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The flagship industry in a pivotal swing state faces an economic crisis.

By **Alan Rappoport**

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KENDALL, Wis. — For decades, Denise and Tom Murray rose before 5 a.m. and shuffled through mud and snow to milk cows on the farm that has been in their family since 1939. This month, after years of falling milk prices and mounting debt, the Murrays sold their last milk cow, taking pictures while holding back tears as the final one was loaded onto a truck and taken away.

“It’s awful hard to see them go out the last time,” said Ms. Murray, 53. “It’s scary because you don’t know what your next paycheck is going to be.”

Wisconsin is known as “America’s Dairyland,” but the milk makers who gave the state its moniker are vanishing, falling prey to a variety of impediments, including President Trump and his global trade war.

Wisconsin dairy farms, like the Murray farm in Kendall, Wis., are facing financial strain from falling milk prices and Mr. Trump’s trade war.

Matthew Hintz for The New York Times

“Low dairy prices have made it so hard for small farms to hang on,” said Josh Murray, 22, who is studying animal science and helping his family try to transition the farm to beef. While the Murrays received about \$400 from Mr. Trump’s farm aid program, it was not enough to keep their milking operations afloat.

“In every aspect, it’s not worth it — it’s not worth the fight,” he said.

For many farmers who have been transitioning away from milk to other products, the trade wars have been the final straw. The warning signs have been flashing for a while, as milk prices declined precipitously in the last five years to below \$17 per 100 pounds from almost \$26. The rise of corporate farms and more efficient milking processes have led to an oversupply as consumption of milk has waned nationally.

Denise Murray and her family sold their last milk cow this month as they transition their Wisconsin farm to produce beef rather than dairy. Ms. Murray, who makes scented soaps from goat milk in her spare time, said they hoped that raising beef cattle would be more profitable. Matthew Hintz for The New York Times

Josh Murray, 22, is studying animal science and helping his family try to transition the

farm to beef. Matthew Hintz for The New York Times

Katya Voelker and their two children on the farm. The Voelkers sold 20 milk cows this year and the remaining 40 are expected to be gone by September, as the farm transitions to producing grain and crops.
Matthew Hintz for The New York Times

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