

Wisconsin NFO members recruit Pa. farmers

BY ROBIN PHILLIPS
Staff Correspondent

DOYLESTOWN — Fifteen dairymen from Wisconsin spent last week going door to door throughout Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York. Their efforts were on behalf of the National Farmers Organization, a national collective bargaining organization for farmers. "They believe in this thing enough that they would come this far to tell a story," states William Gargas, Winding Brook Farm, Warrington, Bucks County NFO president.

Although membership in Pennsylvania is sparse, the National Farmers Organization is widely recognized throughout the nation. The group seeks to recruit farmers to join the membership and place their products, whether milk, meat, grain, eggs, etc., behind them. The NFO then bargains with large processors for a better price. The products are never purchased by the organization, just talked together for greater bargaining power.

"Title is never gained to a product," Gargas goes on to explain. "Once you gain title, you can no longer bargain because then you would be trying to get a higher price for something that you're buying," he adds referring to the milk co-op's structure.

"We're building a new system for pricing farmers' products. The cost production, plus a profit, is our goal," he states. "Everything was previously priced by whoever buys it. We're the only industry that let's this happen."

"This is what farmers must do themselves. NFO has the answer," he concludes.

Gargas is a dairy farmer in Bucks County. He currently sells his milk through an NFO contract to Cumberland Farms, New Jersey. Gargas maintains that the NFO needs 15 percent of the nation's milk production behind them to make their system work. When this is accomplished, he explains, products will be priced through contracts to large processors by the cost of production.

Regarding milk contracts, Carol Sukowatey, Spring Valley, Wisconsin, states, "We have more contracts than we have production." She explains that the contracts specify amounts and availability and are localized in state areas for NFO members.

Sukowatey is one of the Wisconsin visitors in Pennsylvania to talk to farmers about the NFO. "Farmers seem to listen better if we come from another state," she says.

Sukowatey farms 1000 acres and milks 100 cows with her two sons in Pierce County, Wisconsin. A NFO member for 24 years, Sukowatey lost her husband to lung cancer three years ago. She's an active farmer and states, "We all have to work together to hold that farm together."

"We're losing our young farmers back home," she says. "They're going bankrupt and their farms are being sold."

"Basically it's just because we do not have a decent price for our farm products," she adds. "We only have about 55 percent of parity and it's only about half of what we should get."

The county secretary in her own local NFO, Sukowatey continues,

"The NFO is the way to go to save ourselves. We block together so we have more power."

"We're competitive and we move milk around. If someone doesn't want to talk to us, we take it (our products) somewhere else."

She also explains that the NFO has regional offices and local boards (for meat, milk, grain, eggs, etc.) and inspects the products to monitor quality. "We're also guaranteed a milk check," Sukowatey points out. Contract payments go into a trust fund and payments are made to producers twice a month, regardless of when the buyer makes payment on the contract. At the end of the month, leftover funds are paid back to the producers after expenses are deducted.

"We waited for the co-op structure to solve our problems, but now we (the NFO) have the structure," she continues. "We're concerned with all farmers. All we want to is our fair share."

The NFO cull cow contracts program in Wisconsin is currently working very well. Contracts are made directly with the packers, beef is gathered and sold directly. If the price falls below 72 cents hanging weight, NFO announces a "marketing vacation" and farmers wait until the price returns to what they need.

"I sit right in the middle of that area that produces the most milk in the nation, Minnesota and Wisconsin," Sukowatey continues. "We argue whether there is definitely a surplus. It might be a surplus in a certain area, but we can move it out and it will be consumed," she states.

She also cites the government for

not publicizing the fact that the diversion program "actually didn't cost the government anything." She says, "It made milk shorter and it was harder to fill contracts, but we talked to more farmers so we could fill them."

Sukowatey observes that Pennsylvania "is an interesting place. It's much older than in our part of the country," she adds. "The urban sprawl shocks me a little. They're going to look for someone else to produce their food years down the road," she states.

"The problems seem the same; not enough price for our milk," Sukowatey continues. "But we can do it (change the prices), and we better before it's too late. We have a very big job on our hands."

Gargas echoes the same sentiments. "There's no doubt at all in my mind. The biggest stumbling block is the farmers themselves

"We must get the farmers convinced that it's the right way to go and to put their production behind the NFO," he states.

"We're getting very good acceptance from farmers," Gargas adds. The interstate dairymen exchange program enables farmers to visit with each other, compare state problems and discuss NFO concepts. "It's very productive," according to Gargas.

He urges farmers to consider the National Farmers Organization and to "band together for greater power at the bargaining table."

For more information or questions the following can be contacted: National Farmers Organization Marketing Office, 202 Bushkill St., Easton, Pa. 18042 (Phone: 215-258-2904); William Gargas, Winding Brook Farm, 3014 Bristol Road, Warrington, Pa. (Phone: 215-348-5514); or DeVone Woodland, National President, NFO, Corning, Iowa 50841

York Agribusiness Seminar to feature Walter Beuscher

YORK — Walter Beuscher, of Sperry New Holland, will be the featured speaker for the 22nd annual Agribusiness Seminar on Thursday, Feb. 28, at the York Fair Banquet Center.

"Horses Don't Bet On People." Buescher's humorous marketing message, will open the afternoon session of the day-long seminar on the theme of "The American Farmer's Dream." York County Extension Service and the York Chamber of Commerce are co-sponsors.

Other topics planned for the morning program include financial management planning, featuring Richard Denison, manager of the Pennsylvania Farmers' Association management services, and Jack Crane

Sperry New Holland, and Claude Hess, poultry producer, speaking on farm computer use.

Penn State economist H. Louis Moore takes a look at the future of ag marketing, following Buescher's keynote address, and insurance specialists Walter Jeffers, Agri-Business Insurance Center, and Kim Patrono, Geesey, Glatfelter and Zarfoss Agency, wrap up the day with a look at insurance and estate planning.

Time is also allotted over the day for participants to visit various booths and displays by agribusiness firms.

Luncheon reservations are \$10 and are due by Thursday, Feb 21, at the York Area Chamber of Commerce, P.O. Box 1229, York, PA 17405.

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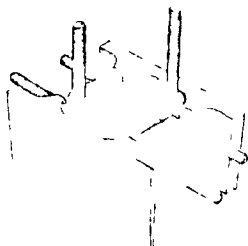
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