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Beshear touts support for ag tech during visit to WKU's SmartHolstein Lab

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Gov. Andy Beshear waves a Western Kentucky University Department of Minter, D-Bowling Green, left, Senior Advisor to the Governor Rocky Adkerson while touring the university's SmartHolstein Lab at the Agri Bowling Green, Ky., on Thursday, Nov. 18, 2021. (Grace Ramey/photo@bgdailynews.com)

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INFORMATION**

SLIDE SHOW:
Gov. Andy
Beshear tours
WKU's
SmartHolstein
Lab

Suited up in plastic booties, Gov. Andy Beshear sidestepped stray cow pies Thursday as he toured the dairy farm facilities at Western Kentucky University's SmartHolstein Lab, which receives state funding to study and refine genetic traits that optimize milk production.

Stopping in Bowling Green for several events connected to the Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce, Beshear got an up-close look at the lab's capabilities.

Just off Nashville Road at the WKU Agriculture and Research Center, the lab uses wearable "Fitbits for cows" to track important biometric data correlated with milk production. The cattle also rest on a giant mattress aimed at maximizing comfort and minimizing stress.

"I actually think the mattress that these cows sleep on is better than mine," Beshear joked Thursday.

As a gaggle of local government and WKU dignitaries dogged Beshear all along the way, the cows looked on

blankly, here and there reaching out in an attempt to gnaw on a photographer's camera.

At the end of the tour, Beshear paused to offer his take on the facility's operations.

"This is an incredibly exciting tour because it shows that we are on the cutting edge," Beshear told several reporters.

Appearing alongside Beshear, state Rep. Patti Minter, D-Bowling Green, echoed that sentiment and opened her remarks by describing herself as the daughter of a beef farmer and the granddaughter of a dairy farmer.

"This kind of genetic research and technology is going to benefit not just southcentral Kentucky but the entire world," Minter said, stressing the pride she feels to be a faculty member at WKU and to represent Bowling Green in the Kentucky House.

In terms of resource consumption, dairy production has the highest environmental footprint by far.

A 2018 study published in Science estimated that dairy produces about three times more greenhouse gas emissions than plant-based milk. Dairy production is also much more land-use intensive, requiring generally nine times more land than any plant-based alternative.

Water use is also high for cow's milk, requiring more than 600 gallons of water for every gallon of milk produced.

Still, agritech is one of Kentucky's most important sectors, and Thursday's appearance was an opportunity for Beshear – who recently filed for reelection in 2023 – to signal his support for the industry.

“We are seeing a world where water is drying up (Fresno, Calif.) and the West Coast. We are seeing a growing world population to where we have to innovate. We have to increase our yield. We have to increase the amount of milk production,” he said, emphasizing that it's not just scientific advancement for the sake of scientific advancement: “This is

incredibly important for the future of
our country and the future of our
world.”

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