**Operating committee highlights dairy priorities to policymakers in DC fly-in**USDEC organized a Capitol Hill “fly-in” following the spring Membership Meeting. Nine members of the USDEC Operating Committee remained in Washington, D.C., for a day-and-a-half of meetings with congressional representatives and administration officials on Wednesday and Thursday. Participants included USDEC Chairman Larry Hancock; Vice Chair Alex Peterson; Pennsylvania dairy farmer Marilyn Hershey; Patti Smith, DairyAmerica; Jing Hagert, Milk Specialties Global; Greg Rodriguez, MCT Dairies; Sheryl Meshke, AMPI, Jeff Schwager, Sartori; and Alison Rosenblum, Tillamook County Creamery Association.

Accompanied by USDEC President and CEO Krysta Harden, COO Martha Scott Poindexter and the USDEC Trade Policy team (Jaime Castaneda, Shawna Morris and Tony Rice), the group emphasized the need for increased funding for key FAS market development programs like the Market Access Program and for a larger U.S. government role in protecting common food names. The group also touched on the significant role exports play in the health of the entire U.S. dairy supply chain, the U.S. economy and jobs, as well as barriers to trade and ways to enhance global demand for U.S. dairy products and ingredients.

The packed agenda included meetings with:

* USDA officials, including staff from the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) and Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS).
* Officials in the USTR’s office, including Julie Callahan, assistant USTR for agricultural affairs.
* Several House members, including Rep. Marc Molinaro (R-NY); Rep. Randy Feenstra (R-IA); Rep. Michelle Fischbach (R-MN); Rep. Brad Finstad (R-MN), chairman of the House Subcommittee on Nutrition, Foreign Agriculture & Oversight; and Rep. Jim Costa (D-CA) Ranking Member of the Livestock Subcommittee.
* Several staff members from the Senate Agriculture and Finance Committees and the House Ways & Means Trade Subcommittee.