

## **The WMMB Link: What's My Checkoff Doing for Me?**

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When confronted with change we tend to ask, “What's in it for me?” That's not to suggest that most of us are selfish. It's simply a fact that the first filter we use to assess change in our environment is personal. It's especially true when we're asked to participate in some sort of change.

In 2017, as a dairy industry we have been tasked with significant change, from the new version of the FARM program, consumer product demands, weather, new leadership in our CEO at WMMB and even milk price. The list is endless, but change is not what troubles most of us, because change is situational. Our challenge is not the change itself, but rather to validate the journey.

When I first ran for the District 21 seat for the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board, I wanted to know what all dairy farmers want to know- “What are you doing with my checkoff?” I wanted to know more about what was being done with my investment. And what better way to have my questions answered and help others understand than to be active on the board? At the first few meetings as a new board member, I was taken aback by how much our checkoff is accomplishing on not only a state level, but also on a national level.

My “aha moment” and what really excites me to talk about is the work we are doing on a national level with Wisconsin cheese. We have seen a change in consumer trends. Our checkoff works to establish partnerships, influence the marketplace, and strives for a volume impact on our milk. This impact is really driven by our checkoff efforts in the both retail and foodservice markets.

Did you know we have eight Regional Marketing Managers across the country to ensure our Wisconsin cheese is available and identifiable in the deli or the dairy case in all 50 states? Or, that our checkoff efforts have expanded the experience of an all-time Wisconsin traditional dairy fare of cheese curds? Just this last year, Wisconsin fried cheese curds had surpassed french-frie sales at A&W restaurants nationwide. Even McDonald's offered Wisconsin fried curds on their menu for a limited time in their 300 locations in Wisconsin.

There are countless stories of our checkoff efforts generating excitement, creating awareness, and ultimately educating consumers about our great Wisconsin dairy products. There is something to be said about branding Wisconsin dairy products with our Wisconsin cheese and Wisconsin Dairy logos. No matter the dairy product, WMMB is working to strengthen our industry and highlight not just our dairy products but the people, places and products that make Wisconsin America's Dairyland.

Wisconsin is the melting pot for all types of dairy operations, and my district of Vernon and



Crawford counties is no different. As a dairy farmer we may differ in the number and types of cows we milk, even in how we farm, but we are all on this journey together. This journey will be filled with new challenges and questions, but above it all, remember our checkoff is a significant resource for helping us educate and communicate within our industry and with consumers. It's my hope as we look forward to 2017, each of us strive to be a champion for the Wisconsin dairy industry and be part of the change in some way.