

## Milk Haulers Exempt From 80,000 Lb. Limit

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — Pennsylvania milk haulers are now exempt from the 80,000-pound weight limit, and can enjoy a new cap of 95,000 pounds, consistent with surrounding New York state, thanks to legislation signed into law this week by Gov. Tom Ridge.

"Passage of this measure was made possible through a combined effort of dairy industry leaders and legislators," said Charles Brosius, state secretary of agriculture.

"The exemption will translate into increased profits for Pennsylvania's dairy farmers by allowing them to be competitive with New York state which already has a 95,000-pound weight limit for trucks.

"It impacts every cooperative, milk hauler and dairy farmer in the commonwealth."

The new law allows milk haulers to carry 60,000 pounds of milk, plus the 35,000 pound weight of the truck, which means haulers really are to enjoy a 45,000-pound increase.

Milk being hauled from Pennsylvania farms to New York City costs as much as 12.5 cents per

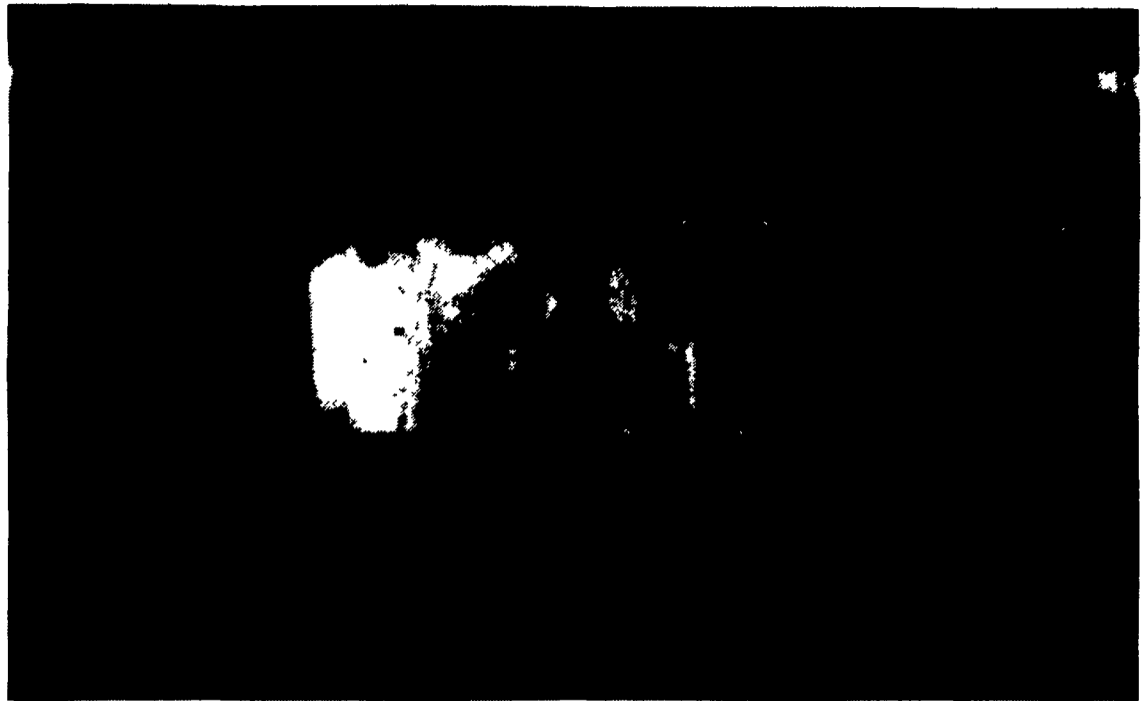
hundredweight more than milk shipped within New York State.

Similarly, loads of New York milk shipped to Pennsylvania plants must be downsized, significantly increasing hauling costs.

Representatives of the state Department of Agriculture, DairyCoop Inc., Atlantic Dairy Cooperative, the Pennsylvania Motor Truck Association and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation were instrumental in securing passage of the law.

Secretary Brosius also recognized the help of House Transportation Committee Chairman Rick Geist (R-Blair County) and Senate Transportation Chairman Doyle Corman (R-Centre County), as well as state Rep. John Barley (R-Lancaster County) and Sen. Roger Madigan (R-Bradford County) for providing leadership in the passage of the legislation.

The secretary said, "Gov. Ridge and I are both committed to increasing the profitability of all Pennsylvania farmers, and the passage of this legislation represents a savings to dairy farmers, cooperatives and haulers."



From the left, at the table, Sen. Barry Stout sits with Gov. Tom Ridge at the signing of law to increase the weight allowance for Pennsylvania milk haulers. Supporters of the measure, from the left standing are, Bob Junk, Pennsylvania Farmers Union; Rep. Raymond Bunt; Phyllis Brown with the House Transportation Committee; Rep. Richard Geist; Diane Salerno, with the Pa. Motor Trucks Association; Cheryl Hicks, staff aide to Sen. Stout; Brenda Shambaugh, Pa. State Grange; Agriculture Secretary Charles Brosius; John Nikoloff, with Capital Associates; Gwen Bower, PDA; and Eric Coolidge, June Diebold, and Raymond Diebold with DairyCoop Inc.

## Scrapie Disease Is Serious

VERNON ACHENBACH JR.  
Lancaster Farming Staff

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — There have been some careful, if not hesitant, public reports about the cause of Scrapie Disease in sheep and similar diseases in other mammals.

That's because, exactly what causes these diseases is not known.

Most published reports refer to it as an agent, and though some differing theories abound, what seems the most logical so far is that the agent is an especially small virus-like pathogen that cloaks itself in protein from the brain.

The immune system of the host animal apparently doesn't recognize the agent as foreign because no antibodies are produced, which would seem to support the theory that the agent assimilates proteins from the host.

According to a scientific paper authored by R.H. Kimberlin, it is possible that the disease is caused by a virus-like agent, although Kimberlin said it is probably smaller than any known virus.

In the paper, Kimberlin wrote that the pathogen that causes Scrapie disease in sheep is quick to mutate and that there is apparently a "family" of the disease.

The exact method of how it is transmitted isn't exactly known, but there seems to be strong evidence that it is transmitted mostly from the mother to the young through placental fluids, and into flock-members and other animals through the consumption of infected tissue such as placental materials and brain tissue.

The disease causes a "spongiform encephalopathy" — it literally creates small holes throughout the brain so that the brain, microscopically, resembles a sponge.

It is fatal. There is no cure. There is yet no test nor indication that the disease has been contracted until symptoms occur.

From the time the disease is contracted, it can take up to 60 months for symptoms to occur. Some sheep, apparently due to a natural genetic difference, may serve as carriers and never exhibit the disease. But it is not a genetic disease, such as BLAD in cattle.

With Scrapies, animals exhibiting symptoms may live from one

week to six months.

Those who still practice eating sheep brains would probably be well advised to stop, although there is currently no direct evidence that humans are susceptible to the Scrapie strain of the disease.

There are known human variations of the disease.

And, it has also been shown, for example, that the form of the agent associated with Scrapie Disease is able to cross over to other species. Thus, some associate an unnecessary risk in consuming sheep brains.

For some time, sheep carcasses have been used for rendering into protein feeds for livestock, farm minks, and pets.

It is believed, but not absolutely known, that bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) was caused by feeding rendered sheep carcasses to cattle.

BSE is also known as Mad Cow Disease, because of the neurological destruction and the behavior that's symptomatic of the disease.

According to a January 1995 factsheet from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), on BSE, "There are different scientific hypotheses concerning the origins of BSE.

"One theory is that BSE had existed in undetectable levels in the British cattle population prior to 1986.

"Another theory stems from epidemiological data that suggest that BSE in England may have been caused by feeding cattle rendered protein produced from the carcasses of scrapie-infected sheep.

"The practice of using products such as meat and bonemeal in cattle rations as a source of protein has been common for several decades. ... Changes in rendering operations in the early 1980s (in Britain) — particularly the removal of a solvent-extraction process and the elimination of a second steam-heat treatment — may have played a part in the appearance of the disease and the large number of cases that developed."

In cattle, according to the APHIS, "There is no evidence that BSE spreads from unrelated cattle

to cattle, or from cattle to other species by contact. Moreover, researchers have not gathered sufficient ... evidence or experimental data to determine if maternal transmission of BSE occurs."

However, "In an experimental study of the disease's biological route of development in cattle, traces of the BSE agent were detected in the small intestines of calves that had been fed large doses of material from BSE-infected animals."

A spongiform encephalopathy disease is also known within the mink industry, but only after mink were fed sheep protein and bone meal. It has been found in captive deer and elk in the West, where the disease is called, "Chronic Wasting Disease."

It has also been discovered in cats.

In humans, the diseases called "kuru," "Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease," and "Gerstmann-Straussler syndrome" have been known for some time.

Kuru is a fatal disease found among a group of primitive people in New Guinea.

According to reports, it is believed that kuru was kept within the tribes because of a practice they had of consuming the brains of their elders. Apparently, this was thought to be a way of transmitting knowledge from the older generation to the younger generation.

According to Dr. Tom Drake, a mammalian diagnostician at the Penn State Diagnostic Laboratory in State College, the apparent common factor of the disease being transmitted is consumption of infected tissue.

Drake is also a member of the Scrapie Committee that oversees the state's voluntary Scrapie-Free certification program.

According to Drake, Scrapie Disease is not rare in Pennsylvania, though it is probably more common in some other states.

"There are sporadic cases in sheep all the time," Drake said this week. "It is not a rare disease. I think it's on the rise."

The disease has been observed in sheep in Britain and parts of Europe since the 18th century, according to Kimberlin. Further,

introductions of sheep to other parts of the world has resulted in the disease being observed in almost every area except in Australia and New Zealand, where strict controls over introduced sheep have prevented the disease from taking hold.

Further, according to Kimberlin, research on sheep and Scrapie Disease suggests that the disease is such that individual animals apparently are affected according to a genetic susceptibility. Some animals may be carriers and not express the disease.

Eradication efforts in United States have mostly failed because of cost and lack of cooperation.

Nationwide, since 1992, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has been attempting to get sheep producers to voluntarily participate in a Scrapie Disease containment and eradication program, but success has been limited.

The program is designed so that sheep producers may elect to work toward certifying their flock Scrapie-free.

States are independent in adopting such a certification program and Pennsylvania has opted to carry it out. However, sheep producers apparently have not been quick to sign up.

In Pennsylvania, less than a dozen sheep producers are currently participating, even though the size of the flock is not a factor in participation.

The program is designed so that a producer desiring Scrapie-free certification is to identify all animals and keep records. If after five years there is no evidence of Scrapie disease being exhibited in the flock, that flock can be certified Scrapie-free.

(Electronic identification in the ear is encouraged, though tattoos are allowable, but more time consuming.)

Also, in order to participate, the owner of the flock must agree to report suspected Scrapie animals immediately and not sell them for slaughter or breeding stock.

If after gaining certification or being in the program for several years, a flock owner finds that one of his animals shows up with Scrapies, then tissue samples from every dead animal from the flock

(over 18 months) must be submitted for testing.

There is perhaps one drawback to the program for the producer who gains certification — in order to keep certification, that producer may not introduce into or expose his flock to an animal coming from a flock that has not achieved such status.

The benefit for achieving such status is that the offspring can be sold as certified Scrapie-free and can be sold to anyone.

In the recent past, some producers have suggested that the stigma that may come from participating in such a program could hurt their business, especially if they are selling breeding stock and testing of dead animals reveals Scrapie Disease.

Further, the state's sheep production business has been marginally profitable in recent years, mostly from pressure from wool imports and limited demand for meat.

However, others have said that when more people learn of the possible ramifications of allowing Scrapie Disease to continue to be spread through breeding stock, those with certified Scrapie Disease-free status should enjoy greater demand for their offspring and breeding stock.

Because of the state's developing tripartite animal diagnostic system, Pennsylvania sheep producers have a good opportunity to gain certification for their own economic benefit and help rid everyone of the possibility of having this agent become more of a problem.

In order to participate, contact Dr. Maher Rizk, veterinary medical officer with the USDA located in Pittsburgh at (412) 241-4650.

