New York Dairy Farmers Must Vote Now

BATAVIA, NY — New York's dairy farmers will benefit from the commissioner of agriculture's proposed minimum milk price under the Rogers-Allen Act.

"All New York farmers will gain approximately 70 cents per hundredweight because of Commissioner Richard T. McGuire's proposed Rogers-Allen milk marketing order," said Carmen L. Ross, executive director of the Regional Cooperative Marketing Agency (RCMA), which was instrumental in getting the order enacted.

"Now the critical issue is for dairy farmers to vote in favor of the order," Ross added.

McGuire announced the order on Wednesday, but before the order becomes law, dairy farmers must vote to accept the proposals. Ballots have been sent from the Department of Agriculture and Markets office, and all ballots must be back in Albany by July 9. Two-thirds of the state's dairy farmers must approve the order if it is to become law. Ballots that aren't returned count as a "no" vote.

Ross outlined several reasons farmers should vote "yes." These include:

* Farmers will receive more money for their milk. The order establishes a minimum price of \$14.50 for Class I milk, which is used for fluid consumption. This is the price processors must pay

The money will be distributed among all New York dairy farmers who sell their milk to plants within the state, no matter whether their milk is used for fluid consumption or turned into cheese or other dairy products.

* Farmers can protect their business from future price declines. The Rogers-Allen order would create an economic safety net for farmers for one year. It would protect them from volatile milk prices, but does not prevent the Class I price from rising above the fixed price of \$14.50.

* Recent price gains will be lost without the Rogers-Allen order. New York's milk prices were increased on June 1 under an interim order, but these prices are only in effect until a decision is reached under Rogers-Allen. The interim prices will expire on

August 1. If the Rogers-Allen order is not approved by dairy farmers, milk prices will drop.

* Farmers can demonstrate unity throughout the Northeast. For the first time, states in the Northeast have indicated a willingness to work together to help dairy farmers. Several states followed New York's lead to fix a Class I milk price higher than the federal order Class I milk prices. Disunity among dairy farmers in the Northeast can only result in lower milk prices.

* Farmers can exercise new power given to them. The New York Legislature recently amended the Rogers-Allen Act to permit dairy farmers to more quickly address disastrously low milk prices. By voting yes, farmers exercise this new power.

* Farmers select the best

available option. The Rogers-Allen order temporarily raises milk prices and returns more money to dairy farmers. It provides an economic safety net for dairy farmers. It demonstrates New York dairy farmers' willingness and power to protect and save the dairy industry in this state and the Northeast.

"For all of these reasons, we urge farmers to vote 'yes' and to return their ballots as soon as they receive them," Ross said.

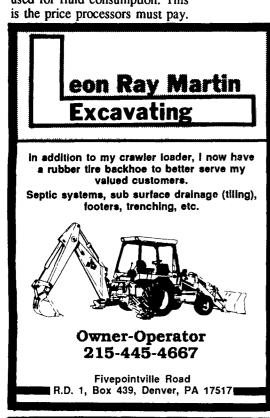
Dairy cooperatives will block vote for their members, so cooperative members should contact their officers to make sure the ballot is returned, Ross said.

RCMA worked several months to obtain this order for dairy farmers. Efforts started late last fall, when it was apparent milk prices were dropping to levels of the late 1970s. RCMA filed the petition to Commissioner McGuire, asking him to use his powers under the

Rogers-Allen Act to set minimum prices for milk in New York State.

RCMA is the only dairy organization in the state that could file the petition, because the law requires the petitioning organization to represent more than 35 percent of the dairy farmers. RCMA's membership is more than 90 percent of the state's milk producers.

Once the petition was filed, RCMA began the massive job of lining up witnesses for the hearing to consider the petition. Twelve days of testimony were presented in Albany during April. Many dairy farmers testified that milk prices were below their cost of production. Bankers, farm equipment dealers, veterinarians and feed salesmen said the declining dairy industry was hurting the economy throughout upstate New York. All urged the commissioner to set the minimum prices.





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