



## The Milk Check

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County Agent

### Wheel Spinning

Every farmer must have experienced the feeling of getting stuck in a wet spot in the field knowing it was there but taking a chance with a plow or a disc then sitting there with wheels spinning cursing the decision. Stuck up to the axles with no help in sight, it's a half mile walk home.

That's about the size of it with your increasing milk production and the price support program.

You knew better than to try to cross that wet spot that got you into trouble in the past. You were warned that it was worse than ever this year. But you drove right into it because you gambled that this year, with a bigger tractor and more weight, you could make it.

But it didn't work. All that extra power and weight only helped to bury you deeper.

After three months under the new support price that started April 1, you're back to exactly where you started.

The Minnesota-Wisconsin average price for 3.5 test milk for June was \$11.68 - exactly the same as it was in April, the first month after the new support price of \$12.07 was announced.

You can argue that those rascals at USDA aren't doing their job, but in the last three months they have purchased over 100 million

pounds of cheese, 157 million of butter and 240 million of non-fat powder. Their purchases have been able to increase the average prices of butter, powder and cheese because they're paying far above the market price. But because of your increasing production, they haven't been able to affect the price of milk.

You're spinning your wheels by producing more milk and keeping prices down while USDA is spinning their wheels trying to buy dairy products fast enough to raise your milk prices. The end result is that your prices stay the same while USDA spends \$1 billion to raise dairy product prices that will be passed on to consumers and affect your sales.

It's a situation that can't continue. Already Secretary Bergland has blown the whistle with a meeting in June to figure out the least painful method of avoiding another support price increase on October 1st.

If the wet spot in our story represents the problems of trying to keep milk production on a level with demands so market prices stay up and the tractor represents the price support program that is supposed to help you over the wet spots temporarily while you make production adjustments,

like you haven't seen for 20 years.

I only hope you don't have to take the tractor apart to get it out.

### Security Fund Secured

You didn't have it for June Dairy Month as promised but when the Pennsylvania Legislature finally approved a milk security fund on July 2nd, no one was complaining about the date.

The Pennsylvania Farmers Association worked hard in the legislative committees to raise the contributions to two cents a hundred in line with their organization policy. Without any help from other groups, it was an uphill battle that they lost - a rarity for them.

The dealers wanted the producers to share in the cost. That wasn't included either.

Basically, it was the same Senate Bill 1287 introduced on March 10 that never did include everything the farm organizations wanted, but was good enough for most of them to support. It still gives the handler the option of using bonds or other securities to cover two month's milk purchases or participating in the security fund at one cent a hundred.

How fast the fund builds up to the \$4 million level expected will depend on how many dealers participate. The effective date is 90 days after the Governor signs the bill so we won't know until next Fall.

After that - for producers selling to handlers contributing to the Security Fund - the payment for claims will be only 75 percent. So farmers must accept some responsibility for shipping milk to financially sound handlers.

To get the fund started, dealers who wish to participate must pay in one cent

a hundred for the milk purchased in the last three months. Even so, it will be a long time getting to 14 million - it may take years.

The Pennsylvania Milk Marketing Board, responsible for administering the fund, has some leeway in regulating its growth to protect the interests of producers. The administration and the legislature have promised some help if it gets caught short.

Don't count on too much security until you get some money in the bank to draw on when you need it. In fact, the best way to treat it is like

any other kind of insurance - and do everything you can to keep from using it.

### Another Lesson to Learn

A lot of farmers were upset and even some misguided reporters got into the act when Farmland Dairies decided to drop some of its producers and told them to join Eastern Milk Producers.

Every producer ought to know that there's nothing in federal orders or the Pennsylvania law that tells a proprietary handler where to buy milk. Neither is there any cooperative or handler who can require a farmer to

sell them his milk.

And when one paper reported that Eastern would "axe" any farmers dropped by Farmland who wouldn't join the co-op, it really had the plow in front of the tractor.

It makes no difference what reasons Farmland had for dropping them or what reasons Eastern had for wanting them. The decisions were up to the producers.

Economics decides these situations for all parties. Any producer ought to know if he's on thin ice and figure out his options before he has only 28 days.

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