential from \$1.60 to zero.

"We must have a system that encourages innovation within fluid milk to meet evolving consumer tastes and to reverse the negative trend," Garofolo testified. "But these innovations are discouraged by rules that treat legally different milks the same and fail to appropriately recognize the manufacturing investments necessary to create greater consumer choices."

## Governments Of Canada, Ontario Investing In Dairy Processing Sector

**Toronto, Ontario**—The governments of Canada and Ontario are investing up to \$8 million, through the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership (Sustainable CAP), to create or increase processing efficiencies and enhance food safety in the province's dairy processing sector.

Eligible dairy businesses are invited to apply for funding through the Dairy Processing Modernization Initiative to acquire modern technologies that increase production efficiency and ensure food safety in their facilities. Cost-share support through this initiative can be used to help cover the purchase and installation of new or refurbished equipment and its associated costs, such as training.

The Dairy Processing Modernization Initiative is open to cow, goat, sheep and water buffalo milk processors. Eligible applicant can receive up to \$200,000 in cost-share support. There are 171 licensed cow and goat dairy processors, plus sheep and buffalo dairy processors, in Ontario.

Applications open on Apr. 2, 2024, and will remain open until the initiative is fully subscribed. Eligible project costs can be incurred as of Apr. 2, 2024.

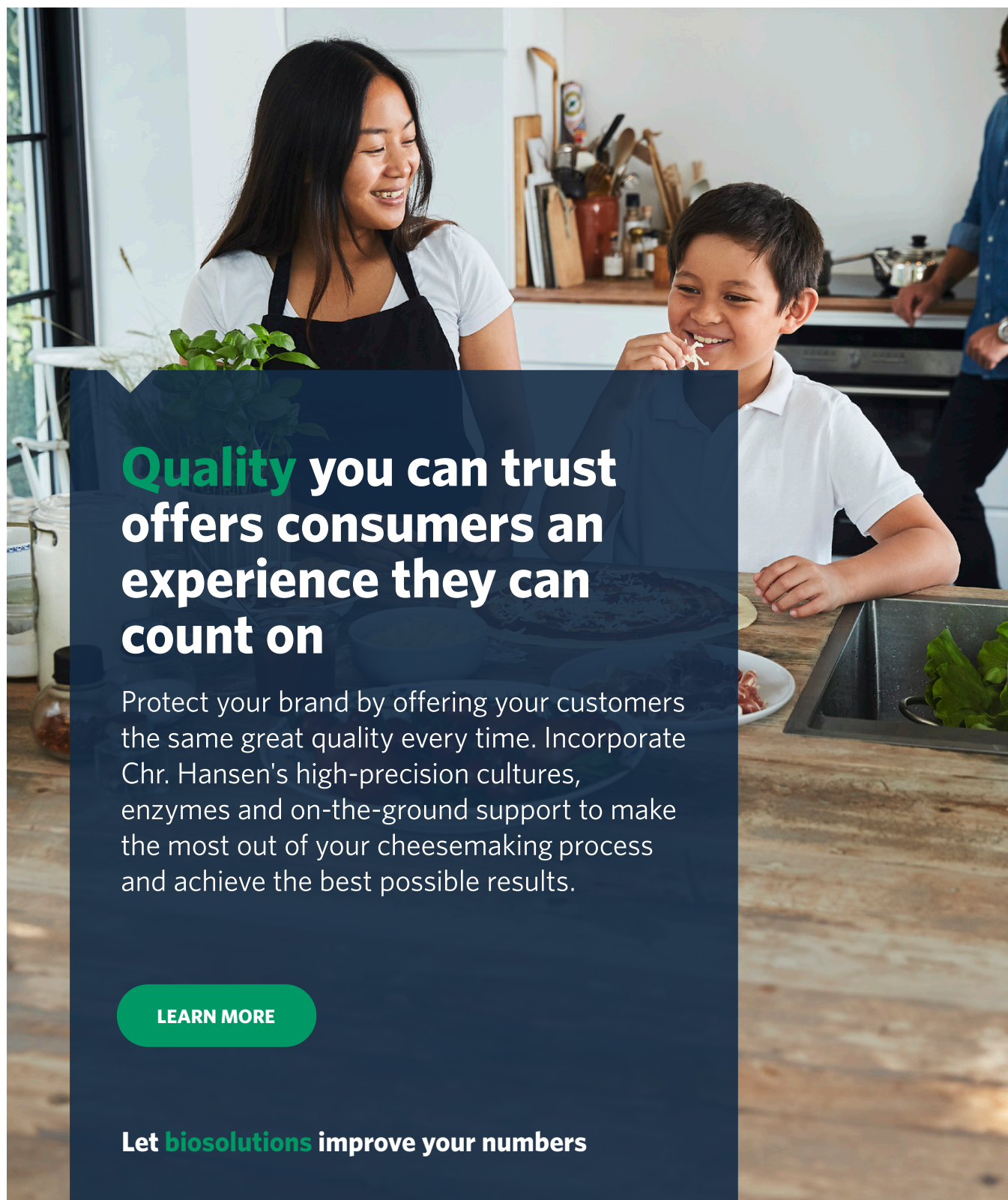
This investment supports objectives of the government's Grow Ontario Strategy to strengthen the agriculture and food supply chain and build resiliency in the face of any future disruption.

"Our government is committed to working with Ontario's dairy

processors, so they will be able to continue to supply the array of delicious, nutritious and safe products that consumers enjoy and trust," said Lisa Thompson, Ontario's minister of agriculture, food and rural affairs. "Efficiencies realized through new technologies will play a key role in helping the sector continue to thrive."

"Through this \$8 million shared investment under Sustainable CAP, processors will be able to access the technology they need to continue to grow and improve their efficiency," said Lawrence MacAulay, Canada's agriculture minister.

The Sustainable CAP is a five-year, \$3.5-billion investment by federal, provincial and territorial governments in Canada to strengthen competitiveness, innovation, and resiliency of the agriculture, agri-food and agri-based products sector.



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## Researchers Looking To Make Better-Tasting Cheese From Peas

Nottingham, United Kingdom— Alternative protein research exploring the use of peas to make plant-based cheese has received funding from Innovate UK to develop commercial processes for new products.

“Cheese from Peas” is a new product being developed by researchers from the University of Nottingham and spin-out company The Good Pulse Company, who are developing techniques to turn yellow peas grown in the UK into a sustainable plant-based cheese.

The latest funding from Innovate UK adds to an investment from UK scientific research orga-

nization Rothamsted Research, and from food technology venture capital investor Big Idea Ventures. The grant has enabled the company to hire researchers from the university and also bring further expertise from other academics working on adjacent research areas.

“We are focused on creating a product that is tasty, has excellent nutritional value and that is also sustainable,” said Dr. Vincenzo di Bari, assistant professor in food structure and processing at the University of Nottingham. “From research we previously carried out we have identified yellow peas as an ideal ingredient to

achieve this because of its composition and availability in the UK.

“This is a key step towards our goal to deliver healthy products manufactured using sustainable UK-grown crop,” de Bari continued.

The Good Pulse Company has already developed over 100 prototypes of plant-based cheese made from pulses using its proprietary technology and processes.

In addition to the funding, the company is now part of the EIT Food Seedbed program and has also achieved key strategic milestones such as securing a major collaboration agreement with one of the largest dairy cheese companies in Europe to co-develop prototypes of cheese using their functional ingredients from pulses and unique processes leading to

large scale pilot production trials, filing a first patent in the US, and shown potential scalability of the technology and processes to other pulses and food applications, according to the University of Nottingham.

“Vegan cheeses are often ultra-processed in nature with poor nutritional value and mostly made from coconut oil, modified starches, and artificial additives. We are addressing this with new types of ingredients blends from pulses that are tailored specifically for making plant-based cheese,” said Cesar Torres, founder and CEO of The Good Pulse Company.

“Creating new food products is challenging and the market is hugely competitive but we believe these new cheese products made from our unique ingredients and technology are completely unique and will offer a tasty, sustainable alternative to what is currently available,” de Bari said.

### Danish Pea Protein Research

Meanwhile, in a new research result from the University of Copenhagen’s Department of Food Science, researcher Carmen Masia has succeeded in developing plant-based cheeses made from yellow pea protein with a firm texture and improved aroma profile. She was able to do so by using the same natural fermentation process with bacteria that has been used with cheeses made from milk for thousands of years.

“Fermentation is an incredibly powerful tool to develop flavor and texture in plant-based cheeses. In this study, we show that bacteria can serve to develop firmness in non-dairy cheese in a very short period of time while reducing the bean-like aroma of yellow pea protein, which is used as the main and only protein source,” Masia explained.

The result builds upon a result from last year by the same researcher, who found that yellow pea protein constituted a good “protein base” for making fermented plant-based cheese.

In the new result, the researcher examined 24 bacterial combinations made from bacterial cultures supplied by the microbial ingredients supplier Chr. Hansen, where Masia is completing her Industrial PhD.

“The whole point of this study has been to combine the commercially available bacterial cultures that are suitable for the fermentation of a plant-based raw material, and test them in a pea protein matrix to develop both taste and texture that would be suitable for a cheese-like product. And, even if some bacterial combinations performed better than others, all of them actually provided firm gels and reduced beaniness in the samples” Masia said.



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## Dairy Processors In Six Western States Invited To Apply For PCC-DBII Grants; Deadline Is Feb. 29

Fresno, CA—Dairy processors in six western states are being encouraged to apply for grants from the Pacific Coast Coalition-Dairy Business Innovation Initiative (PCC-DBII).

Some \$4.1 million in grants is available to dairy processors in California, Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico, Washington and Oregon.

Dairy businesses in these states are invited to submit one or more of the PCC-DBII program goals:

- Developing new dairy value-added products, culturally diverse and ethnic value-added dairy products to meet evolving consumer trends in the region.

- Adapting current dairy products to meet evolving consumer “wants,” to meet both domestic and export demand trends.

- Developing new product lines and expanding the dairy product portfolio to meet domestic and/or export demand for fresh milk and milk products.

- Expanding milk usage beyond food and drink, for example packaging/films, edible products for companion animals, cosmetics, and other high-value segments.

- Adding value to milk by increasing its intrinsic value through differentiation production system/feed additives for nutritional enhancement, and fractionation of components.

- Adopting alternative processing technologies for value-added dairy products, optimization, and/or recovery of high-value co-streams to increase the profitability of the dairy sector.

- Creating future opportunities for value-added ingredients and nutritional powders, milk fat products, and specialty blends, and reducing the dependence on commodity markets.

- Developing sustainability leadership through innovation in packaging, processing efficiencies, reduced losses/waste, and novel uses of co-products (net-zero dairy processing plants). Dairy producer and/or processor applicant(s) may need to partner with non-dairy entity(ies) to address this goal.

- Extending awareness and consumption of higher value dairy processing products through communications, strategic planning, marketing plans, and expanding hands-on agritourism

Applications are being accepted through Feb. 29, 2024.

For more information about the grants, visit [www.dairyppc.net](http://www.dairyppc.net).

## Dairy Business Innovation Alliance Awards Grants Via Research Program

Madison—The Dairy Business Innovation Alliance (DBIA), a partnership between the Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association (WCMA) and the Wisconsin Center for Dairy Research (CDR), is awarding grants to six research groups at the University of Wisconsin through the newly created DBIA Research Program for a total of \$1.2 million.

The DBIA Research Program is funding research projects that focus on developing opportunities for converting dairy co-product streams into commercially feasible, value-added products.

The by-products of processing are many and varied — whey, permeate, lactose, acid whey, etc.,

the DBIA noted. Typically, these items are considered low-value commodity products that are frequently spread on the land or dried and used as animal feed.

Research projects selected by the DBIA have the potential to develop technologies to utilize dairy co-products, the DBIA noted. These projects will have a practical component, combining research and development activities.

The six projects selected receive funding for up to three years and will present on their work through the Center for Dairy Research industry research forums.

The projects span multiple departments, including bacteriol-

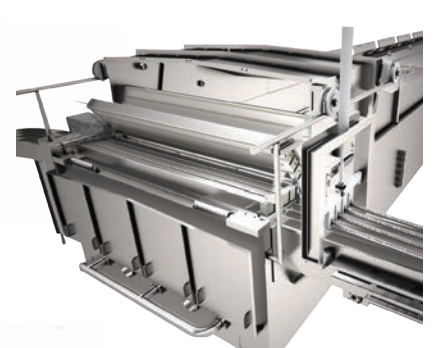
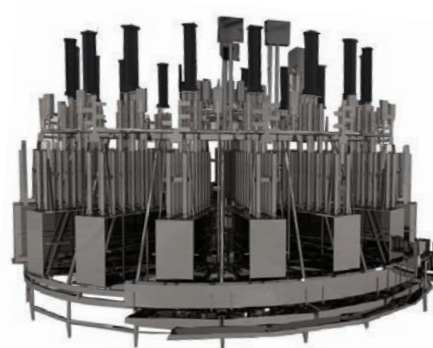
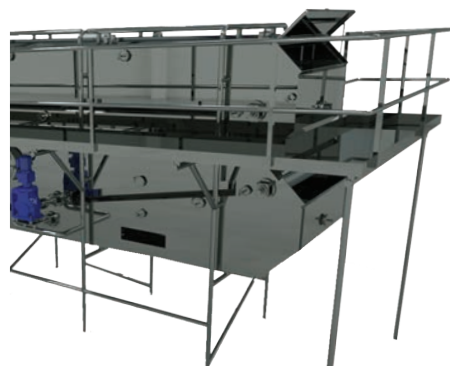
ogy, bioenergy, biological systems engineering, chemical and biological engineering, civil and environmental engineering, and food science.

More details about the funded projects will be available in the near future at [www.cdr.wisc.edu/dbia-research-rfp](http://www.cdr.wisc.edu/dbia-research-rfp).

“We need to accelerate our innovation efforts to develop value-added uses for byproducts from cheesemaking. These byproducts should be viewed as renewable feedstocks for the emerging green bioeconomy; each of the projects selected will try to scaleup or further develop their technology to bring them closer to commercialization,” commented John Lucey, Center for Dairy Research director.

For more information, visit [www.cdr.wisc.edu/dbia](http://www.cdr.wisc.edu/dbia).

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1925 to 2022

by Mary Jane Carlisle, Jr.  
2023, 323 pages, \$75 + Shipping and Handling

For a long time, there have been some members of the American Dairy Products Institute (ADPI) who have been meaning to write the history of this fine organization before the story gets lost.

Now, after months of collaboration with members, industry leaders and others, it's become a reality!

This book was written using ADPI records and minutes, and with the research materials from member's personal files. It offers a well-rounded picture of where it came from and how it got here from there.

*"A perfect publication to show how folks with different ideas on how to utilize a product for profit (sometimes) can create an entire and broad industry!"*, Mark Davis

For details: [www.cheesereporter.com/HistoryofADPI.htm](http://www.cheesereporter.com/HistoryofADPI.htm)

## Cornell Hybrid Fluid Milk Processing Safety Course Now Available Online

Ithaca, NY—The virtual component of Cornell University's hybrid workshop on fluid milk processing for quality and safety will be now available online.

The workshop's live, instructor-led video session has been scheduled for March 7.

The course is designed for those involved in fluid milk processing and testing, providing the tools to support and improve quality assurance and food safety programs for bottled milk products.

The curriculum assumes participants have some prior knowledge of dairy microbiology and processing.

However, critical concepts will be reviewed and expanded on for those who do not.

Instructors will deliver a basic overview of dairy microbiology, raw milk quality and today's regulatory environment.

Students will learn how to evaluate specific spoilage organisms, and identify factors influencing

microbial growth and how these factors are used in controlling defects and safety concerns in fluid dairy products.

They will also learn how to identify microbial hazards commonly associated with raw milk and fluid dairy products, and how they're controlled through processing and sanitation programs, organizers stated.

Students will learn how to identify and determine the causes of non-microbial defects in pasteurized milk directly related to the raw milk supply and handling conditions.

Breakout sessions will demonstrate how sanitation, processing and packaging procedures extend shelf-life through HTST and UHT, and instructors will outline critical factors that help ensure quality and shelf-life, with focus on preventing post-pasteurization contamination and protecting products from non-microbial defects such as light.

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## California Dairy Sustainability Summit Set For March 26 In Davis

Davis, CA—The California Dairy Sustainability Summit will take place here Tuesday, March 26 at the UC Davis Conference

The one-day event will showcase the latest achievements and ongoing progress in planet-smart dairy farm practices.

Attendees will hear how policies, programs, research, and technological advancements can work to improve the sustainability and resiliency of family farms, while supporting the of vulnerable communities.

Specifically, featured speakers will discuss how dairy farmers are reducing climate emissions, improving protection of water and air, and helping build a clean-energy future.

A partial list of speakers includes Michael Boccadoro and J.P. Cativiela, Dairy Cares; Donald Moore, Global Dairy Platform; Mary Ledman, Rabobank; Darin Monteiro, California Dairies, Inc.; John Talbot, California Milk Advisory Board; Secretary Karen Ross, California Department of Food & Agriculture; and Angela Anderson, Starbucks' director of sustainable dairy.

Sign-up for the meeting will soon be available online at [www.cadairysummit.com](http://www.cadairysummit.com).

### PLANNING GUIDE

**New York State Cheese Manufacturers Association Spring Meeting:** March 4 - 5, DoubleTree Hotel, Syracuse, NY. Registration will be opening soon.

**World Championship Cheese Contest:** March 5-7, Monona Terrace Convention Center, Madison, WI. Visit [www.worldchampion-cheese.org](http://www.worldchampion-cheese.org) for updates.





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## Equipment Wanted

**WANTED TO BUY:** Westfalia or Alfa-Laval separators. Large or small. Old or new. Top dollar paid. CONTACT: Dave Lambert at **Great Lakes Separators**, (920) 863-3306 or e-mail Dave at [drlambert@dialez.net](mailto:drlambert@dialez.net).

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## Real Estate

**DAIRY PLANTS FOR SALE:** <https://dairyassets.weebly.com/m--a.html>. Contact Jim at 608-835-7705; or by email at [jim-cisler7@gmail.com](mailto:jim-cisler7@gmail.com)



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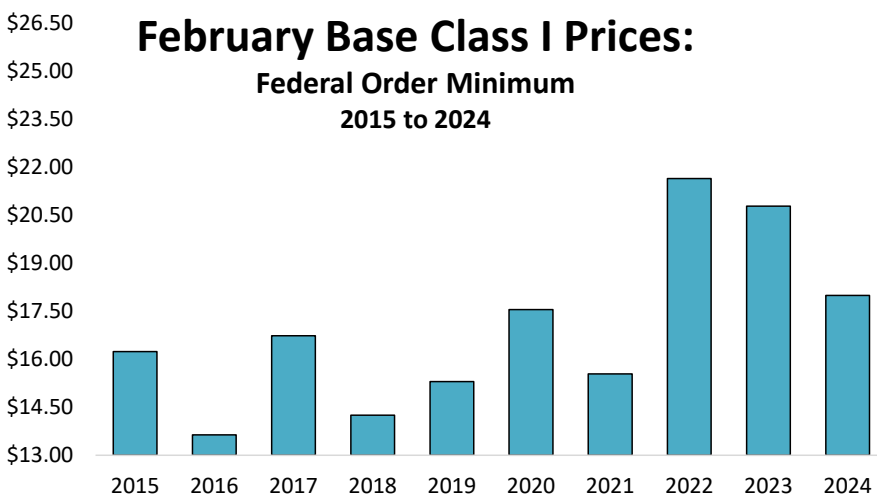
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## Federal Order Class 1 Minimum Prices & Other Advanced Prices - February 2024

Class I Base Price (3.5%)	\$17.99 (cwt)
Base Skim Milk Price for Class I	\$7.75 (cwt)
Advanced Class III Skim Milk Pricing Factor	\$4.73 (cwt)
Advanced Class IV Skim Milk Pricing Factor	\$9.29 (cwt)
Advanced Butterfat Pricing Factor	\$3.0035 (lb.)
Class II Skim Milk Price	\$9.99 (cwt)
Class II Nonfat Solids Price	\$1.1100 (lb.)
<b>Two-week Product Price Averages:</b>	
Butter	\$2.6517 lb.
Nonfat Dry Milk	\$1.2099 lb.
Cheese	\$1.5154 lb.
Cheese, US 40-pound blocks	\$1.5205 lb.
Cheese, US 500-pound barrels	\$1.4807 lb.
Dry Whey	\$0.4289 lb.



## DAIRY FUTURES PRICES

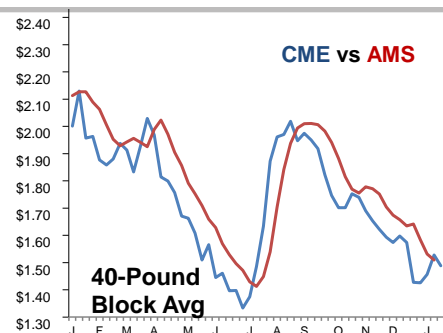
SETTLING PRICE							*Cash Settled	
Date	Month	Class III	Class IV	Dry Whey	NDM	Block Cheese	Cheese*	Butter*
1-12	Jan 24	15.15	19.28	43.600	120.350	1.536	1.5120	262.000
1-15	Jan 24							
1-16	Jan 24	15.16	19.28	43.600	120.475	1.536	1.5180	262.000
1-17	Jan 24	15.16	19.28	43.500	120.475	1.536	1.5200	262.000
1-18	Jan 24	15.14	19.33	43.500	120.025	1.536	1.5180	262.000
1-12	Feb 24	15.90	19.03	43.750	120.200	1.620	1.6000	255.500
1-15	Feb 24							
1-16	Feb 24	15.73	19.03	43.250	120.325	1.620	1.5900	256.000
1-17	Feb 24	15.71	19.04	43.000	120.525	1.620	1.5920	257.000
1-18	Feb 24	15.65	19.17	42.500	120.600	1.593	1.5820	256.500
1-12	Mar 24	16.33	19.00	44.250	120.275	1.680	1.6480	255.000
1-15	Mar 24							
1-16	Mar 24	16.18	19.08	43.500	121.175	1.678	1.6340	255.900
1-17	Mar 24	16.14	19.08	43.500	121.175	1.675	1.6330	255.150
1-18	Mar 24	16.05	19.28	43.250	119.100	1.659	1.6230	255.900
1-12	April 24	17.08	19.25	45.300	122.750	1.750	1.7140	256.475
1-15	April 24							
1-16	April 24	16.90	19.34	45.000	124.500	1.750	1.7130	257.000
1-17	April 24	16.90	19.34	45.000	124.475	1.745	1.7050	256.800
1-18	April 24	16.80	19.36	45.000	121.300	1.737	1.6930	257.400
1-12	May 24	17.73	19.49	46.000	124.100	1.810	1.7750	257.000
1-15	May 24							
1-16	May 24	17.58	19.58	44.750	125.150	1.810	1.7750	258.000
1-17	May 24	17.50	19.58	44.275	125.150	1.805	1.7700	258.500
1-18	May 24	17.52	19.50	45.000	123.075	1.800	1.7650	259.025
1-12	June 24	17.97	19.69	46.000	126.350	1.833	1.8150	259.100
1-15	June 24							
1-16	June 24	17.93	19.65	46.000	126.800	1.833	1.8100	259.100
1-17	June 24	17.90	19.68	45.075	126.800	1.833	1.8100	260.000
1-18	June 24	17.90	19.75	45.075	124.850	1.833	1.8100	260.500
1-12	July 24	18.13	19.80	46.500	128.500	1.878	1.8350	260.000
1-15	July 24							
1-16	July 24	18.12	19.74	46.500	128.500	1.878	1.8330	260.000
1-17	July 24	18.12	19.77	46.250	128.500	1.878	1.8330	261.000
1-18	July 24	18.11	19.80	46.250	127.000	1.878	1.8300	261.525
1-12	Aug 24	18.30	19.93	46.500	130.500	1.875	1.8520	260.000
1-15	Aug 24							
1-16	Aug 24	18.29	19.92	46.500	130.500	1.875	1.8520	260.000
1-17	Aug 24	18.29	19.94	46.500	130.000	1.875	1.8520	261.500
1-18	Aug 24	18.25	19.93	46.500	129.075	1.875	1.8520	262.025
1-12	Sept 24	18.41	20.00	47.000	132.000	1.906	1.8560	261.000
1-15	Sept 24							
1-16	Sept 24	18.39	20.03	47.000	132.000	1.906	1.8560	261.000
1-17	Sept 24	18.39	20.10	47.000	131.950	1.906	1.8560	262.500
1-18	Sept 24	18.45	20.00	47.000	131.000	1.906	1.8580	263.025
1-12	Oct 24	18.41	20.00	47.250	132.500	1.920	1.8700	260.025
1-15	Oct 24							
1-16	Oct 24	18.41	20.06	47.250	132.500	1.920	1.8700	260.025
1-17	Oct 24	18.41	20.06	47.250	132.500	1.920	1.8770	262.000
1-18	Oct 24	18.41	20.00	47.250	131.800	1.910	1.8700	264.025
1-12	Nov 24	18.40	20.02	47.000	133.625	1.925	1.8700	260.000
1-15	Nov 24							
1-16	Nov 24	18.40	20.00	47.000	133.625	1.925	1.8700	262.000
1-17	Nov 24	18.40	20.00	47.000	135.625	1.925	1.8700	260.000
1-18	Nov 24	18.45	20.02	47.000	132.325	1.915	1.8700	261.500
<b>Jan. 18</b>		<b>27,492</b>	<b>8,596</b>	<b>3,530</b>	<b>8,480</b>	<b>2,536</b>	<b>19,965</b>	<b>9,094</b>

## HISTORICAL MILK PRICES - CLASS I

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
'17	17.45	16.73	16.90	16.05	15.20	15.31	16.59	16.72	16.71	16.44	16.41	16.88
'18	15.44	14.25	13.36	14.10	14.44	15.25	15.36	14.15	14.85	16.33	15.52	15.05
'19	15.12	15.30	15.98	15.76	16.42	17.07	17.18	17.89	17.85	17.84	18.14	19.33
'20	19.01	17.55	17.46	16.64	12.95	11.42	16.56	19.78	18.44	15.20	18.04	19.87
'21	15.14	15.54	15.20	15.51	17.10	18.29	17.42	16.90	16.59	17.08	17.98	19.17
'22	19.71	21.64	22.88	24.38	25.45	25.87	25.87	25.13	23.62	22.71	24.09	22.58
'23	22.41	20.78	18.99	18.85	19.57	18.01	17.32	16.62	18.90	19.47	19.75	19.76
'24	18.48	17.99										

## DAIRY PRODUCT SALES

Jan. 18, 2024—AMS' National Dairy Products Sales Report. Prices included are provided each week by manufacturers. Prices collected are for the (wholesale) point of sale for natural, unaged Cheddar; boxes of butter meeting USDA standards; Extra Grade edible dry whey; and Extra Grade and USPH Grade A nonfortified NFDm.



•Revised

Week Ending	Jan. 13	Jan. 6	Dec. 30	Dec. 23
<b>40-Pound Block Cheddar Cheese Prices and Sales</b>				
<b>Weighted Price</b>	<b>Dollars/Pound</b>			
US	1.5098	1.5318	1.5832	1.6418
<b>Sales Volume</b>	<b>Pounds</b>			
US	11,586,124	11,020,791	11,140,117	12,307,052
<b>500-Pound Barrel Cheddar Cheese Prices, Sales &amp; Moisture Content</b>				
<b>Weighted Price</b>	<b>Dollars/Pound</b>			
US	1.5553	1.5540	1.6190	1.6592
<b>Adjusted to 38% Moisture</b>				
US	1.4807	1.4807	1.5390	1.5785
<b>Sales Volume</b>	<b>Pounds</b>			
US	12,432,955	11,679,381	14,231,850	14,025,749
<b>Weighted Moisture Content</b>	<b>Percent</b>			
US	34.88	34.93	34.78	34.83
<b>AA Butter</b>				
<b>Weighted Price</b>	<b>Dollars/Pound</b>			
US	2.6447	2.6687	2.6106	2.605
<b>Sales Volume</b>	<b>Pounds</b>			
US	4,764,252	1,946,142	2,931,464	3,130,257
<b>Extra Grade Dry Whey Prices</b>				
<b>Weighted Price</b>	<b>Dollars/Pound</b>			
US	0.4309	0.4264	0.4109	0.4225
<b>Sales Volume</b>	<b>Pounds</b>			
US	4,613,355	3,676,325	3,604,222	4,859,491
<b>Extra Grade or USPHS Grade A Nonfat Dry Milk</b>				
<b>Average Price</b>	<b>Dollars/Pound</b>			
US	1.2071	1.2143	1.1655	1.1929
<b>Sales Volume</b>	<b>Pounds</b>			
US	15,800,373	10,345,242	21,749,944	18,162,449

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# DAIRY PRODUCT MARKETS

AS REPORTED BY THE US DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

## WHOLESALE CHEESE MARKETS

**NATIONAL - JAN. 12 :** Due to storm activity in many eastern states, many milk loads intended for Class III processors were diverted into Class I channels. Processors note production schedules are steady to lighter commensurate with milk availability. Contacts in the Northeast relay increased export demand. Spot milk availability remains strong in the Central region, and prices are being reported as low as \$7 below Class III. Some plants note downtime for either maintenance or inspection. Cheese makers note steady demand and comfortable inventory levels. Winter weather is expected to add obstacles for both milk and cheese transport. In the West, retail cheese demand is noted to be lighter. Foodservice demand is following a similar downward trend. Contacts note strong Class III demand has made production schedules steady to stronger. Contacts in the West also report increased international purchasing interest.

**NORTHEAST - JAN. 17:** Some transportation interruptions were reported due to severe storm activity in the Northeast. Some milk volumes were again redirected into Class I operations, and cheese plant managers note lighter production schedules in response. Inventories remain comfortable despite lighter processing in recent weeks. Domestic cheese demand has shown slight increases and is in line with seasonal upticks due to football championship season. Cheddar and Mozzarella demand has increased.

**MIDWEST AREA - JAN. 17:** Milk availability, in some areas of the region, is holding at what contacts consider holiday-level availability. Spot milk prices were recorded from \$7-under to \$.50-under Class III at report time. A number of plants in recent weeks have been on lighter schedules, but winter weather has further impacted schedules and hauling. Cheese makers are also finding values on condensed skim milk loads for fortification processes. Cheese demand is generally steady. Cheese plant contacts say cheese loads continue to move steadily, but they are hopeful for bullish market price movements. Some do not expect market improvements while milk remains so widely available. Cheese inventories are noted as stable. Some plant managers have shifted away from seasonal varieties that are slower to sell during the winter months. Retail cheddar makers say demand is on par with previous years. Generally, inventories in the region are neither heavy or tight.

**WEST - JAN. 17 :** In the West, retail demand for varietal cheeses is mixed as some manufacturers and converters indicate demand has flattened. Foodservice demand is steady to lighter as winter storm weather has decreased activity for some establishments. Class III milk volumes are readily available. However, freezing temperatures in northern parts of the region caused some transportation delays and disruptions for stakeholders. That said, cheese makers relay stronger to steady production schedules, as they are actively bringing in spot milk loads below Class level pricing. Stakeholders relay plenty of cheese availability for spot load buyers. Industry sources indicate export demand has strengthened due to domestic prices becoming more competitive internationally.

**FOREIGN -TYPE CHEESE - JAN. 17:** European cheese demand has strengthened since the start of January. Retail markets have strong cheese demand. Retailer advertisements are noted by industry sources amongst the successful reasons for strengthened retail sales. European foodservice markets are more mixed. However, inquiries from foodservice buyers and draws on contracted sales are mostly strong. European milk production is mixed. Industry sources indicate milk production in Germany is strengthening week-over-week, but January 2024 milk production in France is lower than January 2023 thus far. Cheese production has resumed seasonal trend strength. Current inventories are reported as sufficient to meet demand. The recent threat situation around the Red Sea has caused delivery delays due to a need to bypass the Suez Canal. European cheese price market tones are indicated as stable to firm.

### EEX Weekly European Cheese Indices (WECI): Price Per/lb (US Converted)

Variety	Date: 1/17/24	1/10	Variety	Date: 1/17/24	1/10
Cheddar Curd	\$2.05	\$2.07	Mild Cheddar	\$2.07	\$2.08
Young Gouda	\$2.00	\$2.02	Mozzarella	\$1.83	\$1.85

## WHOLESALE BUTTER MARKETS - JANUARY 17

**NATIONAL:** Retail and bulk butter demands are mostly steady. However, some lighter domestic demand is reported in the West as a few manufacturers indicate demand is below expectations. Persistently weak foodservice demand is noted in the East. In the central region, foodservice demand is expected to take a temporary hit from recent winter storms. Cream is readily available. Strong to steady production schedules are reported. Some butter makers are turning down cream offers due to currently being at capacity.

**CENTRAL:** Butter makers say cream is widely available for manufacturing. There were some weather-related setbacks over the weekend and early in the week, as cream handlers say finding homes for the ample cream stores has been an uphill battle. Equipment and hauling hurdles aside, butter makers are churning as busily as possible. They are running at capacity in some cases, as cream multiples hold as low as flat market in the Upper Midwest and as low as .50 in the southern states this week. Bulk inventories of 82 percent unsalted varieties are tighter. That said, interests for 80 percent salted loads are steady.

**NORTHEAST:** Cream quantities remain strong in the eastern states. Spot loads of cream are readily available, and spot market activity remains strong. Butter plant

managers relay mixed churning schedules. Some processors are operating seven day a week production schedules and are freezing bulk butter, while others are opting to sell cream on the spot market. Retail demand is noted to be steady. Foodservice demand remains weak.

**WEST:** Cream loads are readily available for butter makers to utilize. Butter manufacturers indicate production is steady to stronger. Some plant managers note machine maintenance taking place to prepare for heavier churning later in the winter season. Butter makers are working to build additional inventories for spring holiday demand needs, but also relay sufficient current inventory levels to accommodate most spot buyer needs. That said, stakeholders note some tightness regarding unsalted butter. Demand is also stronger for unsalted 82 percent butterfat loads. Demand, both from export and domestic interests, is steady to moderate. Some manufacturers indicate more inquiries from international purchasers recently.

**OCEANIA:** Export data from Australia for November showed total butter exports increased during the month by 17.2 percent, but total butter exports from January 2023 through November 2023 were down by 53.4 percent. Butter production is softening, following seasonal trends.

## NATIONAL - CONVENTIONAL DAIRY PRODUCTS

The most advertised conventional commodity this week was cheese, while ad numbers increased by 10 percent. Organic cheese ads declined 78 percent. Packages of 6- to 8-ounce shred style cheese were the most advertised conventional cheese product, with ad numbers increasing by 28 percent and an average price of \$2.57. Organic 6- to 8-ounce shred style cheese ads declined by 66 percent, and 45 cents was sliced from the average price, making \$2.63 the new price. The organic premium for this item was 6 cents.

Conventional butter ads increased by 126 percent. Meanwhile, retailers stopped churning out organic butter ads, with none present in this week. Ad numbers for conventional 8-ounce butter increased by 863 percent and had an average advertised price that was 22 cents lower than last week, \$3.03. The average price for organic half-gallon milk was up 25 cents, \$4.35. Conventional half-gallon milk had an average advertised price of \$2.12.

## RETAIL PRICES - CONVENTIONAL DAIRY - JANUARY 19

Commodity	US	NE	SE	MID	SC	SW	NW
Butter 8 oz	3.03		3.38	3.00	2.26		
Butter 1#	4.88	4.34	4.95	3.85	5.08	3.99	4.99
Cheese 6-8 oz block	2.30	2.74	2.14	2.36	1.97	2.19	1.99
Cheese 6-8 oz shred	2.57	2.61	2.68	2.61	2.18	2.47	2.83
Cheese 6-8 oz sliced	2.75	2.74	3.12	2.68	2.22	2.47	2.83
Cheese 1# block	6.47		7.20	2.99	3.99	3.98	6.98
Cheese 1# shred	4.06	3.99	4.29	2.99	3.98	4.72	5.98
Cheese 1# sliced							
Cheese 2# block	10.72	7.99	10.48		12.48	9.05	
Cheese 2# shred	7.85	9.07	7.48	7.57		8.30	
Cottage Cheese 16 oz	2.62	3.49	2.72	1.69	2.46	2.99	
Cottage Cheese 24 oz	3.09	2.99	3.19	3.06	3.03	2.89	2.49
Cream Cheese 8 oz	2.32	3.00	2.35	2.70	2.08		
Milk ½ gallon	2.12		1.64	1.41	2.52	2.24	1.56
Milk gallon	3.19	3.69	3.38	2.56	2.92	3.35	2.49
Ice Cream 14-16 oz	3.70	3.88	4.25	3.74	3.10	3.16	3.60
Ice Cream 48-64 oz	4.27	4.12	4.77	3.76	3.83	3.74	3.32
Flavored Milk ½ gallon	1.94	3.19	1.80		1.94	1.87	
Flavored Milk gallon	3.10		3.16		3.03		
Sour Cream 16 oz	2.27	2.26	2.38	1.74	2.09	2.62	2.35
Sour Cream 24 oz	3.11		3.48	2.56	3.24	2.60	2.48
Yogurt (Greek) 4-6 oz	.99	.93	1.01	.90	1.05	0.61	1.13
Yogurt (Greek) 32 oz	4.71	5.39	4.87		3.54	6.34	3.99
Yogurt 4-6 oz	0.66	0.69	0.70	0.62	0.68	1.15	0.60
Yogurt 32 oz	2.67	3.84	2.40		2.41	3.08	2.83

## ORGANIC DAIRY - RETAIL OVERVIEW

### National Weighted Retail Avg Price:

Butter 1 lb:		Cheese 2 lb shred:	
Cheese 6-8 oz shred:	\$2.63	Sour Cream 16 oz:	
Cheese 6-8 oz block:	\$2.99	Ice Cream 48-64 oz	\$7.99
Cheese 6-8 oz sliced:		Milk ½ gallon:	\$4.35
Cottage cheese 16 oz:		Milk gallon:	\$7.15
Cottage cheese 24 oz:		Yogurt 4-6 oz:	\$1.41
Cream Cheese 8 oz:	\$3.85	Greek Yogurt 4-6 oz:	
Cheese 2 lb block:		Yogurt 32 oz:	\$3.78
		Yogurt Greek 32 oz	\$5.10

## DRY DAIRY PRODUCTS - JANUARY 18

**WPC CENTRAL/WEST:** Contacts report consistent demand for WPC 34% and note especially strong ordering from animal feed end users. Some stakeholders note WPC 34% remains a good value compared to alternative dairy proteins. WPC 80% and whey protein isolate remain in strong demand and inventories are tight, which has contributed to increased focus from drying operations on the production of these commodities. Due to this some manufacturers say they have limited time in their schedules to produce WPC 34%.

**LACTOSE CENTRAL/WEST:** Contacts report steady spot market demand in domestic markets for lactose. Some contacts note much of their lactose during Q1 is committed to contractual sales. Spot inventories of lactose are mixed. Some manufacturers report they have limited or no spot availability through the remainder of Q1. Spot purchasers note inventories of lactose which meet more stringent requirements are difficult to obtain but say lactose which is more interchangeable is easier to

obtain. Lactose production is steady to higher as some manufacturers say they have increased their production schedules following the holidays. Contacts report lactose markets are steady to bullish.

**DRY WHEY/CENTRAL:** Contacts view the market with mixed takes. There's still holiday-levels of milk readily available for cheese production. Despite winter weather causing setbacks, a number of plant managers running lighter schedules in recent weeks have begun to return to regularly running schedules this week and some plan to run somewhat hearty schedules through the rest of the winter. Still, high protein markets maintaining their recent strengths causes a ripple effect for whey powder markets. As processing focal point in the direction of whey protein concentrates, dry whey inventories are not expected to become problematically abundant. Demand, though, is not necessarily hearty, either. Some contacts do not expect a lot of price movement in either direction in the near-term.

## WEEKLY COLD STORAGE HOLDINGS

### SELECTED STORAGE CENTERS IN 1,000 POUNDS - INCLUDING GOVERNMENT

DATE	BUTTER	CHEESE
01/15/24	37,634	82,492
01/01/24	31,043	82,414
Change	6,591	78
Percent Change	21	0

### CME CASH PRICES - JANUARY 15 - 19, 2024

Visit [www.cheesereporter.com](http://www.cheesereporter.com) for daily prices

	500-LB CHEDDAR	40-LB CHEDDAR	AA BUTTER	GRADE A NFDM	DRY WHEY
<b>MONDAY</b> January 15	No Trading	No Trading	No Trading	No Trading	No Trading
<b>TUESDAY</b> January 16	\$1.4700 (+2½)	\$1.5150 (-4¾)	\$2.5675 (NC)	\$1.1950 (+1)	\$0.4150 (-1½)
<b>WEDNESDAY</b> January 17	\$1.4675 (-¼)	\$1.5000 (-1½)	\$2.5800 (+1¼)	\$1.1950 (NC)	\$0.4050 (-1)
<b>THURSDAY</b> January 18	\$1.4400 (-2¾)	\$1.4700 (-3)	\$2.5650 (-1½)	\$1.1825 (-1¼)	\$0.4050 (NC)
<b>FRIDAY</b> January 19	\$1.4675 (+2¾)	\$1.4450 (-2½)	\$2.5450 (-2)	\$1.1750 (-¾)	\$0.4275 (+2¼)
<b>Week's AVG</b> <b>\$ Change</b>	\$1.4613 (+0.0013)	\$1.4825 (-0.0455)	\$2.5644 (+0.0049)	\$1.1869 (-0.0041)	\$0.4131 (-0.0139)
<b>Last Week's</b> <b>AVG</b>	\$1.4600	\$1.5280	\$2.5595	\$1.1910	\$0.4270
<b>2023 AVG</b> <b>Same Week</b>	\$1.6581	\$1.9569	\$2.3581	\$1.2019	\$0.3300

### MARKET OPINION - CHEESE REPORTER

**Cheese Comment:** Seven cars of blocks were sold Tuesday, the last at \$1.5150, which set the price. One car of blocks was sold Wednesday at \$1.5000, which set the price. On Thursday, 2 cars of blocks were sold, the last at \$1.4700, which set the price. A total of 11 cars of blocks were sold Friday, the last at \$1.4450, which set the price. The barrel price increased Tuesday on a sale at \$1.4700, declined Wednesday on an uncovered offer at \$1.4675, fell Thursday on a sale at \$1.4400, then increased Friday on a sale at \$1.4675.

**Butter Comment:** The price increased Wednesday on a sale at \$2.5800, fell Thursday on a sale at \$2.5650, and declined Friday on a sale at \$2.5450. It was a heavy trading week for butter on the CME as a total of 22 carloads were traded.

**Nonfat Dry Milk Comment:** The price rose Tuesday on a sale at \$1.1950, declined Thursday on a sale at \$1.1825, and fell Friday on a sale at \$1.1750. 15 carloads of NDM were traded this week on the CME.

**Dry Whey Comment:** The price declined Tuesday on a sale at 41.50 cents, dropped Wednesday on a sale at 40.50 cents, then increased Friday on a sale at 42.75 cents. A total of 11 carloads of dry whey were traded this week on the CME.

### WHEY MARKETS - JANUARY 15 - 19, 2024

RELEASE DATE - JANUARY 18, 2024

<b>Animal Feed Whey—Central: Milk Replacer:</b>		.3000 (NC) – .3500 (+2)
<b>Buttermilk Powder:</b>		
Central & East:	1.0800 (NC) – 1.1550 (NC)	West: 1.1100 (+1) – 1.2600 (+1)
Mostly:	1.1500 (+1) – 1.2100 (+1)	
<b>Casein: Rennet:</b>	3.5000 (+10) – 3.8000 (NC)	Acid: 3.7000 (+20) – 3.9000 (NC)
<b>Dry Whey—Central (Edible):</b>		
Nonhygroscopic:	.3900 (NC) – .4400 (NC)	Mostly: .4000 (NC) – .4200 (+½)
<b>Dry Whey—West (Edible):</b>		
Nonhygroscopic:	.4050 (+½) – .4900 (+¾)	Mostly: .4200 (NC) – .4600 (NC)
<b>Dry Whey—NE:</b>	.3825 (+¾) – .4550 (+¾)	
<b>Lactose—Central and West:</b>		
Edible:	.1525 (+¼) – .3800 (NC)	Mostly: .2300 (NC) – .3100 (+½)
<b>Nonfat Dry Milk—Central &amp; East:</b>		
Low/Medium Heat:	1.1700 (NC) – 1.2300 (NC)	Mostly: 1.1800 (NC) – 1.2200 (NC)
High Heat:	1.3100 (+2) – 1.3500 (+2)	
<b>Nonfat Dry Milk—Western:</b>		
Low/Med Heat:	1.1400 (+1½) – 1.2400 (+1)	Mostly: 1.1700 (NC) – 1.2200 (+1)
High Heat:	1.2800 (+1½) – 1.4450 (NC)	
<b>Whey Protein Concentrate—34% Protein:</b>		
Central & West:	.9000 (+1) – 1.1400 (+1)	Mostly: .9200 (NC) – 1.0200 (NC)
<b>Whole Milk:</b>	1.9500 (+5) – 2.2000 (NC)	

Visit [www.cheesereporter.com](http://www.cheesereporter.com) for historical dairy, cheese, butter, & whey prices

### AVERAGE MONTHLY WPC MOSTLY PRICES: USDA

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
'10	.9271	.9307	.9130	.9102	.9238	.9432	.9444	.9555	.9662	.9845	.9950	.9950
'11	1.0233	1.0597	1.2404	1.3686	1.5043	1.5570	1.5650	1.5376	1.4900	1.4363	1.4458	1.4600
'12	1.5239	1.5271	1.5091	1.4195	1.3010	1.1977	1.1401	1.1272	1.1862	1.2283	1.2358	1.2483
'13	1.2606	1.2472	1.2150	1.2378	1.2786	1.3172	1.3518	1.3670	Govt Shutdown	1.6046	1.6908	1.6908
'14	1.7663	1.7799	1.7694	1.7682	1.7530	1.6612	1.6089	1.5549	1.4355	1.3358	1.2751	1.2326
'15	1.1727	1.0970	1.0031	.9439	.9103	.8620	.7863	.6473	.5610	.5333	.5313	.5300
'16	.5445	.5750	.5852	.6076	.6239	.6616	.6937	.7151	.7305	.7706	.7961	.8608
'17	.9318	.9905	.9681	.9425	.9138	.9013	.8919	.8486	.8231	.8063	.7757	.7490
'18	.7268	.7211	.6960	.7027	.7502	.7949	.8092	.8144	.8437	.8658	.8817	.8851
'19	.8929	.8995	.9025	.9025	.9074	.9244	.9297	.9444	.9465	.9530	.9597	.9854
'20	1.0017	1.0140	1.0148	1.0027	.9590	.9356	.8945	.8591	.8500	.8810	.9124	.9255
'21	.9696	1.0134	1.0487	1.0977	1.1328	1.1513	1.1551	1.1548	1.1450	1.1540	1.2149	1.3174
'22	1.4378	1.5904	1.7102	1.7920	1.8160	1.8269	1.8313	1.8118	1.8052	1.8085	1.8073	1.7478
'23	1.6671	1.4846	1.3440	1.2238	1.0989	.9482	.8743	.8191	.8254	.8670	.8974	.9420

## USDA Now Accepting Applications For Value-Added Producer Grants

Washington—USDA's Rural Business-Cooperative Service (RBCS) this week announced acceptance of applications under the Value-Added Producer Grant (VAPG) program for fiscal year 2024, subject to the availability of funding.

The notice, published in Wednesday's *Federal Register*, is being issued prior to the FY 2024 appropriations act to allow applicants sufficient time to leverage financing, prepare and submit their applications, and give RBCS time to process applications within FY 2024. Based on FY 2023 appropriated funding, RBCS estimates that roughly \$30 million will be made available for FY 2024.

The objective of the VAPG program is to assist viable independent producers, agricultural producer groups, farmer and rancher co-ops, and majority-controlled producer-based businesses in starting or expanding value-added activities related to the processing and/or marketing of value-added agricultural products.

Grants will be awarded competitively for either planning or working capital projects directly related to the processing and/or marketing of value-added products. Generating new products, creating and expanding marketing opportunities, and increasing

producer income are the end goals of the program.

All proposals must demonstrate economic viability and sustainability to compete for funding.

There is a matching fund (cost-sharing) requirement of at least \$1.00 for every \$1.00 in grant funds provided by the RBCS (matching funds plus grant funds must equal the proposed total project cost).

Matching funds may be in the form of cash or eligible in-kind contributions. Matching contributions and grant funds may be used only for eligible project purposes, including any contributions exceeding the minimum amount required.

According to the RBCS notice, a planning grant is used to fund development of a defined program of economic planning activities to determine the viability of a potential value-added venture.

A working capital grant provides funds to operate a value-added project, specifically to pay the eligible project expenses directly related to the processing and/or marketing of the value-added products that are eligible uses of grant funds.

Applications filed through [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) are due by Apr. 11, 2024.

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