

Vital Message Needs Exposure

PITTSBURGH—Extending greetings from Gov. Tom Ridge, Agriculture Secretary Charles Brosius, who spoke at Milk Marketing Inc.'s annual banquet Nov. 20, officially welcomed MMI delegates and leaders to Pennsylvania.

In the face of so many struggling dairy farmers around the state, Brosius said it was "exciting to see the opportunities you're taking advantage of"—from the unification of MMI and Eastern Milk Producers to innovative product development.

Agriculture is still the number one industry in Pennsylvania, he said, with dairying leading the list.

The challenges facing dairy farmers are such that "you have to be the very best manager you can be," he said. "But no matter how sharp we are...we just can't control or predict everything." That's where cooperatives can make all the difference, he said. "I've been a cooperative supporter all my life. I recognize the historical significance of farmers banding together to do collectively what we can't do for ourselves..."

He added: "But we must be willing to embrace new ideas...to change...MMI is doing just that..."

"This new partnership is good for you as a co-op, and for the industry," he said, referring to the MMI-Eastern Milk merger.

Praising the co-op's interest in innovative products and new opportunities, Brosius said: "Your cooperative leadership has the vision to position you in the world market order."

Brosius also said it was appropriate to recognize American farmers for producing a safe, abundant and reasonably priced food supply. "It's time to go out and tell legislators" that message, he said.

At the Annual Business Meeting the following morning, MMI president and board chair Herman Brubaker also told farmers it was imperative to get the word out to legislators and the public.

"We have been riding a tidal wave," he said, referring to "the dramatic change in public perception" of farm programs. "Programs we've had for the past 60 years are being challenged...Federal orders. Export incentives. Price supports. Throughout all this food is not even an issue."

For the past six months, he said, MMI and other dairy cooperatives have been fighting "total deregulation;" that is, the effort to eliminate the federal order system. "The charge of total deregulation is being led by a few educators and some politicians, processors and dairy producers who have convinced the uninformed public that the nation—its farmers and its consumers—will be better off without dairy programs. That's regionalism at best. It's also farmers who have forgotten their cooperative history lesson;" namely, farmers individually may not have the power to craft their own futures, "but, together, they have all of the power and resources at their disposal—if they would just use them."

Noting that the dairy industry, with the help of the northeast congressional delegation, stood in the way of the budget reconciliation process for nearly a month and "refused to concede on the issue of eliminating market orders," Brubaker said the "win" is only temporary. The attacks will continue, he warned.

"What we're really dealing with is a commonly held public perception that agriculture programs in general and dairy in particular are: 1) out of date; 2) not relevant to today's marketplace; 3) unfair to consumers; 4) too expensive to maintain, and 5) government assistance to a privileged few."

He quoted President Harry Truman, who, when asked why people call him "Give 'em hell, Harry", said: "I don't give them hell, I just tell them the truth and, to them, it feels like hell."

"That's what we've been doing, and we can't let up," he said. "Dairy farmers, through their co-ops, absolutely held back the frontal attack...Dairy cooperatives are as important today as any time in history."

Public support for co-ops has faded, Brubaker said. Some members of Congress think co-ops don't represent farmers anymore,

and some individual farmers regard cooperatives as just another buyer of milk, he said, noting: "Something is wrong! When the benefits of cooperatives become lost or taken for granted, we open the door for the kinds of attacks and opinions that we are facing."

Calling for a dose of "co-op fever," the MMI board chairman recounted benefits MMI provides, such as market security, a merger propelling MMI into third spot in the nation, its Farmer Dairy Foods manufacturing arm that is the 12th largest dairy processing firm in the U.S., and paying farmers an extra \$4.1 million in earnings in 18 months.

"We are headed for a world without a support price," Brubaker said. "We are headed for a world that is unregulated—no controls, no mechanisms—the free market that people refer to. We are in, not headed for, a

NAAB Honors Chichester

PLAIN CITY, Ohio — Richard Chichester, general manager of Select Sires Inc. is the recipient of the 1995 NAAB Distinguished Service Award. The Plain City, Ohio resident was recently honored at the 49th Annual National Association of Animal Breeders Convention.

Select Sires has experienced

struggle with the buyers in the market to control the pricing function. We're in a marketplace where the purchasing power is amassing in larger and larger organizations. We are in a world with no international borders."

He exhorted: "Now is not the time for us to walk away from what we've built...Now is the time to fight for the cooperative rights we gained in the 1920s (through the Copper Volstead Act)."

"Co-op fever. MMI fever. Catch it. Preach it. Support it...Together we are creating the future!"

success under the leadership of Chichester, according to its news release.

Chichester said, "Our Board of Directors and committees must never lose sight of the fact that they are elected to serve farmers and represent their best interests. All of us, directors, committeemen and employees are accountable for our judgments and actions. Let us never fail to be responsive."

Since Chichester accepted the manager's post in August 1973, Select has tripled its sales volume. In 1990 the position was strengthened as the federation marketed a record-setting five million units, a feat the organization surpassed in 1993 and 1994.

Select Sires is a federation of 11 farmer-owned and controlled cooperatives, serving the largest number of co-op members in the U.S. The federation's basic objective is to supply livestock breeders with America's best genetics.



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