

# Farmers Dump Milk

(Continued from Page A1)

In Wednesday's milk strike, participation occurs in Vermont, Maine, Massachusetts, New York, Wisconsin and Minnesota, said Fred Shaw, a strike organizer in New York.

He reports that since the strike began, the dairymen have received premium offers from local milk plants and co-ops.

Robert Stronach of Eastern Milk Producers explained that while Eastern is contemplating a premium, it will be a temporary premium lasting until spring. The premiums are in response to the seasonal milk shortage, not one brought on by the milk strike. He added that competition for the same supply dictates the premium. The bonus is limited to the additional amount Eastern can receive for the milk from their customers, Stronach added.

Over 650 farmers attended meetings explaining the milk withholding, Shaw said. He estimates 20 percent of the dairymen in New York are participating.

However, for the strike to have an impact on the fluid milk supply 80 to 90 percent of the dairy farmers need to participate, explained Joseph Gerace, commissioner of agriculture and marketing for the state of New York. He also described the participation as sporadic.

A large percentage of participating farmers are needed to influence the supply because the milk market administrator controls the supply regionally. When a shortage of fluid milk appears, the administrator shifts supplies from the manufacturing facilities to the bottling plants. This process insures adequate class one milk supplies.

The strike appears to be "fairly well organized. They are getting the message across without a great deal of milk loss," Gerace added.

While the farmers may not boost the milk price, they are focusing media attention on the problem. "It's an item on the 6 and 11 news," Gerace said.

In the Herkimer County area, farmers are receiving support from the ag related industries and local labor unions, Shaw reported. The labor unions have aided the effort by developing slide displays and rallying public support, he said.

The farmers are running the strike without public money and

they have no title for their group, Shaw said. He added that this strike will continue until a result is achieved.

Some farmers in New York have continued to dump their milk since the first milk withholding episode. These farmers and the farmers participating in the current strike are surviving by taking the equity on their insurance policies or by living on credit, Shaw explained.

Frustration over low prices fuels the current strike. Only 10 percent of New York farmers operate solidly in the black and 25 to 40 percent operate in critical condition financially, Gerace stated. Yet in the Northeast region, 34 billion pounds of milk were consumed last year and only 28 billion pounds of milk was produced in the area, Gerace said.

"We are at a crossroads. We will be losing more of the market if we don't find a way to keep the farmers in business," he said.

The Regional Cooperative Marketing Association represents the logical alternative to the milk strike, according to every co-op spokesman and independent dealer interviewed.

Gerace is a firm believer in the possibilities of RCMA and has been

working day and night and every weekend to enroll farmers. "RCMA will only be successful if 90 to 95 percent of the farmers sign up," he said.

The price support dropped by \$2 per hundredweight for the Order 2 farmers. Now, 16 to 20 percent of the farmers in New York are operating below the breakeven price for a herd average of 12,500 pounds of milk, Gerace notes.

While RCMA will help the farmers in the future, dairymen need the money now and have attempted to solve the immediate problem with the milk withholding, he explained.

He urges farmers to channel their energies into getting the over-order pricing organization moving. Gerace listed three major advantages of RCMA:

First, he said, the organization is run by farmers who will set the milk price. It will enable farmers to be "truly independent for the first time." Farmers will be able to command a price as other vendors do.

RCMA will also unify the 30,000 northeast dairy farmers and permit them to have a voice in Washington. While the farmers are working hard, they have no impact

on agriculture policy.

Finally, RCMA will make cooperatives and independent milk dealers market the milk more effectively.

RCMA worked in 1973 and 1974 when members received an average of \$7,000 over the blend price, Gerace explained. RCMA is a unique organization since it permits farmers to set, not negotiate, set the price of milk. The marketing association was legalized under the Capper-Volstead Act.

"It is the only alternative except to attempt to ride the wave," he said. Last year, from August 1985 to August 1986, 1,700 farmers in the 11-state northeast region failed to ride the wave and silently went out of business, Gerace noted.

If this was a factory closing down, everyone would focus the spotlight on it and try to save the industry. The story is different with ag; no one hears when a farmer goes out of business, Gerace added. But for now, he said, the strike has focused attention on the plight of the farmer.

With RCMA, the farmer has an organization bargaining for a better price. With the strike, there is no clear organization and no one to bargain with, Gerace said in explaining a benefit of RCMA over the strike.

On the darker side of the milk strike, two farmers have been arrested and await trial for attacks on milk trucks, Shaw said. He added that the meetings he conducts presents facts; he does not encourage violence.

New York State Police investigated reports of 17 stolen plunger valve stems and nuts last Friday. A loaded truck near Whitney Point lost its valve and consequently dumped a load of milk valued at \$10,000.

The sabotage occurred throughout the state at four locations. State police are investigating the possibility that striking farmers organized the thefts. Trooper Gene Barnes of the Marathon barracks reported that Donald Hill lost six plunger valves from his trucks between 9 p.m. and 6:30 a.m.

Donald Hill estimates the cost of the valves at \$300 each. In his opinion, striking farmers performed the misdeed to prevent his truckers from picking up the milk of non-striking farmers. However, his firm was able to replace the valves and follow a normal milk hauling schedule on Saturday.

Striking farmers are also suspected of dumping antibiotics in neighbors' farm bulk tanks and milk tankers. The excessively high antibiotic level indicated tampering.



## Agri-Care serves farmers

For a quarter-century, Agri-Care has been serving farmers and farm communities with health care insurance.

We've learned what farmers need. The Agri-Care plans are designed to meet your needs and to change as your needs change.

Talk to your local Agri-Care Insurance agent about the new Agri-Care plans for 1985. Talk over your current situation and learn how the Agri-Care plans might help you.



**Agri-Care helps put the cap on health care costs.**

**Insuring the country way of life - AGWAY INSURANCE**



LIFE • HEALTH • FARM • AUTO • HOME Home Office P.O. Box 4851, Syracuse, NY 13221

**SALUTE TO THE PORK PRODUCERS**

**FARMERS AgCREDIT CORP.**

9 EAST MAIN STREET, LITITZ, PA  
717-626-4721