

Agriculture Secretary Lyng Supports RCMA Concept

WASHINGTON, D.C. — In a letter to a leading Congressman on the House Dairy Subcommittee, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Richard E. Lyng supports the concept of the Regional Cooperative Marketing Agency, an organization of 22,000 Northeastern dairy farmers trying to establish a fair price for their milk.

Lyng wrote to Rep. James M. Jeffords (R-Vt.), the ranking Republican on the subcommittee, that "Producers should look to the market place for increased income by bargaining for a higher price. Over-order pricing is common in a number of markets, particularly in the mid-west, and this is a good example of farmers turning to the market for increased returns."

"Other than the endorsement 22,000 dairy farmers have given RCMA by joining, the support of Secretary Lyng is probably the most important that RCMA could receive. He's the top agriculture official in the number one agricultural country in the world," said William Zuber, RCMA president.

Rep. Jeffords, speaking at the Northeastern Dairy Conference

being held today in Burlington, Vt., said that this endorsement should encourage the small number of farmers not in RCMA to join the organization.

The March 25th letter resulted from an earlier meeting between Lyng, Jeffords, Sen. Richard Leahy and a group of Vermont dairy farmers. During that session the dairy farmers were told that they should not expect a change in federal policy on dairying for at least three years. In recent years, due to surplus supplies from the west and mid-west, the minimum farm milk price has been slashed.

Steve Kerr of RCMA lead a group of 10 RCMA members from Vermont to Washington on March 3 to discuss the possibility of increasing farm income through legislative or administrative actions by the federal government. "The group asked what the outlook was for such changes. We were told that there is very little chance for action on the federal level," Kerr said.

Lyng pointed out in his letter that the federal price is not designed to be the price farmers

receive for their milk. "As I stated when we talked, neither the dairy support price nor the market order prices should be viewed as the established price for dairy products," Lyng said.

RCMA is currently paying over-order premiums to its members collected from all fluid milk dealers in the Northeast except one -- Farmland Dairies of Wallington, N.J. While RCMA has put nearly \$10 million into the hands of hard pressed dairy farmers in just five months, Farmland claims that RCMA is illegal and is not the

right avenue for dairy farmers to use in getting a fair price for their milk.

"RCMA has the support of political officials familiar with the plight of dairy farmers and every major farm organization in the Northeast. More than 90 percent of the farmers in the region have joined our organization. Plus, approximately 150 milk dealers in the region participate in the RCMA premium program. Farmland wants you to believe they are the only people with the interest of

farmers in mind. The truth is that Farmland's business interests come first, and they feel that breaking RCMA is in the best interest of their business," said William Zuber, RCMA president.

In fighting for fair farm prices, RCMA has filled a lawsuit against Farmland for not paying money owed dairymen and 165 RCMA members who previously supplied milk to Farmland are now diverting their milk to other dealers paying the RCMA premium.



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