FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

United Dairy Industry of Michigan

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Hi-res images for download: <https://www.mediafire.com/folder/itoxbq34jhbww/Food_Security>



**Dairy Plays a Vital Role in Food Security**

*Michigan dairy farmers* *take aim at food insecurity through partnerships, donations and grant programs.*

*OKEMOS, Mich.* [Sept. 27, 2022] – Milk is one of the most frequently requested items at food banks. But it’s one of the least likely to be donated because temperature requirements can make milk difficult to move and store. To help, Michigan dairy farmers have partnered with organizations, companies and each other to ensure milk and other dairy foods are available to all residents.

While farmers work to ensure dairy food availability year ‘round, these activities are especially highlighted this month. September is designated Hunger Action Month to spread the word about the hunger crisis in America and dedicate time to be part of the solution.

“Hunger doesn’t discriminate, and it affects every community,” says Cortney Freeland, United Dairy Industry of Michigan (UDIM) Director of Health and Wellness. “Historically, food banks relied on donated or near-date milk from rescue programs. Today, our food banks are purchasing dairy. They are committed to the value milk plays in the lives of the neighbors they serve.”

**Fighting food insecurity**

Michigan dairy farmers are making a difference.

“When families have to choose between buying food and paying bills, nutritious food often becomes a luxury they cannot afford. UDIM and Michigan dairy farmers have been dedicated partners, working alongside us to get families, and especially children, the fresh milk they want and need to thrive,” says Gerry Brisson, President and CEO of Gleaners Community Food Bank. “In the past year, we have been able to distribute 879,000 gallons of milk, a true demonstration of how through collaboration we can solve real challenges for our communities.”

For more than seven years, UDIM has made it a priority to work proactively with Michigan food banks on behalf of dairy farmers. The goal is to ensure these partners can not only provide dairy foods but also have the infrastructure to store and distribute fresh dairy.

These initiatives include:

* Growing relationships with the seven Feeding America food banks serving the state
* Creating retail programs encouraging grocery store customers to donate milk
* Providing nutrition education resources to food bank clients about the importance of dairy in their diet and how to use dairy
* Building UDIM’s food pantry grant program

Plus, for the past five years, UDIM has helped create infrastructure for the distribution of dairy products through food banks. Six of seven food banks in the state now have dedicated dairy trucks provided by Michigan dairy farmers as part of their fleet.

“Food banks play a critical role in ensuring young children to older adults have access to nutrient-rich foods like milk and other dairy products,” says Phil Knight, Executive Director of the Food Bank Council of Michigan. “Dairy farmers began a partnership with Feeding America in 2012 to ensure dairy products are available to nourish people in need. Our Feeding America network of food banks across the state are dedicated to ensuring milk is available for Michigan residents.”

**Generosity in action**

“Two years ago, as our farmers saw more need in their local communities due to the pandemic, we started a grant program to provide a dairy cooler and dairy foods to food pantries,” says Corby Werth, UDIM President and dairy farmer from Alpena, Mich. "It’s a great feeling to be a part of an industry that helps get nutrition to those who need it.”

To date, UDIM and Michigan dairy farmers have placed 61 coolers in local food pantries and provided 10 infrastructure grants and 25 dairy food grants to help our neighbors gain access to dairy foods.

The giving doesn’t stop at the farm gate.

* Busch’s Fresh Market in metro Detroit is in its sixth year of hosting a twice-annual milk drive at 16 retail locations. This past spring, customer donations at these stores helped purchase more than 46,000 gallons of milk for the local food bank. The store’s next drive will start at the end of September.
* Last summer, Spartan Nash hosted a milk drive across its entire Midwest footprint, which includes over 130 stores, and funded the purchase of more than 127,000 gallons of milk.

Ultimately, supporting the availability of nutritious dairy foods provides an immediate benefit to families in need while building a strong future for dairy sales in the years to come. Additionally, these initiatives help support Michigan dairy farm families through incremental milk sales.

“Our farmers work to ensure our neighbors have dairy at a time in their lives when they need it the most,” concludes Freeland. “By doing so, we are creating space in their fridge for milk and dairy foods. When people can move on from depending on food banks in their time of need, they will remember the vital role milk plays in their life by providing the full nutrition package. Offering our help now helps secure a spot for dairy in their grocery carts in the future.”

To learn more about the dairy checkoff or how you can be involved in promoting dairy in your community, go to [milkmeansmore.org](https://www.milkmeansmore.org/).

**About the United Dairy Industry of Michigan**

The United Dairy Industry of Michigan (UDIM) is dedicated to serving Michigan's hard-working dairy farm families and promoting Michigan's locally produced dairy products. UDIM is the umbrella organization for the American Dairy Association and Dairy Council of Michigan. These non-profit organizations provide dairy product promotion and nutrition education services on behalf of their funding members.

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**Captions:**

**Alpena food pantry photo with Corby Werth.jpg:** *Michigan dairy farmer and UDIM President Corby Werth (right) joined efforts to provide a cooler for dairy foods to the Alpena Food Pantry.*

**Cooler-Edit\_IMG.jpg:** *Michigan dairy farmers have donated more than 60 milk coolers like this one to ensure dairy foods stay cool and fresh at area food pantries.*

**Gleaners trucks\_delivery.jpg:** *Michigan dairy farmers and Gleaners are dedicated partners to help get families, and especially children, the fresh milk they want and need to thrive.*

**Loading truck from milk drive.jpg:** *Michigan dairy farmers have joined with retail partners to sponsor milk drives several times throughout the year, resulting in generous purchases of dairy foods for area food banks.*