

# GA MILK REVIEW

DECEMBER 2025



## HEADLINES:

- Congress Finally Passes Whole Milk Bill
- From the Executive Director's Desk
- Don't Miss the 2026 GA Dairy Conference
- Walmart Opens New Milk Processing Plant in Valdosta
- Farmers Can Begin Preparing for Hurricane Helene Block Grant
- Farm Spotlight: Leatherbrook Holsteins



**The US Senate and US House of Representatives have passed the Whole Milk For Healthy Kids Act. The bill is now headed to the President for signature.**



## CONGRESS FINALLY PASSES WHOLE MILK BILL

On Monday, December 15th, the US House of Representatives passed the Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act (S.222). This followed the Senate's approval of the bill by unanimous consent on November 20th, 2025. The bill is now headed to the President's desk for his signature or veto. The push to return whole milk to schools has been a long-running grassroots campaign among dairy producers and supporters since changes to USDA school meal guidelines and the Dietary Guidelines for Americans listed skim and one-percent milk as the approved milk options for children and students. This bill, if signed into law, will give schools the option of serving whole or two percent milk as part of the USDA reimbursable school lunch and breakfast programs. Most schools have contracted out their milk supply for the remainder of the school year, but they could begin serving more milk options in the 2026/2027 school year.

In addition to the possible increase in fluid milk consumption among school-aged children, additional whole and 2% milk sales could lead to better milk checks for farmers. According to American Farm Bureau Economist Danny Munch, "Whole milk contains three times more fat than 1%, so reintroducing it would pull more butterfat into fluid use instead of butter, cheese, or powder. If 25%, 50%, or 75% of schools adopt whole milk, annual butterfat demand could rise by 13-18 million, 25-36 million and 38-55 million pounds, respectively. A near-universal shift could divert 45-66 million pounds of butter –about 2-3% of U.S. production – into bottled milk."

## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S DESK

At its peak readership, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution delivered more than 600,000 daily print editions across much of North Georgia. Today, nearly all of those readers have shifted to digital news. On December 31, 2025, the remaining 40,000 print subscribers will receive their final regular copy as the AJC becomes a solely digital news agency.

The reasons for the switch are no surprise. Most people now consume news online – often through social media – and the costs for printing and delivering the news (materials, labor, energy, etc.) have risen sharply, while the consumer's willingness to pay for printed paper has not. The year 2025 marks the end of an era for one of the South's largest newspapers.

Georgia Milk Producers, however, jumped back into the printing game in 2025 (albeit at a much, much smaller scale). This summer we revived the printed Georgia Milk Review newsletter. We hope you've enjoyed reading this physical copy of our most important and interesting news and items over the past few months.

When I joined GMP in 2022, I had never curated a newsletter. Initially I continued with the (mostly) weekly GMP E-News while also emailing out a monthly digital Milk Review. After a year, I made the decision to drop the Milk Review and focused solely on the E-News each week. Over time, though, a pattern emerged: a farmer would remember reading something of note in the E-news, but couldn't find it in his cluttered email inbox or trash folder. The information reached its intended audience, but it just as quickly disappeared amid the flood of notifications and alerts.

More than once, producers have told me they wanted something they could keep in the truck—something they could hold and look at. So we're giving this printed newsletter another try, hoping you'll find enough useful information here to leave it on the truck dash or pinned up in the office. I should note, it helps that you have a new Milk Review editor in GMP's Events & Outreach Coordinator, Mrs. Bethany Dyer.

Since you're likely reading this edition of the Milk Review between Christmas and New Year's, I'll take a moment to list some of GMP's 2025 highlights (aside from the paper newsletter) and outline some of our goals for 2026. If the inside of your truck looks anything like mine, you might even rediscover this very paper at the end of 2026 and be able to see just how well we did in the year prior.

### 2025 Highlights:

- GMP committed \$200,000 towards the purchase of bulk milk dispensers for schools. By partnering with The Dairy Alliance Youth Wellness staff, our financial commitment has led directly to the purchase and placement of 19 dispensers across 11 schools this semester with funds for another 20 or so dispensers next semester
- GMP made a four-year commitment to help fund two 4-H dairy programs: the commercial dairy heifer program and collegiate Dairy Challenge
- Successfully stopped legislation that would have created unfair dairy regulations favoring certain species of dairy animals and value-added processing over others
- Created the organization's first natural disaster preparedness database to aid in hurricane response
- Partnered with Georgia Department of Agriculture's Dairy Division to plan streamline reinstatement testing after permit suspension
- Helped create a dairy industry working group with UGA College of Agriculture leadership and The Dairy Alliance to plan for coordinated dairy research and extension support
- Successfully petitioned Georgia NRCS to revise agency position on funding for dairy expansions
- Collaborated with GA Fruit & Vegetable Association to host immigration enforcement and I-9 webinar for employers

### 2026 Goals:

- Host quarterly webinars focused on providing latest information on policies and management challenges facing dairy producers
- Develop long-term plan with UGA College of Ag and key stakeholders to launch a multi-department dairy research and extension program
- Secure additional funds for the purchase of school milk dispensers for Georgia schools
- Partner with State and National groups to secure additional funding for school milk purchases for whole and two percent milk
- Partner with Georgia Department of Economic Development, Georgia Department of Agriculture, University of Georgia, and allied groups to attract investment into new dairy processing and milk sales in the state and region
- Provide support to Georgia dairy farms seeking financial support for implementing conservation practices

Undoubtedly, new challenges and new opportunities will present themselves in 2026 that none of us anticipate now. Our team at GMP is here to tackle those challenges head-on, and I hope you'll call us when they do arise. I also hope you will be joining us in Savannah for the Georgia Dairy Conference on January 19 - 21 where you will receive our 2025 Annual Report. Should you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me directly at 229-221-3906 or [bryce@gamilk.org](mailto:bryce@gamilk.org).

Sincerely,



Bryce Trotter  
Executive Director, GMP

# DON'T MISS THE 2026 GA DAIRY CONFERENCE

## PRE-CONFERENCE SYMPOSIUM

We are excited to share that the Pre-Conference Symposium is returning to the 2026 Georgia Dairy Conference Monday, January 19th at 9:30 AM. This two-hour informal session will focus on What's New and What's Next in the Dairy Industry. We invite all of our farmers and guests to attend this educational opportunity, sponsored by our friends at FerAppease, Alta Genetics, Agrarian Solutions, and Agri-Services Agency. Modeled as our own version of "Dairy TedTalks," the Pre-Conference Symposium will focus on new technology and services that are driving the dairy industry forward. Be sure to stop by the symposium to hear from our outstanding lineup of speakers. Our speakers include:

- Dr. Jose Santos, University of Florida IFAS
- Greg Kowalewski, Aurora Oakwood Dairy
- Dr. Larry Roth, Agrarian Solutions
- Agri-Services Agency

## CE CREDITS AVAILABLE

Receive Continuing Education credits by attending the 2026 Georgia Dairy Conference! The Georgia Veterinary Medical Association is sponsoring the veterinary CE credits at GDC 2026. Veterinarians can earn up to seven credits by attending the general session seminars.

Georgia dairy farmers can also earn up to 3 CE credits towards their certified waste operator permit with the Georgia Department of Agriculture. In addition to two CE credit hours on Wednesday morning, we will be showing a video on nutrient management prior to Tuesday morning's general session seminars that can count towards 1 credit hour for the GDA requirements.

## SPOTLIGHT SYMPOSIUM ON MILK QUALITY

We're excited to offer a new series this year at the Georgia Dairy Conference. On Tuesday morning during our regularly scheduled general session seminars, we will have a Spotlight Symposium on Milk Quality, bringing together some of the US dairy industry's leading experts on milk quality, mastitis treatment and prevention. For the first time, the Georgia Dairy Conference will take a deep dive into this major production topic, bringing producers several industry leading points of view on the best practices to achieve higher milk quality, reduce dependence on antibiotics, and prevent mastitis altogether.

## WALMART OPENS NEW MILK PROCESSING PLANT IN VALDOSTA

Walmart held a ribbon-cutting ceremony for its new Valdosta milk processing facility on Tuesday, December 2nd. The ceremony included music from the Valdosta High School marching band, speeches from Walmart and local leaders from the Valdosta-Lowndes area, and donations to the Greater Valdosta United Way and Valdosta High School. The facility will become the largest fluid milk processing facility in America when it reaches full capacity. The first shipments of gallon and half gallon jugs out of the new Valdosta plant arrived on store shelves a little over a month ago. At full capacity, the plant leadership estimates the facility will service over 650 Walmart and Sam's Club locations in Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana.

GMP's Bryce Trotter, Matt Johnson, and Calvin Moody were able to attend along with representatives from The Dairy Alliance, Georgia Department of Agriculture, and USDA AMS.

## FARMERS CAN BEGIN PREPARING FOR HELENE BLOCK GRANT

Georgia Commissioner of Agriculture Tyler Harper announced at the Farm Bureau Convention on December 8 that the Georgia Department of Agriculture was finalizing its agreements with USDA to implement a block grant to provide disaster relief for producers impacted by Hurricane Helene. This program, which would be run entirely by GDA with USDA's blessing, would cover losses not included in traditional USDA programs. As part of the announcement, GDA created a Helene Block Grant website where producers can find updates on the block grant's status and view a list of the potential loss categories covered by the grant and the documents producers will be required to submit along with their application.

To view the list of commodities and loss categories and see the documentation requirements, visit [www.agr.georgia.gov/hurricane-helene-block-grant](http://www.agr.georgia.gov/hurricane-helene-block-grant).

GDA anticipates a full announcement with application period dates and more information on payment formulas soon.

*At the time of printing, GDA has not made any additional announcements. Any new developments on the block grant will be shared via our GMP E-news emails over the holidays.*

# FARMER SPOTLIGHT: MEET ADAM GRAFT

Spending summers on his grandfather's dairy farm in Ohio, Adam Graft had an appreciation for the dairy industry from a young age. He always knew that one day, he would like to operate his own dairy. After graduating from the University of Georgia College of Veterinary Medicine, he moved to California to practice veterinary medicine on dairy farms. He rented a small dairy in the region but didn't find much opportunity for growth. He met his wife, Jane, while in California, and they moved back to Georgia in 2005 to put down roots in the ground.

In his early years of dairy farming in the state, he rented a dairy in Barnesville, Georgia. The dairy was previously owned by a retired farmer, and when Adam took over, he started milking 300 cows. "Starting out with a smaller number of cows allowed me to figure out what worked and what didn't," said Adam.

After a few years in Barnesville, he had the opportunity to purchase a dairy dairy from two retirement age couples looking to get out of the business in Americus, Georgia. This was the start of Leatherbrook Holsteins.

Throughout the years, Adam has continued to develop and expand his operation. Today, he milks several times the amount of cows he started with 20 years ago. "It's a marathon, not a sprint," said Adam. "Today was built on yesterday."

Leatherbrook Holsteins has two parlors operating around the clock, one parallel and one rotary parlor. The rotary parlor has been a game changer to the operation, offering many benefits that have paid off in the long run. Increased milking efficiency, lower labor costs, and better cow comfort due to consistent milking environments are just a few of the benefits of the system.

Leatherbrook Holsteins also plants and harvests all of their own forages for feed. A unique approach to their hay harvest that has yielded positive results is chopping their hay for haylage and silage instead of baling it.

Farmers continue to be leaders in sustainable and environmental practices, and Adam is no exception. He installed a methane digester on the dairy, which constantly recycles manure and other organic materials. The system uses bacteria to break down cow manure and organic materials, which creates biogas. The biogas contains methane which is then captured and used to generate renewable natural gas creating recycled energy and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The remaining digestate is used as fertilizer for the crops.

Adam and his wife Jane have four children, Lee (19), Reese (17), Emmie (15), and James (13). Lee is currently in college at Cornell University. Both of the boys are interested in the dairy industry.

"My favorite thing about this industry is being able to control your own destination," said Adam. With time and patience, Leatherbrook Holsteins has grown into an industry-leading dairy in the Southeastern United States. Adam has always been committed to learning and expanding his knowledge base to make his goals a reality. He currently serves as Vice-President on the Georgia Milk Producers Board of Directors.

