

# Farm Forum

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## Editor:

I have never felt that premiums paid to dairy farmers, could or should replace a stable milk pricing system. However, the last two administrations that have been elected in Washington D.C. have failed to listen to the needs of dairy farmers, as they have tried to obtain a realistic milk pricing system.

As a result of Washington's ineptness, dairy farmers have found it necessary to pursue alternative avenues in an attempt to improve milk prices.

Dairy farmers have grouped together in over-order pricing agencies, such as R.C.M.A. In addition, dairy farmers have successfully negotiated voluntary premiums from milk handlers.

As Washington continued to exhibit a deaf ear towards the plight of dairy farmers; several states in the northeast took various steps in an attempt to rectify the inadequate prices paid to dairy farmers.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania took the lead as the Pennsylvania Milk Marketing Board

granted a \$1.05 per cwt. Premium on Class I (fluid) milk used in Pennsylvania. This \$1.05 premium gave several other states the courage to implement some price relief to their dairy farmers.

However, the \$1.05 premium in Pennsylvania had some shortcomings. Many dairy farmers in Pennsylvania did not receive any direct benefits from the premium.

## New York State

During the late 1930's as turmoil developed in Central New York State as a result of low milk prices being paid to dairy farmers; (sound familiar) the legislators in the Empire State passed legislation which allows dairy farmers to petition the state for a milk hearing in an attempt to secure a statewide milk order.

Independent and small milk cooperative directors of R.C.M.A. pursued the idea of a New York State milk hearing under the guidelines of the Roger Allen Law. Finally, obstacles were overcome and R.C.M.A. moved aggressively and successfully in obtaining a hearing in New York State, which resulted in a favor-

able decision for dairy farmers.

However, dairy farmers all across the Northeast have just had the rug pulled out from under them, as an attempt to amend the New York State order, to allow for compensatory payments, has been turned down, as the amendment failed to obtain a 66% percent favorable vote.

The sad part of the defeat is the fact, that at least two dairy cooperatives voted against the amendment. It has been reported that up-state milk coop from the western part of New York and Dairylea Cooperative of Syracuse, New York voted NO in a bloc vote for all of their members.

In a letter to their members, Dairylea tried to defend their vote; saying, "because too many serious economic issues resulting from the order remain unresolved." To their argument, I say "hogwash". Of course, premiums that are not reasonably unified in a given area will cause problems. But, aren't these nice problems to address as opposed to having no price increase to dairy farmers.

Actually the people that should have been upset were the majority of dairy farmers across the northern and central part of Pennsylvania that did not benefit from either The New York State order or the Pennsylvania \$1.05 Premium.

Within Pennsylvania Pro-Ag and with coops like North Penn, Northern Tier and Scenic Mountain have been actively pursuing legislation that would allow the \$1.05 in Pennsylvania, to be paid to all Pennsylvania dairy farmers.

And you know, we thought we could use the New York State order as an example.

Is it any wonder that dairy farmers feel they are knocking their heads against a stone wall. At a milk hearing in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania last spring we listened to an economist testify for several dairy cooperatives and he urged the P.M.M.B. to lower the Class I Premium from \$1.35 down to \$1.05.

Now along comes two dairy cooperatives and knock out a pricing order that could have started the ball rolling to provide some stability to our northeast dairy farmer.

During the milk hearing held in Washington D.C. this past summer the national milk producers federation testified for the support price on manufactured milk to be set at \$11.60 per cwt., the House Sub-committee raised the level to \$12.60 per cwt.

Maybe some of the reasons why dairy farmers have not been suc-

cessful in Washington D.C. are starting to surface.

As the old-time minister said, "Father, don't help me from my enemies, save me from my friends."

Arden Tewksbury  
Pro Ag Organization

October 1 is past. The Rogers-Allen petition failed to attract enough "yes" votes and 18 cents just went down the drain.

Why did the vote fail? It failed because it was not a vote of the farmers.

Thirteen hundred eligible farmers did not even return their ballots, resulting in 1,300 "no" votes.

Whatever happened to "one man, one vote, and a simple majority of those voting?"

What has happened to the government of the people, by the people, for the people? Has it been replaced by a government of the politicians, by the bureaucratic corps for the corporate bottom line?

Where do we go from here? We refile the petition possibly with a new set of numbers that really would put a floor under the milk price in New York. We have a moral responsibility to do this in the interest of our neighbors in New England.

Beyond this action, the farm community must get behind RCMA and strongly consider pricing of our product on Nov. 1, 1991.

RCMA is the vehicle through which we can have a price for our product that approaches cost of production. We need solidarity. We don't need a lot of independent producers out there doing their own things, making their own deals, and believing what their handler tells them.

It is time, my friends, to get yourself an application for membership (1-800-634-3723), fill it out, send it in, and stand up and be counted.

The farm sector is the only one that lets someone else set the price for their product and it is time for a change.

We also do not need farmer cooperatives believing more in

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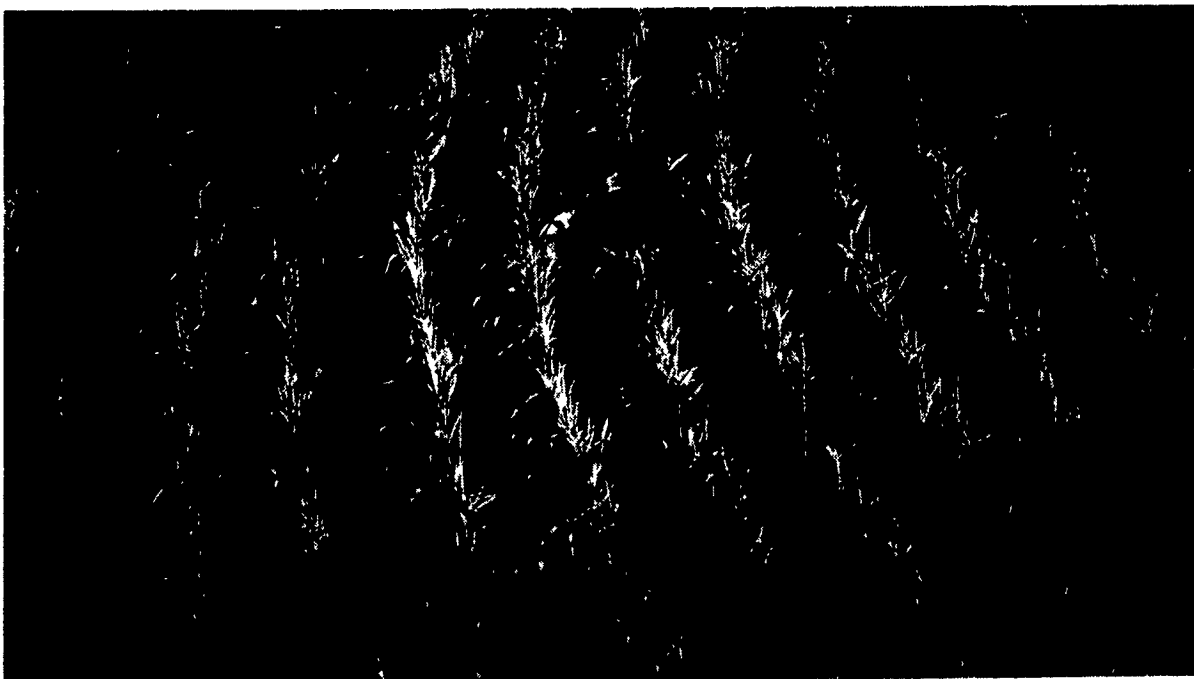
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