

Immigrant dairy workers strike to stop Wisconsin cheese company from violating their basic rights

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On August 12, 43 dairy workers at W&W Dairy in Monroe, Wisconsin, walked off the job and launched a strike against anti-immigrant measures imposed by their employer following the company's acquisition by the Kansas-based Dairy Farmers of America (DFA).

The strikers—nearly all of whom are long-term Hispanic immigrants—are demanding severance after being told to verify their immigration status through E-Verify, a measure that is understood by the workers to have been made with the complicity of the Trump administration's war against immigrants.

W&W Dairy, a producer of Hispanic-style cheeses, was purchased recently by DFA, which gave all employees until August 30 to provide proof of legal status through the E-Verify online system. While roughly half the nearly 100-strong workforce resigned immediately, the remaining 43 workers—some with decades of service—refused to comply without receiving three weeks of severance pay per year worked.

The company not only denied this demand but reportedly threatened to call ICE should workers engage in legally protected strike action.

The strikers have issued the following statement:

We are on strike because we demand that the company respect our rights as workers, that it recognize our seniority, provide us with fair compensation for the years we have worked, and not resort to threats or retaliation.

The workers have remained steadfast, demanding severance and denouncing ICE threats and workplace intimidation. Wisconsin Public Radio (WPR) reported that, according to one striker interviewed anonymously, the workforce “was like a family,” but “now, I just feel really

sad, because it feels like they divided us.”

A spokesperson for DFA said the company “takes compliance with state and federal labor laws very seriously and is committed to complying with federal employment eligibility requirements.” DFA claims that E-Verify is necessary due to their federal contracts, though it remains unclear whether any such contracts are fulfilled by this Wisconsin plant specifically.

E-Verify is an online platform run by the Department of Homeland Security that checks new hires' documentation against federal databases to confirm legal work authorization. While participation is voluntary for most employers, those holding federal contracts are required to use it.

The expansion of E-Verify allows companies to instantly screen and, in practice, purge immigrant workers from their workforce. For long-term employees—including those with pending status or unresolved documentation—mandatory E-Verify can mean the sudden loss of jobs and separation from families.

The process is notorious for errors, and immigrant advocates warn it serves as a tool for mass firings and racial profiling, enabling employers to threaten and retaliate against workers raising demands for increased wages or safe working conditions.

The anti-immigration enforcement by DFA comes as no surprise. Dairy Farmers of America (DFA) is the largest dairy cooperative in the United States and one of the world's leading milk processors. The cooperative is farmer-owned, meaning there are no public shareholders and no shares traded on stock exchanges.

Headquartered in Kansas City, Kansas, DFA is owned by more than 11,500 family dairy farmers spread across 47 states. The cooperative structure gives dairy producers a stake in the organization, differentiating it from the corporate and Wall Street investor model that is common in most large food conglomerates.

However, both the size and economic scale of DFA are substantial. The organization handles nearly 30 percent of the US milk supply, making it a dominant force in both production and processing. Its annual revenues have been among the highest in the global dairy industry, reaching an estimated \$20 billion in recent years.

DFA employs more than 19,000 people across its various processing, distribution and administrative operations, with some estimates placing total employment at over 20,000. Its member farms supply the bulk of raw milk, which is then processed into a wide variety of consumer products and food ingredients under both proprietary and partner brands.

DFA operates an extensive network of more than 380 manufacturing and processing facilities across the US. These sites produce a wide range of dairy products, including fluid milk, cheese, butter, powdered milk, ice cream and specialty ingredients sold to food manufacturers worldwide.

Although DFA's production assets are located within the United States, the cooperative is global in reach, exporting dairy ingredients and finished products and engaging in joint ventures and partnerships—such as with Fonterra in New Zealand—to serve international markets. This blend of domestic infrastructure and global sales allows DFA to play a major role in both the domestic and international dairy sectors.

According to publicly available information, DFA made significant political contributions in the 2023–2024 election cycle through its political action committees and the donations of its members and employees. DFA's committees and individuals contributed a total of \$427,471 to federal campaigns, the vast majority—historically above 70 percent—going to Republican candidates and party committees.

Information from OpenSecrets and other sources shows that DFA contributed \$363,300 to candidates, \$95,602 to party committees and \$117,108 to individuals, with Republicans as the overwhelming recipients.

Meanwhile, the workforce at DFA includes a significant portion that is unionized. The International Brotherhood of Teamsters is present in over 35 DFA locations, and approximately 2,000 employees work under union contracts at the cooperative's plants.

The attack on the former W&W Dairy workers is part of the escalating assault on immigrants orchestrated by the Trump White House, DHS and ICE since January. Over the last two years, ICE raids have increased exponentially, with workplace roundups targeting both undocumented and legally present immigrant workers.

Under the Trump administration, ICE has been directed to meet arrest quotas of up to 1,500 per day, carrying out operations outside courthouses, schools and other sites.

These policies have resulted in thousands of deportations and direct violations of constitutional rights, with reports of Fourth Amendment abuses during workplace raids and indiscriminate detentions of workers with no criminal records.

The anti-immigrant hysteria has culminated in the widespread construction and expansion of detention facilities across the country, such as the Florida prison camp called Alligator Alcatraz and the planned facility in Indianapolis called Speedway Slammer.

The use of these names is a measure of the inhumane conditions in the facilities. Since October 2024 at least 12 people have died in ICE detention, matching the total for the previous year and putting 2025 on track to set a record for fatalities by year-end.

Many deaths are the result of medical neglect and lack of basic care. Even more horrifying is the documented separation of children from their parents, often without due process, inflicting lifelong trauma and psychological harm on thousands of families. Human rights investigations have condemned these centers as inhumane, warning that further deaths remain “inevitable” under current conditions.

The stand taken by the Monroe dairy workers is significant and presages the mass struggles of the entire working class against the assault on immigrants and others by the fascist administration of Donald Trump.

By taking strike action against employer intimidation and the threat of being targeted through the E-Verify system—and by issuing their own demands for severance compensation—the workers are taking a stand in defense of their own fundamental rights and pointing the way forward for all workers and young people around the US and throughout the world.

In the face of the Trump administration's deepening attacks on democratic rights and blatant violation of the constitution—along with the complicity of the Democratic Party in facilitating these measures—workers everywhere must organize independently of the reactionary nationalist and anti-immigrant union apparatus and mobilize their enormous power to support and come to the aid of the immigrant workers on strike in Monroe, Wisconsin.



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