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1. Grocers Buy Local to Publish New WI Products Wholesale Catalog

If you're a Wisconsin company that sells wholesale products, listen up: a new initiative called "Grocers Buy Local" is publishing the first-ever wholesale catalog of local, Wisconsin products to be distributed to grocery stores in January.

With Wisconsin consumers spending \$21.5 billion each year on food - approximately \$10 billion of that purchased in grocery stores - Grocers Buy Local, a consortium of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Wisconsin Grocers Association, Thrive, and UW-Extension, is working to increase visibility of local foods. The initiative will publish a "Something Special from Wisconsin™ Wholesale Catalog" on Dec. 21 and distribute copies to grocery stores around the state in January.



"Grocery consumers need a fast and easy way to identify local foods. Grocery managers need a simple, cost-effective way to promote local foods. That's why we partnered with key players and developed the Grocers Buy Local campaign. It brings the whole picture together - consumers, producers, distributors and grocery stores. It's a win-win-win," says Lois Federman, director of the state's Something Special from Wisconsin™ program.

Greg Lawless, director of agricultural initiatives at Thrive, agrees. "More local food purchases mean more money circulating in our regional economy. We are thrilled that several grocery stores are stepping up to show solidarity with local farmers by purchasing local foods directly from the source, and this new wholesale catalog will only increase that trend."

Here's how it works: new companies joining Something Special from Wisconsin™ (a trademark program managed by the state Department of Agriculture) before Dec. 21 are guaranteed inclusion in the Something Special Wholesale Catalog that will be distributed to grocers in January. The Grocers Buy Local program partners will use the wholesale catalog to persuade grocers to embrace the Something Special from Wisconsin™ signage program in their stores and to introduce to their customers new

companies and their products. Grocers Buy Local has already developed in-store signage to promote Wisconsin food products and has secured 20 spots per month on Wisconsin Public Radio announcing the new catalog and initiative. Already in 2009, nearly 50 new Wisconsin companies have joined Something Special from Wisconsin to participate in the wholesale catalog promotion.

In 2010, the Grocers Buy Local initiative will conduct special events at four participating grocery stores, including Miller & Sons in Verona, Metcalfe's Sentry in Madison, and Mountin's Piggly Wiggly in Mayville. It is anticipated that the signage program will expand quickly to other stores, as signs have already appeared in Woodman's Markets, Williamson Street Co-op, and the new Hy-Vee store in Madison.

To participate in the program, make sure at least 50 percent of your company product's ingredients are produced and/or processed in Wisconsin. If you fulfill this requirement, then join the Something Special from Wisconsin™ program, with membership cost ranging from \$10 - \$200 per year, based on company sales. To join, [click here](#) and follow the simple three-step instructions. Questions? Contact Lois Federman, director of Something Special from Wisconsin™, at 608-224-5124 or <mailto:lois.federman@wi.gov>.

2. DBIC Team Column: Status of Wisconsin's Dairy Sheep Industry



This month, we hear from **Claire Mikolayunas**, DBIC Dairy Sheep Specialist. A New England native, Claire completed her undergraduate education at Cornell University. After working on sheep and dairy cow farms in Northern Ireland and Maine, she managed a small flock of dairy ewes in a portable milking parlor. In 2004, she moved to Wisconsin to pursue a Ph.D. in dairy sheep nutrition at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She has served as President of the Dairy Sheep Association of North America, organizing the Great Lakes Dairy Sheep Symposium. She provides technical and business development assistance to increase dairy sheep production in Wisconsin. This month, she gives us an update on the **Status of Wisconsin's Dairy Sheep Industry**.

Among other dairy accolades, Wisconsin can stake its claim to being a leader in dairy sheep. We lead the nation in the number of licensed sheep dairies (13), and sheep milk production (1 million pounds per year), producing more sheep milk cheeses than any other state, and maintaining the only dairy sheep research station in North America (Spooner Agricultural Research Station).

What these achievements don't indicate are the people who have generated this success, including the University of Wisconsin sheep and food science researchers, inventive cheesemakers, and our dairy sheep producers. With only about 150 dairy sheep producers in North America, dairy sheep farmers are geographically secluded. However, rather than isolationism, these producers' agricultural uniqueness drives creativity and collaboration throughout the milk marketing chain. Processors have maintained a cooperative relationship with milk producers, adjusting milk prices to support the profitability of the milk production system. This exceptional industry attitude was noted at the recent Great Lakes Dairy Sheep Symposium, where multiple speakers approached me to offer heartfelt thanks for the invitation to address such a knowledgeable and supportive group of producers. As we work to increase sheep milk production in the state, we must work to maintain this cooperative spirit.

To forward this effort, the Dairy Business Innovation Center is pleased to announce the launch of the first Wisconsin Dairy Sheep School in March 2010 at the Spooner Agricultural Research Station. This five-

day, hands-on course in sheep dairying is a cooperative project of UW-Extension, Spooner Ag Research Station and the DBIC. Participants will hear lectures from the prominent dairy researchers and spend time milking ewes, raising lambs, cleaning equipment, creating feed rations, and budgeting for future operations. Information and registration materials are available on the [DBIC Sheep's Milk website](#).

3. New Publication Offers Tips for Marketing Grass-Fed Dairy Products

A new publication published by the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems and authored by Laura Paine, the grazing specialist at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, offers lessons from 11 dairy marketers using grass-fed milk in their products. In *Grass-based Dairy Products: Challenges and Opportunities*, Paine writes that grass-fed milk, or milk from cows that graze fresh pasture, is gaining popularity for its unique flavor, color, and physical properties.



"My goal with this publication was to help this fledgling sector grow by allowing them to learn from both the successes and the challenges that others have had," said Paine. "This is how the grazing community has built its collective grazing skills. Now we can help each other build the market side of the industry."

One of the best known among grass-fed products is Pleasant Ridge Reserve cheese made by Uplands Cheese Company near Dodgeville. Dairy farmers Mike Gingrich and Dan Patenaude developed this cheese in 2001 after researching European cheeses from traditional grass-based dairies in the Alps. "Mike and Dan have a great success story," Paine said. "They came up with a cheese recipe that complements the flavor and texture of grass-fed milk. Their cheese won 'Best of Show' the first time they entered it in the American Cheese Society contest. That got them off to a good start!"

Not all of the marketing efforts summarized in the publication have gone so well. Some have struggled to gain a foothold in the marketplace and one or two didn't survive. The process of pooling milk from multiple grass-based dairies, getting it to a processing plant, making a consistent, high quality product, and getting it onto store shelves has proved challenging for some of these mostly farmer-owned companies.

Paine is also coordinating a three-year research project to investigate the differences between grass-fed and conventional milk. "Processors who have worked with pasture milk know that it looks, handles, and tastes different," she said. "Our goal is to characterize those differences and match this specialty milk to the types of products that are best suited to it."

The research team includes some of the farmer-marketers highlighted in the publication, plus University of Wisconsin forage, dairy, and food scientists. "We're also working with two chefs who are helping us understand the culinary differences of grass-fed milk," said Paine. "With the research project and the publication, we're hoping to build a strong foundation for a grass-fed dairy market."

For a free copy of the publication or for more information on the research, contact Paine at 608-224-5120 or <mailto:laura.paine@wi.gov>. The publication is also available on line by [clicking here](#).

4. Industry News

- ❖ **Focus on Goats Conference:** The Wisconsin Dairy Goat Initiative coordinated the third annual state-wide conference on dairy goats in October. Twenty-two vendor/exhibitors participated in the event, which drew attendees from Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, and Canada. Speakers came from Colorado, New Mexico, Florida, Iowa, and Wisconsin. More than 225 attended the conference during the two-day period and heard presentations. An evening Cheese Reception hosted at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville attracted more than 100 attendees and featured goat cheese makers, as well as Alice in Dairyland as special guests.



- ❖ **Yves Berger Recognized by Dairy Sheep Organization:** Yves Berger, researcher at the Spooner Agricultural Research Station, received the William J. Boylan Distinguished Service Award from the Dairy Sheep Association of North America during the organization's annual meeting and symposium held November 12-14, 2009 in Albany, New York. His citation reads, "In recognition of truly significant contributions to the growth of the dairy sheep industry in North America through development of the only dairy sheep research farm in North America, conduct of dairy sheep production research with industry impact, initiation of the annual Great Lakes Dairy Sheep Symposium, and active involvement in the cooperative marketing of sheep milk." Congratulations, Yves!

5. Upcoming Important Dates

- **Jan. 21-22: Wisconsin Local Food Summit, Midwest Value Added Agriculture Conference & Value Added Agriculture College. Eau Claire, Wis.**

These three events offer educational sessions and networking opportunities for farmers, farm suppliers and distributors; agricultural educators, service providers and agencies; farmers' market managers and vendors; local food buyers and advocates; and others with an interest in sustainable agriculture. Keynote speakers will be urban farmer and MacArthur Fellow Will Allen, writer Michael Perry, author of *Population 485*, and dietician, nutritionist and journalist Melinda Hemmelgarn. A wide-ranging choice of breakout sessions and round table discussions related to marketing, production, business management, bio-energy, building regional food economies, and local food projects will be offered. This year, for the first time, the conference and summit will be preceded by the Value Added Agriculture College, consisting of half- and full-day workshops. To see a complete schedule and register, go to <http://www.rivercountryrcd.org/valad.html>.

- **Feb 9-10: Economics of Sustainability & the Dairy Industry. Madison, Wis.**

As part of the third annual ACEEE Forum on Energy Efficiency in Agriculture, the Dairy Business Innovation Center is partnering with this national organization to co-host a special conference exploring The Economics of Sustainability and the Dairy Industry. The DBIC-sponsored event will kick off with a Wisconsin cheese reception on the evening of Feb. 9, and an all-day series of speakers and workshops on Feb. 10. All events will take place at the Monona Terrace. Save the date. Visit <http://www.aceee.org/conf/10ag/index.htm> for details as they develop.

- **March 6-10: Wisconsin Dairy Sheep School. Spooner, Wis.**

The DBIC, the Spooner Agricultural Research Station, and the University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension have teamed up to host the first Wisconsin Dairy Sheep School in March 2010. The school will train new producers in an effort to increase the supply of quality sheep milk. The five-day course will be held at the Spooner Agricultural Research Station and will feature lectures on topics including: weaning and artificial rearing of lambs, mastitis and milk quality, parlor design and milking machine function, ewe nutrition, and milk handling regulations. In addition, the course will provide hands-on experience in the milking parlor and caring for young lambs, reinforcing information provided in daily lectures. As space in the milking parlor and barn are limited, course enrollment will be capped at 14 students. Enrollment preference will be given to Wisconsin residents and those interested in commercial dairy sheep production. For a course brochure and application, [click here](#).

- **March 16-18, 2010: World Championship Cheese Contest. Madison, Wis.**

Participate with cheesemakers and buttermakers from around the world in the 28th biennial World Championship Cheese Contest, to be held at the Monona Terrace in Madison, Wis. This contest is an objective assessment of cheeses and butters and awards Best of Class gold, silver and bronze medals to the finest products in 80 classes. Key contest dates include:

- * Entry Deadline: February 18, 2010
- * Entries Delivered: March 10, 2010
- * Contest Judging: March 16 - 18, 2010
- * Awards Banquet: April 22, 2010

For more information, visit the [contest website](#).

The Dairy Business Innovation Center offers technical assistance to dairy producers and processors in developing value-added dairy products, business planning and market development. For more information, visit www.dbicusa.org or contact Jeanne Carpenter at 608-358-7837, email: jeanne@wordartisanllc.com.

