

RCMA Elects Gardner President

SYRACUSE, NY— Lewis Gardner, the new president of the Regional Cooperative Marketing Agency Inc. (RCMA), challenges the organization's 22,000 dairy-farmer members throughout the Northeast to work together to earn higher prices for their milk.

"I don't believe we have even begun to reach our potential," he told the RCMA Board of Directors during its organizational meeting on December 13 when he was elected. "If we stick together as a board, I believe we can reach our potential. It can only be achieved with unity and common goals of directors and members."

Gardner, a dairy farmer from Galeton, Pa., replaces William G. Zuber of Churchville, N.Y., who served as RCMA president since 1984. Under Zuber's leadership, RCMA developed a program that generated approximately \$70 million in payments known as "over-order premiums" to its dairy-farmer members from 1987 through 1989. Using New York State's Rogers-Allen Law, RCMA also won a state premium for New York dairy farmers that was paid June through September.

The New York program was copied throughout New England, generating a higher milk price paid to dairy farmers in those states, too.

RCMA's main goal is to increase the price of milk received by dairy farmers, who have been struggling for nearly a year as prices dropped to the same levels as the late 1970s. Many farmers have gone out of business because prices have been so low.

Gardner emphasized that if RCMA's membership, which includes dairy farmers throughout the 11 states of the Northeast, keeps the organization's goal in mind and works together to obtain that goal, then it will continue to be a strong economic force in the dairy industry.

Gardner is the president of Eastern Milk Producers Cooperative. A former Marine Corps demolitions instructor and a member of the presidential honor guard, he and his wife, Lois, purchased a 100-acre dairy farm in 1978. There they milk 55 cows out of a herd of 90 Holsteins, and rent another 150 tillable acres, growing mainly alfalfa and corn. Their

three sons, Lewis III, Lee Thomas and Levi, all help operate the farm.

Other officers elected include Vice President Norman Harvey of Florence, Vt., president of Agri-Mark Cooperative; Secretary William Murphy, who operates Prospect Farms in Stamford, N.Y.; and Treasurer Lloyd Patterson of St. Johnsbury, Vt., president of Cabot Farmers Cooperative.

Dairy farmer members of the RCMA Executive Committee include Zuber, George Demere of Little Falls, N.Y.; Donald Duncan of Robesonia, Pa.; Roy Hetrick of Bernville, Pa.; Harold Howrigan of Fairfield, Vt.; Clyde Rutherford of Otego, N.Y.; and Robert Storch of Troy, Pa.

In other action, the Board of Directors approved the report of an ad hoc committee that recommended moving the RCMA office from Batavia to Syracuse by Jan. 31 and restructuring staff to prepare for future milk pricing initiatives. The committee presented a list of alternative pricing programs that are being studied for future action. The move and staff restructuring will allow RCMA to

preserve more of its financial resources as the directors plan the next step.

RCMA Directors and Delegates were encouraged by Congressman James Walsh and New York State Senator Nancy Lorraine Hoffman. Congressman Walsh, the Northeast's only member of the House Agriculture Committee, recounted the efforts during the year to get the House to enact a new dairy bill. He is urging Agriculture Secretary Edward Madigan to use administrative policies as he did last spring to keep milk prices higher.

Senator Hoffmann, who was instrumental in signing up many RCMA members in the mid 1980s, said she has sponsored a bill to change voting procedures under New York's Rogers-Allen Law so that ballots not returned no longer count as "no" votes. She said the state "would welcome your next petition" to activate emergency milk prices under Rogers-Allen.

Directors also authorized the RCMA Executive Committee to protect the interests of Northeast dairy farmers in discussions of the future of the federal milk marketing orders, which regulate milk prices throughout most of the U.S. Agriculture Secretary Madigan is inviting public comments about the future of the orders.

In late 1990, RCMA and some of its member cooperatives joined together to oppose changes in the pricing structure of the federal milk marketing orders that would have reduced the prices received by Northeast dairy farmers. The proved effective, for when the U.S. Department of Agriculture, announced its preliminary decision last month, there were no

pricing changes that would hurt Northeast producers. RCMA's Executive Committee will consider reactivating the Coalition of the Northeast to make sure the interests of the Northeast's dairy farmers are represented and protected in the current discussions by the Agriculture Department.

During the RCMA annual meeting prior to the directors' meeting, delegates heard the year-end reports of President Zuber and Executive Director Carmen L. Ross. They summarized the success of RCMA's year: successful representation of the Northeast's interests in the federal order hearings and the implementation of Rogers-Allen emergency milk prices in New York State, with similar programs enacted throughout New England.

Both also stressed the need for unity among RCMA members and all dairy farmers in the Northeast. "We must work out some of the problems and move ahead together," Zuber said. "There is no question that we are going to need RCMA in the future. Dairy farmers will continue to need a unified voice working for higher prices."

Ross echoed a similar theme: "You can come together and work together as a team for the common good of all dairy farmers. If you do that, then RCMA has a bright future and will be an organization to be reckoned with in the dairy industry."

Gardner, as the newly elected president, pledged to work to further develop that unity of purpose. "If all the dairy farmers of the Northeast work in unity, then RCMA can achieve its goal of higher milk prices for its farmer members."

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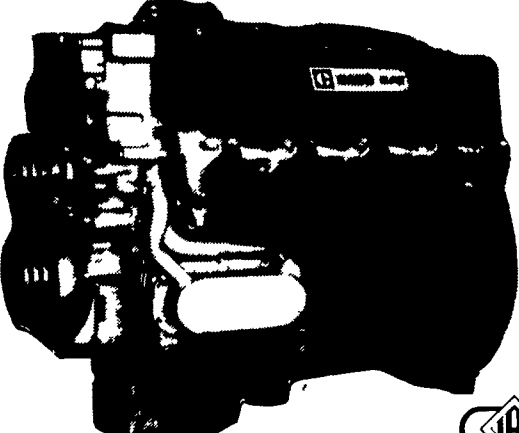
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