

At Farmers Union meeting

Dairy co-op manager outlines his price solutions

GRANTVILLE — The ideal solution to the current dairy price problem is higher grain prices, not lower dairy prices.

That's the opinion expressed Monday afternoon by Douglas J. Caruso, general manager of the Farmers Union Dairy Cooperative.

His organization represents 6000 dairymen in the upper midwest, including Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois and Michigan.

Caruso said the reason there is so much milk on the market is because farmers get a better return from turning grain into milk than they would get turning it into beef or pork.

We can not go through a period of lower grain prices like we have had without that grain being attracted into whatever livestock products will generate a better return," he said.

An increase in grain prices would help U.S. crops growers get a better return for the corn, soybeans, and small grains they produce. The higher price would bring these growers closer to 100 percent of parity for their production.

Raising grain prices also would stimulate our economy by increasing foreign dollars flowing into our nation for grain exports," he told members of Pennsylvania Farmers Union at their annual convention held in Grantville.

Caruso checked off a whole list of problems dairymen are going to have to meet in the coming months.

Not the least of them is the challenge offered by such respected and powerful groups as Common Cause and Ralph Nader's Congress Watch.

Caruso said an industrial milk users group, including candy makers like Hershey and M&M/Mars, and restaurant chains like Pizza Hut and Marriott, are quietly organizing to provide technical and possibly financial support to the anti-price support lobby.

But, Caruso said, prices paid by farmers for production items are increasing faster than milk prices.

Retail dairy product prices have increased less than other foods and the cost of living generally.

The real price of milk, measured in terms of how many minutes of labor at average labor rates it takes to buy milk, has declined 44 percent since 1950, he continued.

Farm milk prices have been above support levels in 26 of the past 30 years. The support price, he said, has been an insurance policy to protect consumers and producers against wide swings in prices.

At 80 percent of parity, by definition, dairymen get only 80 percent of the purchasing power farm milk generated 70 years ago.

But, Caruso said, at 80 percent of parity a farmer who grows his own feed

averaged only \$3.57 per hour for his own labor last year.

That's barely above minimum wage. At 70 percent of parity the farmer's wage drops to \$1.71 per hour.

The net cost to the government of the dairy price support program in the last marketing year was roughly \$100 million, he maintained, and not the often-cited \$1.3 billion figure.

By any measure the dairy price support program has been a success for both consumers and producers. It is the envy of most other nations in the world, Caruso said.

Despite his argument for a minimum 80 percent of parity, the co-op leader admitted it will be difficult to get 80 percent of dairy parity written into the new farm bill.

Caruso called for programs to correct the supply-demand imbalance.

He blasted the claim that cholesterol in dairy products is harmful.

He spoke of a program to push free milk refills in restaurants during June dairy month and at other times in the year.

Caruso called the Community Nutrition Institute proposal to allow reconstituting powdered milk hogwash.

The income loss to farmers under the CNI proposal would be substantial.

He mocked the idea of saving money by spending cash to remove water from milk only to turn around and put it back into a liquid form.

He asked a reconsideration of imports of cheese, especially from the European Community.



Douglas J. Caruso, general manager of the 6000-member Farmers Union Dairy Cooperative, told Pennsylvania Farmers Union members the best thing that could happen to dairy farmers would be for the price of grain to go up. He has some convincing reasons why. Listening is Lancaster County's Forney Longenecker.

Under the 1979 Trade Act, cheese imports from Europe can increase 14 percent, a move which will cost domestic dairy farmers \$76 million a year, he said.

Caruso also pointed out the need for casein and caseinate quotas.

Imports have been rising steadily and substantially in recent years as this protein is substituted for nonfat dry milk in more and more products, he noted.

While he said he was not a protectionist, Caruso said free trade must also be fair trade.

Caruso gave the Pennsylvania farmers greetings from his Co-op President,

Ron Brown, a Marathon County, Wisconsin dairyman.

Tell them we're all in the same boat and that the water looks darn choppy ahead. Everybody better grab an oar or we may capsizе, Brown asked Caruso to tell local dairymen.

The first point of sale passage for U.S. dairymen will come if the 1981 Farm Bill is written in a way which will continue the time times for dairymen.

Otherwise, it may be the start of a long, rough voyage for the dairy industry which will find itself faced with more of the headaches Caruso addressed.—CH

Synchronizing heifers can help breeding programs

LANCASTER — Prostaglandin was identified as one of the newer "chemical tools" now available in dairy reproduction programs, according to information discussed at a workshop at the Farm and Home Center this week.

Prostaglandin can be used to synchronize heifers for artificial breeding, Michael L. O'Conner, Extension dairy specialist, explained.

Presently, it is estimated that only about 20 percent of dairy heifers are bred artificially because of difficulty in detecting standing heat.

Use of the drug to synchronize the estrous cycles is approved only for dairy heifers and not lactating cows.

Injection of prostaglandin is suggested between the fifth and 18th day of a cycle. One method of use recommends a second injection 11 days later in order to catch those heifers, possibly 30 percent, missed in the first injection.

After an injection, the

heifers come into heat three days later. Breeding can then be done either by observing standing heat or by group at one time.

To be successful use of the drug requires sound management and planning ahead, according to O'Conner. Proper physical facilities are needed to handle the heifers for injections and breeding.

The best results are achieved when healthy normally cycling heifers are used, the animals are properly grown out, qualified inseminators and high quality semen are utilized.

There are some notes of caution, too.

Prostaglandin can cause abortion if used on pregnant

animals. It will not correct fertility problems and will not improve conception rates. Also, it will not induce animals to cycle.

But it can be added to the list of management tools available to help insure that heifers are bred for calving at 24 months.

Its use is not for everyone, the dairy specialist said.

If a dairy farmer is having good success in his heifer breeding program, the use of prostaglandin may not be necessary.

And if a decision is made to utilize the drug, proper consultation is recommended with both the veterinarian and AI personnel so that a program can be planned well in advance.—DA

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