



**WISCONSIN
CHEESE MAKERS
ASSOCIATION**

February 26, 2025

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Secretary Rollins,

On behalf of the Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association Board of Directors, serving dairy businesses in 44 states nationwide, I write to express deep concern regarding the U.S. Department of Agriculture's pause in funding for Dairy Business Innovation (DBI) Initiatives. We respectfully ask for your immediate action to release Congressionally-directed funding, critical to the stability and growth of hundreds of small, rural businesses and the nation's dairy industry.

Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association, in partnership with the Center for Dairy Research, runs one of the DBI centers, called the Dairy Business Innovation Alliance (DBIA). Our center was informed by your staff that the agency is pausing reimbursement for our center and others, with a retroactive date of January 19, 2025. In a meeting on February 25, USDA staff confirmed that grant recipients should be informed. We want to impress upon you the gravity of the decision to pause DBI funding.

DBI Initiatives spur regional strategies to enhance the capacity, vitality, and innovation of the American dairy industry, contributing 3.2 million jobs and \$794 billion in economic impact nationwide. DBI centers convene farmers, industry partners, and academia to tackle industry production, processing, and marketing needs. DBI provides critical technical assistance, market research, and free consulting services. As noted, centers also offer direct-to-business grants supporting business and product launches, diversification of on-farm revenue streams and expanded processing capacity.

Across the four DBI centers, 420 dairy businesses are affected by your decision to pause reimbursement, with \$28,658,502.90 hanging in the balance. The Dairy Business Innovation Alliance alone has 88 dairy businesses awaiting promised reimbursement totaling nearly \$6.5 million for their grant projects. Our center's affected dairy businesses are small, with 86 percent employing 50 or fewer workers, and 50 percent employing five or fewer workers. They are depending on the federal government to honor its commitment to them, via our program.

We appreciate your attention and look forward to your swift action to resolve this matter for the dairy farmers and processors. Please know that we stand ready to discuss this matter at any time. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Rebekah Sweeney
Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association

Cc: Members of the House Committee on Appropriations, Members of the Senate Committee on Appropriations