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Governor Walker's Team Visits Vita Plus, Reaffirms Strong Support for Farmers, Agricultural Industries Facing Challenges of Severe Drought

MADISON – In a visit to livestock feed company Vita Plus, Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary Reggie Newson and other key members of Governor Walker's team reaffirmed the Walker Administration's strong support for farmers and the agricultural industry challenged this summer by record temperatures and severe drought.

"We want farmers throughout Wisconsin and ag industries like Vita Plus to know that we support them and will do all that we can to help them get through this difficult period," Secretary Newson said. "The challenges they face are our challenges, too. The drought affects all of us, farmers and consumers. Agriculture is a \$59 billion-a-year industry that accounts for one out of every 10 jobs in Wisconsin."

Joining Secretary Newson were Jeff Lyon, Deputy Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP), appearing on behalf of DATCP Secretary Ben Brancel, and Paul Jadin, Chief Executive Office of the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC).

In a statement, DATCP Secretary Brancel urged farmers to explore all options before deciding to chop their corn crop for forage or cull herds. Among the resources he cited were the Ready Wisconsin website, <http://ready.wi.gov/>; the UW-Extension's Farmer-to-Farmer network, a central exchange site, and DATCP's Wisconsin Farm Center. Farmers can contact the Farm Center toll-free at 1-800-942-2474 or by email at farmcenter@wisconsin.gov, weekdays from 7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

"During a drought, it is critical to work with your local University of Wisconsin-Extension, veterinarians and nutritionists to make the best decisions for each individual operation," DATCP Secretary Brancel said. "I encourage farmers to contact the Wisconsin Farm Center to locate the best resources available for your individual situation. Staff can direct you to assistance with financial planning to accommodate extra costs, mediation with creditors or find the right contact for locating feed or needed help."

Vita Plus CEO Bob Tramburg said that, while drought conditions vary from one region to the next and affect individual livestock operations differently within regions, his company is committed to working with customers who have suffered economically as a result.

"Vita Plus as a supplier to the livestock industry is doing everything we can to help our customers through these challenges," Tramburg said. "We are helping to evaluate all options available to each customer, given the economic effects that we know a reduction in buying power could have on local communities."

During today's visit, Secretary Newson joined leaders from WEDC and DATCP in commending Vita Plus for its contributions to the state's economy, particularly the agriculture sector. Leaders toured the company's distribution center and learned more about the company's history and labor market needs.

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Secretary Newson cited DWD programs and services in support of the agricultural community and ag industries. He cited training grants DWD has awarded to regional partners, such as the South Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board, to help determine the workforce needs of the agri-business community and other sectors and structure training programs to meet those needs. In addition, he cited adult and youth apprenticeship programs with career paths in agriculture, and a DWD-Easter Seals partnership that helps farmers, disabled due to injuries, continue farming. Over 4,000 disabling accidents occur on farms each year.

WEDC CEO Jadin cited his agency's partnership with DATCP in Wisconsin exports.

"Last year, Wisconsin agricultural exports totaled a record \$2.85 billion," Jadin said "At the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, we support farmers and the agri-business community by partnering with DATCP on trade missions and providing technical assistance to increase exports of Wisconsin commodities, technology and manufactured goods. We also partner with agricultural groups on business development initiatives in the areas of food and beverage processing, commercialization of dairy product research and aquaculture."

Pat Schramm, Executive Director of the South Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board, also took part in the visit and tour of the Vita Plus Distribution Center and reinforced the Board's strong commitment to work with employers in the agriculture industry to find the skilled workers they need.

"We will do all that we can to help the Department of Workforce Development as it seeks to provide the critical services, resources, and support to those workers affected by the drought," she said.