



3 questions to Lisa Ramatowski, Vice President, Sustainability and Export Marketing, Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin

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Located close to the Canadian border near the Great Lakes, Wisconsin is the United States' historical dairy state. 90% of the milk produced in Wisconsin is made into cheese and Wisconsin is the leading cheese producer with 25% of the total U.S. production and 49% of the specialty cheese production. [Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin](#) is present in France in October 2024 to promote the high standards of sustainability and quality of their products.

1/ How would you describe the dairy industry in Wisconsin and does Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin do?

Wisconsin has been known as America's Dairyland since the 19th century. Currently, 96% dairy farms are family farms. Wisconsin is the U.S. number two milk producing state after California and leading cheese producing state. There are approximately 1.27 million dairy cows in 5,500 farms in Wisconsin, making the average dairy herd size 230 heads. The average production per head is more than 25,000 pounds of milk. Cheese production amounts to 3.52 billion pounds and includes a diversity of cheese types, mainly including a broad mix of American styles and European styles, producing over 600 styles, types and varieties.

Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin is the marketing and promotion organization for Wisconsin dairy farmers. It is a farmer-directed non-profit organization funded by Wisconsin's dairy family farms families and aims to increase sale and consumption of the state's dairy products. For every 100lbs of milk produced and marketed in the state, 10cents go to DFW. An additional 5 cents go to the national Dairy Promotion and Research Board for generic dairy promotion activities at the national level.

2/ Sustainable production is important for Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin. What does it consist of?

96% of our dairy farms are family owned and many of these are multi-generational. For us, sustainable farming means stewarding the land, protecting waterways, ensuring animal health and welfare, and keeping farms thriving to transmit them in good conditions to the next generation. Minimizing waste and maximizing efficiency efforts include adopting innovations in crop production, irrigation and nutrition. As a result, producing a liter of milk requires 30% less water and 21% less land in 2017 than it did in 2007. The average dairy farmer also captures and reuses each gallon of water on their farm up to four times.

In addition, Wisconsin is home to 47 farmer-led water shed conservation programs to protect soil and water quality with innovative farm practices. Dairy farmers in Wisconsin are improving soil health via crop rotation, planting cover crops and converting to no-till or reduced tillage, all of which prevents soil erosion and runoff into local water sources while improving nutrient density and microbiome diversity.

The diversity of Wisconsin dairy farm allows farmers to determine the sustainability practices they implement for their farms and their land. Some use solar energy to decrease their reliance on fossil fuel power plants. Some target their biggest energy use (milk cooling) and use plate coolers and ground water to reduce their energy needs. Many in Wisconsin also employ on-farm digester systems that capture methane from manure (held in air-tight tanks or lagoons) to create renewable energy. Overall, Wisconsin dairy farms try to use less and protect their community's land and water because it's what keeps Wisconsin dairy farming strong.

3/ In this month of October 2024, you have participated in 2 major international events in Paris: International Dairy Forum and SIAL. Why?

We participated in both IDF and SIAL in partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Trade, Agriculture and Consumer Protection (DATCP). Promoting Wisconsin, America's Dairyland and Wisconsin cheese is one of our key missions. These two professional showcases have been great opportunities for us to demonstrate our actions in favor of sustainable farming and high-quality cheese production.

There are five dairy exhibitors from Wisconsin in SIAL this year. One of them is Sartori cheese, founded in 1939 by Paolo Sartori, an Italian immigrant with an entrepreneurial spirit. Today, the company remains a 4-th generation family-owned business. Its cheesemaking facilities are located within 70 miles of the partner dairy farms, all in Wisconsin, to maintain carbon footprint low. Sartori employs 40 licensed cheesemakers included 3 Master Cheesemakers & 2 Apprentice Master Cheesemakers who develop a wide range of specialty cheeses including the new-to-the-world Sartori original BellaVitano cheese, hand-finished with a variety of flavors including Espresso and Merlot wine. Sartori products can be found in Germany at two major retailers, Edeka and Rewe. It can also be found in France in the Rungis market where is sold at independent cheese shops.

Interview by **Marie-Cécile Damave**, Head of Innovation and International Affairs, Agridées.