

# Freedom Matters

## A Weekly Newsletter

Dane County, Wisconsin

Vol. 3, No. 26

Friday, June 27, 2003

We are a free people in a republic, under a constitution which limits the powers of government to those necessary to secure the unalienable rights of each person to their life, liberty and property. Yet, when a legislature is in session, no one's life, liberty or property is safe. It's the curse of a democracy. That's why we have a republic instead. *Freedom Matters* dedicates itself to the fight to restore our republic. Most of the press and courts fail to do so. They've forgotten that freedom matters.

### Dairying in Wisconsin

*Recently Dawn Haag spoke to the Dane County Board. Her speech was loaded with information many residents of our state are probably unaware of even though they buy Wisconsin-produced dairy products off the shelf at the local grocery store. Freedom Matters is printing her speech to support the agriculture industry when some in government are making it tougher for farmers to succeed at it*

Dane County Board Presentation  
June 5, 2003- Dawn Haag

Wisconsin's dairy industry is a sophisticated, modern business with one of the most integrated infrastructures in the world. Many people conjure up idealistic pictures of little red dairy barns dotting rural Wisconsin and this image is an important part of our dairy heritage. However today's dairies are as varied as models of cars. No one size is right for all producers. Both large and small operations are important. The reality is agriculture is \$84 billion industry in Wisconsin. It is Wisconsin's largest industry-larger than the Packers, tourism, even beer. Dairy products alone pump more than \$2.1 million per hour into Wisconsin's economy. Dairy employs 1 in every 20 people in the state. Over 300 careers are linked to dairying. Truly, whether you have milked a cow or not, you are in the dairy business in Wisconsin. No other single product has more economic impact in Wisconsin than milk. **A 500 cow operation puts \$1.1 million back into the local economy.** Currently, legislation is in the process to give investment incentives to dairy producers to modernize and upgrade their operations. We have programs by the Department of Commerce to promote increased milk production in the state by subsidizing interest rates and collateral for producers. Yes, Wisconsin is about the dairy industry.

Again, when you think about the biggest business in Dane County, don't look to the state government or the UW. In Dane Co. agri-business is the leader. Sales of Dane County farm products were nearly \$285 million based on the most recent information. **If Dane County were a state, it would rank above 20 other states in annual milk production. The 2002 Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics book says Dane County is home to 455 dairy herds with 50,000 cows. With an impact of \$2300/cow that is \$115 million of income per year.**

As with all businesses dairying has evolved over the years. We don't see many of the small independent grocery or hardware stores anymore, just as it is becoming rarer for smaller dairy operations to continue in the same fashion they did 20-30 years ago. Some people try to define what a family dairy farm is. Maybe more tentatively

than defining a farm by size, is to determine if the farm is sustainable operation. To be sustainable it must include these three elements.

- it must provide a quality of life for the family
- it must be financially sound
- it must be environmentally sound

In doing research for this talk I looked to Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics Service. I found some interesting information regarding land sales in Dane County. Fewer acres are being diverted out of farming today than in 1991. In 2001, which was the most recent information I found, 1713 acres without buildings were sold to stay in farming at a price of \$3300/acre while 1170 acres were diverted from agriculture at a price of \$13400/acre. This illustrates the economic incentive to sell the land for non farm uses. The information also showed that two of the larger uses of the converted land were transportation and open space.

One of the most talked about concerns among my customers is that of land use. In fact the Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin has made it one of their top policy issues. I would imagine we have as many differing thoughts on land use as people in this room. **In many cases in this county, the land is the largest asset the producers have. This is the asset they looked forward to providing for their retirement years as they don't have 401Ks or company sponsored retirement plans.** As property owners they have paid the taxes, tended to the land over the years and in my opinion should be able to maximize their investment to what the market will bear.

One point I want you to remember is farmers are the caretakers of our land. Developing wildlife habitats, implementing integrated pest management and utilizing global positioning systems (GPS) allow farmers to be efficient producers, while protecting our natural resources. An increasing number of farms are voluntarily developing and following a nutrient management plan. These plans balance the nutrient needs of the crop with on-farm nutrient resources to minimize the threat to water quality. All of these management practices promote sustainable agriculture.

The bottom line is, dairying is important to Dane Co. and to Wisconsin. It is an industry you should be proud to be part of as I know I am.

Dawn Haag, Badgerland Farm Credit Services

*Could it be possible that over regulation of land use is a contributing factor in the sharp increase in land prices that make farming for the next generations even more difficult to continue?*

**Readers' Bulletin Board.** e-mail us your comments. Include your name, for publication by *Freedom Matters*

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