

The Milk Check

TOM JURCHAK
County Agent



Suggestion Box

As I have participated in meetings to explain the milk marketing proposal to producers, it has been interesting to hear the suggestions on what should be done to correct the current marketing problem.

I should have taken a "suggestion box" to the meetings to get them all but I can easily remember those that were most often made. Of course, there are still some producers who don't believe there is a marketing problem and others who concede there's trouble but believe it isn't their problem. Whether or not the marketing proposal is approved, I hope the producers will remember

some of the suggestions they made and work on them in the future with or without set aside financing.

High on the list of suggestions is milk quality improvement. Everything from increasing the present minimums for butterfat and solids to requiring refrigeration for participation in the school lunch program.

Shutting off imports is usually suggested without realizing that they are equivalent to only about two percent of our production. But, every little bit helps.

Fighting the "cholesterol stuff" is important to many who even feel doctors aren't as informed as they should be. Right behind cholesterol comes misleading oleomargarine

ads and losses to imitation dairy products, especially cheese.

From more knowledgeable producers comes the suggestion of changing seasonal incentives to reduce the spring flush of milk that is an annual marketing problem.

Among the strongest and most often heard suggestion, however, is supply management. The idea that somehow, some way, producers will have to do something to keep milk production in line with sales even while they are expanding markets. Solutions suggested include everything from production quotas as part of the price support program to incentives for culling cows.

Most interesting is the idea that any or all of the suggestions made could be part of a dairy promotion program now or in the future but only if producers want them and work for them.

Culling Costs

The idea of cow culling incentives came up so often along with the question, "what would it cost," that I was tempted to find out.

Here in Pennsylvania, we're producing 26 percent more milk than we're consuming, so we would have to cull 187,000 of our 721,000 cows.

If we have 40 heifers in waiting

for every 100 milk cows, like the national average, we'll have to consider them also.

Assuming a normal 25 percent annual culling rate, we would still have about 167,000 head to send to the butcher. If a \$100 incentive on top of the beef price would be enough to get the job done, then the cost would be about \$26 million more than the money expected if the marketing proposal is approved. So it doesn't look as promising in Pennsylvania as expanding markets.

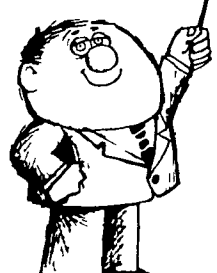
However, if you could sell the idea nationally, it might work. Here you have only a 10 percent surplus, so you have to sell only 1.1 million cows and 2.5 million heifers for only \$300 million. That's a lot of

money but not nearly as much as the \$1.8 billion spent last year for dairy price supports.

The problem, of course, is what do you do with all that beef? Beef prices are worse than milk prices and you only would be trading problems without reaching a solution.

Beef producers wouldn't stand for it because they have per capita consumption problems even more serious than milk producers. Many beef producers are already having second thoughts about the referendum they defeated two years ago and wish they had a second chance.

Perhaps you can learn from them.



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