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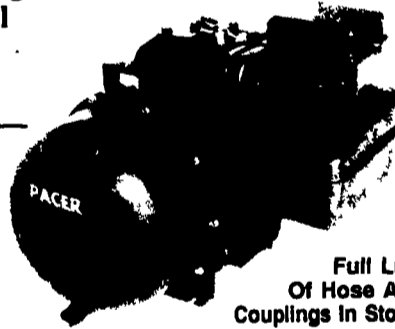
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**MMI To Congressional Panel:
Keep Federal Milk Orders**

SYRACUSE, N.Y.—The Federal Milk Marketing Order system needs to be retained, even though it needs changing to reflect current market conditions, Lewis Gardner, vice chairman of Milk Marketing Inc. (MMI), told a congressional panel conducting a hearing in Syracuse, N.Y., on April 24.

"The facts are that, in the many years the Federal Milk Marketing Order program has been in existence, it has functioned as intended," Gardner said to the U.S. House Committee on Agriculture's Subcommittee on Livestock, Dairy and Poultry.

"Consumers have obtained adequate supplies of fresh fluid milk at reasonable prices. At the same time, producers have been assured they will receive prices for their milk based on how that milk was ultimately used," Gardner said.

Gardner, who testified on behalf of the 13,300 dairy farmers associated with the Council of Northeast Farmer Cooperatives, cautioned that any changes made in the federal order system should not be made at the expense of any one region in the country. (The Council represents farmers from New England to Kentucky, from Michigan to Delaware.)

"Needless to say," he said, farmers "would like higher prices. In order to have higher prices, without limiting production, we must expand our markets."

Exports present the greatest potential for such income-producing expansion, he said.

"Export market development should be given the highest priority in the 1995 Farm Bill," he said, adding that it should be done especially since agriculture exports have not grown as fast as other products, and dairy remains very small as measured in dollars.

In related points, he said the Dairy Export Incentive Program (DEIP) should remain fully funded within the requirements of GATT, especially as the U.S. dairy industry develops export markets.

Also, development of value-added dairy exports (such as ice cream, yogurt and specialty cheeses) needs additional emphasis. "This is the area most promising to our industry's future," he said.

Current assessments on dairy farmers (which pay for more than half the cost of the dairy support program) should be eliminated, with monies then channeled into helping the industry expand export markets, he said.

Gardner also told the Congressional subcommittee that Class I differentials should reflect supply and demand conditions for fluid milk in more local geographic regions, not just the distance from Eau Claire, Wis.; and that Congress should give serious consideration to expanding the Conservation Reserve Program to help dairy and other livestock producers pay for water quality-related farm improvements.

Gardner, who operates a family farm in Galeton, was president of Eastern Milk Producers Cooperative before it merged with MMI. The new MMI now has 9,000 member farmers who produce nearly 6 billion pounds of milk annually, making it the third largest dairy cooperative in the country.

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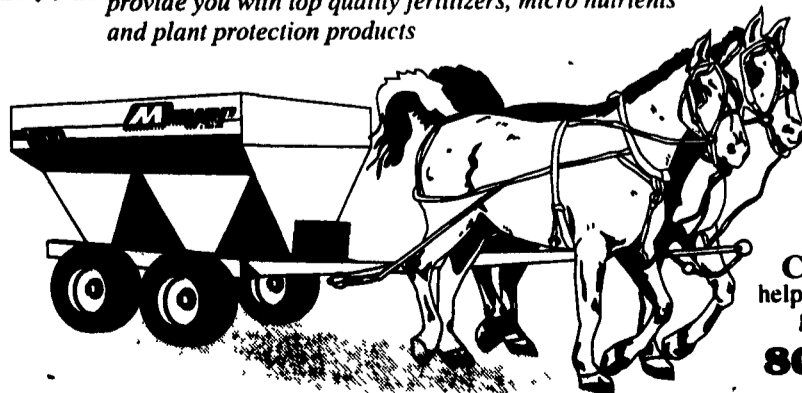
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