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Dairy Producers Discuss Key Trade Issues with U.S. Trade Representative

During a visit today to southwestern Wisconsin, U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk learned more about Wisconsin's dairy industry and discussed how trade is impacting America's entire dairy sector. The National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF) and the U.S. Dairy Export Council (USDEC) participated in the discussion with Ambassador Kirk, and Foremost Farms and Swiss Valley, farmer-owned cooperatives that are members of both NMPF and USDEC, hosted the events.

America's dairy producers and processors have been working together for the past several years to expand market opportunities abroad, leading to peak sales of \$3.8 billion in 2008 and exports totaling \$2.3 billion last year, despite the global financial crisis and dwindling dairy prices.

The day began with a tour of Foremost Farms' Richland Center cheese plant, which is involved in export markets through sales of whey produced at that facility. "Foremost Farms has been exporting whey ingredient products for many years and we continue to look for opportunities to expand our international market share. Richland Center plays a large role as up to 50 percent of the whey produced here is destined for export. We are in favor of mutually beneficial trade agreements that are critical to our growth and are pleased to have a dialogue with Ambassador Kirk about trade opportunities," said Doug Wilke, vice president of marketing and technology, Foremost Farms.

Ambassador Kirk also visited Valley View Dairy, a member of the Swiss Valley Farms Cooperative. Farm owner Ray Schmitz said he appreciated the efforts of Trade Ambassador Kirk, Swiss Valley Farms and USDEC in helping grow opportunities to

create more demand for U.S. dairy products worldwide. "Accessing global markets helps provide a stable price for the U.S. dairy producer. It is a source of pride that my Wisconsin dairy farm participates in these global markets when my co-op exports cheese to Mexico and Japan," said Schmitz.

In Richland Center, Wisconsin Ambassador Kirk said, "I am pleased that we were able to have in-depth and frank discussions here with dairy industry folks about their trade priorities and concerns. There is no substitute for this kind of focused consultation."

The discussion centered around issues of critical concern to the U.S. dairy industry such as maintaining the flow of exports to important existing markets such as China and the European Union, as well as creating new opportunities for U.S. dairy companies through beneficial agreements like the U.S.-South Korea Free Trade Agreement. Producers attending the event also resoundingly reiterated their deep opposition to inclusion of U.S.-New Zealand dairy trade within the Trans-Pacific Partnership FTA.

Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation President Bill Bruins said he was pleased by USTR's strong interest in the health and future growth of America's dairy industry, and added, "There is a growing demand for dairy products in foreign markets from Brazil to Beijing. I believe this is a golden opportunity for the USTR to help us meet global demand with U.S. dairy products."

"The past few years of growth in exports, followed by last year's painful financial collapse when a significant portion of the overseas market was lost, have underscored the importance of U.S. exports and the need to strengthen inroads that America's dairy producers and processors have already made in many markets around the world," said Shawna Morris, vice president of trade policy for NMPF and USDEC.

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The U.S. Dairy Export Council (USDEC) is a non-profit, independent membership organization that represents the global trade interests of U.S. dairy producers, proprietary processors and cooperatives, ingredient suppliers and export traders. Its mission is to enhance U.S. global competitiveness and assist the U.S. industry to increase its global dairy ingredient sales and exports of U.S. dairy products. USDEC accomplishes this through programs in market development that build global demand for U.S. dairy products, resolve market access barriers and advance industry trade policy goals. USDEC is supported by staff across the United States and overseas in Mexico, South America, Asia, Middle East and Europe.

The National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF), based in Arlington, Va., develops and carries out policies that advance the well-being of U.S. dairy producers and the cooperatives they collectively own. The members of NMPF's 30 cooperatives produce the majority of the U.S. milk supply, making NMPF the voice of nearly 40,000 dairy producers on Capitol Hill and with government agencies. For more on NMPF's activities, visit www.nmpf.org.