

Region's dairy leaders meet to discuss concerns

BY CURT HARLER

LEOLA — Dairy leaders from eight southeastern Pennsylvania counties met Tuesday to discuss a wide range of dairy concerns.

Top on the list is the reconstituted milk proposal, a petition from the Community Nutrition Institute for a public hearing on the regulatory treatment of reconstituted milk under the Federal Order system.

The meeting was called by Jere Skiles, chairman of the Lancaster County Farmers' Association milk marketing committee.

In attendance were several dairy marketing experts and representatives from Lancaster, Chester, Berks, Bucks, Montgomery, Lehigh, Lebanon and Franklin counties.

Members felt the meeting was successful enough that they agreed to meet on a quarterly basis. The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for somewhere in Lancaster County this summer.

Skiles said he asked for the meeting because he felt dairy committees were not really doing their job.

He pointed out that dairy farming is the state's largest agricultural industry.

He said the meetings were to distribute general information.

"If a reporter calls a dairy leader, the farmer will get proper information out to the consumer if he is well informed. These meetings should give us the chance to get that information and exchange ideas."



Jere Skiles, left, chaired a meeting of Pennsylvania Farmers' Association dairy leaders held in Leola. Topics of discussion included parity and the CNI proposal on reconstituted milk.

Among those impressed with the meeting were Berks County representatives Don Duncan, Robesonia; and John Stump, Bernville.

Duncan pointed out that farmers often don't get the chance to hear the kind of expertise that was available at the meeting.

"We got a full story plus the behind-the-scenes things," he noted.

To promote free discussion, the workshop part of the meeting was closed to the public.

"We constantly are being hit for what we have," Duncan continued. "We'll all get ulcers before we find a solution."

Stump said the meeting

gave some direction, gave hints as to which way to go.

He said a proposed pricing program to drop parity in times of surplus should help cut back on surplus milk.

The proposal, explained by Farm Bureau's Hollis Hatfield, calls for a sliding scale on the dairy support price.

Hatfield pointed out the potential for problems of using parity as a political tool.

Under the proposal outlined, if the government is buying up to three percent of the milk marketed by all dairymen, then the parity level would be between 80 and 90 percent.

If government purchases represent three to five percent of milk marketed, then the parity level would drop to the 75 to 80 percent range to discourage production.

If the government buys over five percent of the milk produced, the parity level would be 75 percent.

More important to some farmers was discussion of the CNI proposal.

John Stoner, Franklin County, said he thought he knew about the reconstituted milk proposal before he came to the meeting but he discovered there was more to it than meets the eye.

"They say it is to get cheaper milk for low income families," he started. "But those families can get dry milk right now and add water to it."

"Really, the CNI proposal is a tool of consumer advocates to undermine some of the dairyman's best marketing interests," he said.

Stoner pointed out those at the meeting took no stand on the proposal. Most were against it. He added there is a chance the hearings never will take place.

Norm Hershey, Intercourse, said the meeting brought out the full potential of what could happen if the

CNI hearings ever got started.

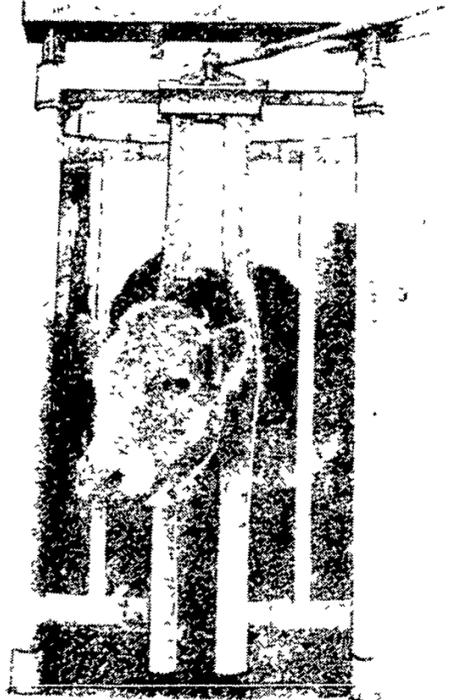
"They could go much farther than what the original hearing calls for," he said. He said he feels such

a hearing could destroy federal orders.

"The purpose of the orders was to assure a steady

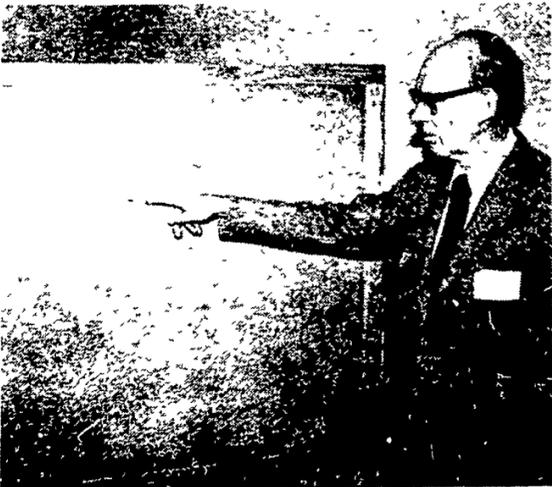
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Hollis Hatfield outlined a proposal to increase parity for milk as percentage of government purchases drops.

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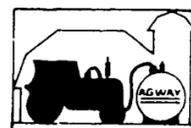
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