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U.S. Dairy Leaders Promise Steadfast Commitment to Mexico

MEXICO CITY –The leaders of three major U.S. dairy organizations Wednesday promised to continue a strong commitment to their time-tested partnership with Mexico’s dairy industry and consumers.

“We have always seen Mexico as a partner first and a customer second,” U.S. Dairy Export Council (USDEC) President and CEO Tom Vilsack told Mexican dairy leaders attending the National Dairy Forum in Mexico City. “That’s why we intend to continue working with you and your industry to expand the consumption of dairy products in a way that benefits both countries.”

“Mexico is our friend, ally and most important trading partner,” said Jim Mulhern, President and CEO of the National Milk Producers Federation. “Our goal this week in visiting Mexico is to communicate our steadfast commitment to our partnership with the Mexican industry, even as we continue to explore ways to deepen that relationship by working on issues of mutual benefit.”

“The United States proudly provides the majority of imported dairy products to Mexican consumers,” said Michael Dykes, D.V.M., President and CEO of the International Dairy Foods Association, which represents dairy food companies and their suppliers. “We strongly believe that it’s in the best interest of both countries to preserve and enhance our excellent trade relationship, now and in the future.”

Vilsack and Mulhern spoke at the Femeleche conference here, which brought together Mexican dairy industry leaders, farmers and government officials. As part of the coordinated message of collaboration and partnership with Mexico, the three CEOs of the leading U.S. dairy policy organizations are also meeting with a variety of government officials, including the Mexican Minister of Agriculture and the U.S. Ambassador to Mexico.

The reassurance from U.S. dairy leaders comes during a time of political uncertainty on both sides of the border.

Since NAFTA became law in 1994, U.S. dairy exports to Mexico have more than quadrupled to \$1.2 billion. That makes Mexico the U.S. dairy industry's No. 1 export market, accounting for nearly one-fourth of all U.S. dairy exports last year.

Put another way, exports to Mexico require the milk of 345,000 American cows. They create approximately 30,000 U.S. jobs, according to USDA, and \$3.6 billion in U.S. economic impact.

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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 cooperatives produce the majority of the U.S. milk supply, making NMPF the voice of dairy producers on Capitol Hill and with government agencies. For more on NMPF's activities, visit www.nmpf.org.

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 International Dairy Foods Association (IDFA), Washington, D.C., represents the nation's dairy manufacturing and marketing industries and their suppliers with a membership of nearly 525 companies within a \$125-billion a year industry. IDFA is composed of three constituent organizations: the Milk Industry Foundation (MIF), the National Cheese Institute (NCI) and the International Ice Cream Association (IICA). IDFA's nearly 200 dairy processing members operate more than 600 manufacturing facilities and range from large multi-national organizations to single-plant companies. Together they represent more than 85 percent of the milk, cultured products, cheese, ice cream and frozen desserts produced and marketed in the United States. Visit IDFA at www.idfa.org.