

MILKLINE

NEWSLETTER



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Change, Growth, Success



Change is inevitable, and there is no opportunity for growth and progress without it. FarmFirst’s board of directors have made some changes recently in the best interest of the cooperative. We are proud to announce the appointment of Mick Homb as our General Manager. With his extensive expertise and proven track record, Mick is set to lead us into a future defined by growth, dedication, and success.

Mick is not new to FarmFirst. Serving as the Director of Milk Marketing for our Family Dairies USA division since 2019, he has demonstrated exceptional leadership and management within the cooperative. Over the past five years, he has navigated the complexities of milk hauling schedules, developed and maintained vital business relationships, and has ensured that milk from our

producers has always had a place to be sold - even throughout Covid. Mick’s ability to navigate regulatory landscapes and optimize operational processes has been instrumental in ensuring our continued success.

Mick brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to his new role. With prior

USA. Meanwhile, the management of FarmFirst’s member services division will transition to Sarah Sarbacker. Sarah joined FarmFirst as the Director of Communications and Marketing in April of 2023. Prior to joining FarmFirst, she worked for Boviteq USA as the Client Services Supervisor for North America, and managed client

“Mick’s demonstrated success and extensive management experience within the dairy food industry make him the natural choice to lead our cooperative.”

experience as a production manager at Dean Foods, he oversaw scheduling for entire processing plants, managed labor negotiations, managed payroll and implemented operational efficiencies. Mick’s extensive background in the dairy food industry further solidifies that he is a natural fit for the role of General Manager for FarmFirst.

“Mick’s demonstrated success and extensive management experience within the dairy food industry make him the natural choice to lead our cooperative,” remarked John Rettler, FarmFirst Board President. “We are excited about the positive direction he will lead us in and look forward to the invaluable contributions he will make to our organization.”

As Mick assumes his new role as General Manager, he will continue to fulfill his responsibilities as Director of Milk Marketing for Family Dairies

service teams in both the US and Canada.

“Sarah’s management experience in the industry, her work in marketing and communications to increase our visibility and dedication in her time here at FarmFirst makes her the right fit for managing member services,” said Homb. “We are excited for her leadership going forward.”

At FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative, change is not just welcomed—it is celebrated. This change in leadership marks the beginning of a new chapter for our cooperative. A chapter characterized by collaboration, and a solid commitment to our members. As we embark on this exciting journey, let us come together in support of these changes and the bright future that lies ahead for our cooperative. Together, we will harness change as a catalyst for growth, and enduring success.

Dedicated to serving and representing you, our family farm members, FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative represents farms in Wisconsin, Minnesota, South Dakota, Michigan, Iowa, Illinois and Indiana through policy advocacy, dairy marketing services, laboratory testing opportunities and industry promotion.

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Member Farm Tours

Our field staff have been working with members farms that have been hosting farm tours. We sponsored milk for 550 students that visited Krescent Valley Dairy in Richfield, Wisconsin, and helped with the tour at Lawler Farms in Peosta, Iowa where field rep Abby Walker also talked to students about the path of milk after it leaves the farm.



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FarmFirst Sets Priorities for 2024



In March, the FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative Board of Directors reviewed and identified the top priority issues that the cooperative will focus on with its advocacy efforts for 2024.

Federal Order Modernization - With the completion of the national hearing, FarmFirst will be engaged in the next steps of the hearing process to make sure there are shared benefits for dairy farmers and their processors when dairy farmers vote on the proposed changes in 2025. Further, FarmFirst will engage in a campaign to help members better understand the proposed changes and how they will affect them.

2023 Farm Bill - The current Farm Bill was extended through September 2024. FarmFirst will remain engaged on the Dairy Title, specifically on changes to enhance the Dairy Margin Coverage program, to make sure it remains an effective safety net for dairy farmers. Other Farm Bill priorities include restoring the "Higher of" Class I mover, directing USDA to conduct mandatory plant cost studies for future "make allowance" discussions, maintaining and strengthening access to risk management programs, and maintaining funding for voluntary conservation programs.

International Trade - FarmFirst will advocate for comprehensive trade agreements that will allow for increased market access that do not sacrifice dairy interests for gains by other industries or agriculture commodities and also the implementation of current trade agreements.

Dairy Labeling - FarmFirst will continue to advocate for the Food & Drug Administration to enforce its existing regulations with respect to the definition of milk and other dairy related terms

so that plant-based, cell-based, lab-grown, and products cannot capitalize on dairy's great reputation and nutritional quality. In addition, FarmFirst will work for passage of the Dairy Pride Act.

Environment - FarmFirst supports climate smart policies that recognize the contributions dairy farmers have already made to reduce their carbon footprint and will advocate for policies that will adequately compensate dairy farmers for their conservation, nutrient management, and soil health improvement efforts. We will oppose green energy initiatives that threaten production agriculture and require farmers to be carbon neutral. Lastly, FarmFirst will continue to support the implementation of rules based on a clear, consistent, and reasonable definition of what constitutes Waters of the United States.

Agriculture Labor Reform - FarmFirst supports policies that will ensure there is a reliable, consistent, and legal workforce for the dairy industry. Policies should include securing the borders and making it easier for immigrants to obtain a work visa.

Consumer Confidence - FarmFirst will continue to share the farmers' story on how they care for the health and well-being of their animals and ensure the quality and safety of the milk supply.

Consumer & Childhood Nutrition - FarmFirst will advocate for passage of the "Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act" which will get 2 percent and whole milk back in schools. Further, FarmFirst will be engaged in making sure that the "Dietary Guidelines for Americans" include three servings of dairy daily and that new science on full-fat dairy be included in the review process. Lastly, FarmFirst supports the increased use of milk and dairy products by publicly supported institutions, facilities, and individuals.

Beginning Farmers - FarmFirst will continue to work towards building the foundation for new, beginning farmers to have the resources available to begin dairy farming. 🇺🇸

HPAI and Milk Safety

The FDA and USDA have indicated that based on the information we currently have, our commercial milk supply is safe because of both the pasteurization process and that milk from sick cows is being diverted or destroyed. The federal-state milk safety system, and the Grade "A" Pasteurized Milk Ordinance, have proven effective for decades against a wide range of pathogens. Data from previous studies shows that pasteurization is very likely to effectively inactivate heat-sensitive viruses in fluid milk. Furthermore, thermal inactivation of HPAI has been successful during the pasteurization process for eggs, which occurs at lower temperatures than what is used for fluid milk. Given this is a novel and evolving situation, the FDA and USDA are working closely to collect and evaluate additional data and information specific to HPAI A (H5N1) to support our state co-regulators as they manage this emerging disease in dairy cattle.

U.S. government partners are working with all deliberate speed on a wide range of studies looking at milk along all stages of production, including on the farm, during processing and on shelves. This work is a top priority and agencies are proceeding in an efficient, stepwise and scientific fashion to ensure the continued effectiveness of the federal-state milk safety system and reinforce the current assessment that the commercial milk supply is safe. These important efforts are ongoing, and we will work to keep you informed. 🇺🇸



USDA Sets Mandatory Testing for Interstate Dairy Cattle Movements, Updates Reporting Rules

On April 24th, USDA issued a federal order requiring pre-movement testing for the interstate movement of lactating dairy cattle. More than 20 states have already introduced restrictions on dairy cattle movement. Beginning Monday, April 29th, a negative test result for highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza will be required for all interstate movement of lactating dairy cattle before a Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (CVI) can be issued.

USDA also announced that all laboratories and state veterinarians will be required to report positive H5N1 cases to USDA, a move that aims to limit the risk of virus spread to protect dairy workers, dairy herds and poultry facilities.

For affected farms, USDA's Federal Order will require business owners with dairy cattle that test positive for interstate movement to complete a comprehensive epidemiological questionnaire and provide animal movement tracing.

USDA has identified spread between cows within the same herd, spread from cows to poultry, spread among dairies associated with cattle movements; in addition, cows without clinical signs have tested positive. Today's actions are intended to enable USDA to take necessary measures to contain the disease and provide essential data for surveillance and epidemiological research. Accurate and timely reporting is essential to understanding the prevalence, distribution and dynamics of the virus, and the information collected is crucial for developing effective prevention and control strategies.

USDA's actions are appropriate to limiting the spread of H5N1 and ensuring the health of U.S. dairy cattle and workers, but several concerns have been raised regarding laboratory capacity, and the availability and cost of veterinary services. Guidance offering specific details about what is expected of dairy farmers, veterinarians and laboratories will be released by USDA tomorrow.

WHICH DAIRY CATTLE WILL REQUIRE PRE-MOVEMENT TESTING FOR INTERSTATE MOVEMENT?

The rule applies to lactating cattle, or cows that are currently milking. Testing for dry cows and heifers is recommended but not required. Any requirements for other classes of dairy cattle will be based on scientific factors concerning the virus and its evolving risk profile.

WHAT MOVEMENTS WILL FALL UNDER THIS RULE?

The rule will apply to all lactating cattle crossing state lines, including those being transported for slaughter. Up to seven days prior to interstate movement, dairy cattle must receive a negative H5N1 test before they can be issued a CVI. USDA has advised that its Federal Order is the baseline; some states may already have more rigorous importation requirements depending on state orders that have been implemented.

HOW WILL DAIRY CATTLE BE TESTED?

USDA is expected to share testing details tomorrow. We expect that only accredited veterinarians will have the authority to draw samples and submit PCR tests to an approved National Animal Health Laboratory Network laboratory. USDA expects that test results will be available within two to three days after samples are submitted. USDA will cover the cost of pre-movement tests. Financial support for veterinary services is under consideration.

WHAT IF AN ANIMAL TESTS POSITIVE FOR H5N1?

If an animal tests positive for H5N1 during pre-movement testing, the animal should be quarantined for 30 days before it's retested, and heightened biosecurity measures should be taken to reduce the risk of virus spread.

Owners of herds in which dairy cattle test positive will be required to provide epidemiological information, including animal movement tracing. [T!](#)



From Milk to Vodka, Gin - Mullins Creates Whey Spirits at Knowlton House Distillery



FarmFirst held a Young Cooperator event in February at Knowlton House Distillery in Mosinee, WI, and Dairy Star Magazine was there to join us. Danielle Nauman from Dairy Star writes about the process that the Mullins family uses to make spirits from milk.

When one thinks of Wisconsin and milk processing, there is a good chance cheese is the first thing that may come to mind. What might not come to mind, however, is vodka or gin.

The Mullins family of Mullins Cheese is hoping to change that with their Knowlton House Distillery in Knowlton. Last fall, the family opened the doors of the business, which distills whey into top-quality vodka and gin marketed under the brand name TenHead Spirits.

TenHead Spirits has been a work in progress for nearly a decade, said Heather Mullins, a fermentation specialist by trade who is married to fourth-generation cheesemaker, Luke Mullins.

Heather Mullins explained the concept behind Knowlton House Distillery and the process used to create vodka and gin Feb. 29 to members of the FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative.

In project infancy, Mullins said she spent nearly two years working in her garage to develop exactly the strain of yeast she was seeking.

"I married into the right family for a good, consistent source of sugar to work with," Mullins said. "It takes a very special yeast strain to convert that lactose into alcohol. That is where my background in fermentation sciences comes into play. Standard brewer's yeast will leave lactose behind. I want a yeast that will eat all the sugar, leaving behind only the alcohol. I wanted to develop a yeast that would do that work for us."

The whey that Mullins uses to create distilled spirits is the byproduct of the cheese making that happens at the family's nearby processing facility.

"To make 1 pound of cheese curd, you're left with 9 pounds of whey as a byproduct," Mullins said. "They are pulling the protein off the whey and drying to it sell as whey protein. What is left is lactose, some salt and minerals, and some of that is coming over to me as this lovely source of sugar."

The whey Mullins receives from the cheese plant requires little additional processing before she can begin the process of distilling it into the final TenHead product. The whey is pasteurized and then mixed with the yeast Mullins created and placed into fermentation vats for a week.

Once the fermentation process is completed, a 7% distiller's brew remains. That is transferred to the still where it undergoes distillation through a series of 18-20 copper plates. It becomes more concentrated until it reaches 95% alcohol, the government-required level for completion of the distillation process.

"The distillation process works because water and ethanol boil at different temperatures," Mullins said.

While water boils at 212 degrees, ethanol boils at 173 degrees.

"The ethanol is evaporated, and it does not condense back to a liquid," Mullins said. "The vapor continues to go over the still, leaving the water behind."

The process continues through a series of copper plates that sort the bad components out, leaving a 40% vodka that is ready for consumption.

Mullins said gin is made by adding botanicals to vodka.

"All gin is required by the government to have juniper in it from juniper berries," Mullins said. "That is what gives gin the strong pine-like taste. We can add other botanicals to make unique varieties, things like coriander, ginseng and birch bark, which tastes like sarsaparilla. We can give the gin a citrus note or a more floral note."

Mullins's efforts have paid off in a short time. TenHead vodka was awarded a gold medal at the recent American Craft Spirits Association annual tasting competition while the TenHead Woodland Dry gin was given silver medal recognition.

The history of the area and the heritage of the Mullins family are honored by the distillery's profile.

Naming the distillery Knowlton House is a nod to the immigrants who settled the area, Mullins said.

"There was a roadhouse located here called the Knowlton House," Mullins said. "This was the halfway point between the towns of Stevens Point and Wausau. It was a two-day trip between the towns. People would stop here, eat, spend the night and change horses."

The name TenHead pays homage to the Mullins family's entry into the dairy farming world of Wisconsin. In 1849, Patrick Mullins sold 10 head of cattle in Ireland and set sail to America to begin a new life as a dairy farmer. Seven generations later, the family has evolved from dairy farmers to cheesemakers and now distillers.

"This was all started from the sale of those 10 head of cattle," Mullins said.

Because of those ties to the dairy industry, the Mullins family said creating additional uses for the whey left behind by the cheese-making process is a natural progression for their business. The milk sugars in the whey leave behind a mildly sweet flavor and a silky texture, making it nearly ideal for the creation of distilled spirits.

"From milk to vodka, the only thing we add is the yeast," Mullins said. "It's very much a dairy product." 🍷

Article by Danielle Nauman, Dairy Star Magazine

Originally featured in their April 13, 2024 issue

MARCH 2024

Federal Milk Order
Market Information

	UPPER MIDWEST	CENTRAL	MIDEAST
Order Name and Number	Order 30	Order 32	Order 33
Producer Milk (lbs.)	2,712,499,592	1,287,215,046	1,520,785,976
Producer Price Differential @ base zone	\$ 0.36	\$ 1.68	\$ 2.30
Statistical Uniform Price/cwt @ 3.5% BF*	\$ 16.70	\$ 18.02	\$ 18.64
Class I Price/cwt	\$ 20.60	\$ 20.80	\$ 20.99
Class II Price/cwt	\$ 21.12	\$ 21.12	\$ 19.52
Class III Price/cwt	\$ 16.34	\$ 16.34	\$ 18.10
Class IV Price/cwt	\$ 20.09	\$ 20.09	\$ 18.38
Component Prices & Test Avg. % aves			
Butterfat/lb.	\$ 3.2385	4.32%	4.26%
Protein/lb.	\$ 1.1265	3.29%	3.36%
Other Solids/lb.	\$ 0.2881	5.78%	5.78%
SCC Adjust Rate/1000	\$ 0.00080		
Producer Milk Classified %			
Class I	5.70%	27.70%	38.62%
Class II	1.10%	6.71%	11.04%
Class III	92.40%	55.38%	46.30%
Class IV	0.80%	10.21%	4.04%
	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%



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