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Shop locally, shop responsibly during COVID-19

A commentary by Randy Romanski, Interim Secretary, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) and Brandon Scholz, President and CEO, Wisconsin Grocers Association



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As we continue to navigate the ever-changing circumstances of COVID-19, we can take comfort that we live in a state that produces an abundance of nutritious, high-quality foods. From fruits and vegetables to milk and meat, Wisconsin agriculture is diverse and plentiful. You don't have to drive far in Wisconsin to see the farms and fields that feed all of us every day.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 has impacted the entire world, including our food producers, processors, and distributors. We've seen disruptions to the food supply chain, and expect there could be more as the pandemic continues. Despite those disruptions, grocery stores across Wisconsin are working tirelessly to be sure we have consistent access to a variety of fresh, frozen, and packaged foods.

You may have seen some empty shelves at your local store, but it's not because there is no food. In most cases, it simply means the store is in the process of restocking, or is working to manage its supply to ensure all shoppers can buy what they need. Similarly, you might see higher sticker prices than you are used to on some items. This doesn't necessarily mean the store is trying to dishonestly pocket more of your money. In fact, in many cases that higher price reflects legitimate cost increases further up the supply chain. Although many of us only see the price we pay in the grocery store, it's important to remember the multitude of factors that can change that price.

The fact is that there is and will be food available in Wisconsin. There's no shortage of food; there are disruptions in the usual flow of the food supply chain. We know it can be frustrating, but there are a number of ways you can help:

- **Shop responsibly.** Only buy what you need, and please don't hoard. We always want to support Wisconsin producers, but when one person buys two or three times what they usually need, it may mean someone else in greater need gets nothing. Buying responsibly also helps your local grocery store manage their supply more effectively.
- **Seek to understand.** Take some time to learn more about where your food comes from – and how it moves from the farm to your plate. Grocery stores of every size, and the many employees who staff them, are an important part of the food supply chain and our communities. You can find more educational resources at WisconsinGrocers.com.
- **Think locally, buy locally.** With so much being grown or raised in Wisconsin, the food you see at the grocery store may have come from a farm just down the road. One unexpected development of COVID-19 is that local producers are working even more closely with local processors to move their product. Local retailers are also looking for additional opportunities to connect that dot between producers and consumers.
- **Share your thanks.** Now is the time to express your gratitude to our essential workforce, including those in the food distribution network. Show your appreciation in your local community or on social media for those who stock our shelves and fill our plates every day.

COVID-19 has changed many things about our lives, and there's no doubt it will have a lasting impact on all of us. But throughout this global public health emergency, food and those who produce and distribute it have remained essential to everyone's well-being. By shopping responsibly, learning more about our food supply chain, thinking and buying local, and supporting the essential workers who work hard each day to make nutritious, high-quality food available, we will move through these challenging times together.

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