The University of Wisconsin School of Veterinary Medicine (SVM) is world renowned for research and education, with many of its faculty and scientists working to address some of society’s most pressing questions, including those that are crucial to the economic and cultural vitality of our state, our nation, and beyond.

One such program is The Dairyland Initiative, created in 2010 using scientific principles developed by researchers at the SVM to help optimize dairy cattle health, performance, and well-being. Primarily a web-based resource for ideas and best practices related to dairy cattle, with over 118,000 users globally, The Dairyland Initiative’s recommendations are continually updated with the latest research findings and clinical experience that farmers can use to make economically viable, practical solutions for herds of all sizes. The results are evident not just in Wisconsin but around the world. Through virtual learning modules and in-person interactive workshops on housing, lameness, calf health, barn ventilation, and automated milking system facility design, the impact of The Dairyland Initiative’s research can be seen far and wide—most recently in the building and management guidelines for the Australian dairy industry, with the aim of promoting healthier cows, improved animal welfare, and more efficient and productive dairies.

With the economic impact of the dairy industry exceeding $45 billion in Wisconsin alone, the importance of improving animal welfare cannot be overstated. Since its launch in 2010, The Dairyland Initiative has been working hard to ensure a prosperous, modern dairy industry and to assure consumers that the food produced is safe and the animals are well cared for. It is a critically important objective, particularly as the industry faces increased financial burdens and other unprecedented pressures in recent years.

The Dairyland Initiative is constantly evolving to meet the industry’s latest challenges by collaborating with colleagues on campus and elsewhere. Working with a group in Finland, they conducted research on labor efficiency and the importance of barn design in robotic milking systems, challenging the industry to adopt higher standards of care. Working with collaborators at the University of Wisconsin College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, they conducted research to demonstrate how higher air speeds in the summer can facilitate greater resting times and improved productivity and subsequently developed on-farm and virtual workshops to train people how to assess existing ventilation and cooling systems to help cows handle hotter climates. They continue to train veterinarians to perform diagnostic lung ultrasounds to identify pneumonia in young calves to help farmers improve existing housing and use antimicrobials in a safer and more targeted manner. They have also supported the development of a new tablet-based game that aims to revolutionize how we train on-farm workers to move cows in a safe and stress-free manner. This app will join a suite of other diagnostic and decision-support apps for dairy herds developed by The Dairyland Initiative to run on smartphone and tablet devices that are available in English, Spanish, French, and German. In the pipeline is research on providing support tools to farmers to facilitate culling decisions on farms as well as the development of a Dairyland Initiative Podcast to engage younger members of our target audience in the agricultural community.

The Dairyland Initiative operates independently of state funding thanks to the generosity and support of our program sponsors and revenue generation from its activities. Over $1 million has been raised so far, and The Dairyland Initiative is thankful to its premier sponsor, Saputo, without whose support it could not continue to support the dairy industry.