

# Strategies For A Too-Low Milk Price

## Farmers Urged To Complete Census

**HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.)** — Farmers across Pennsylvania and the nation are being asked to take a few minutes to fill out the 1997 Census of Agriculture report form. This is the 25th time since 1840 that data have been collected on America's agricultural activity, but the 1997 Census will be the first one conducted by NASS, USDA.

In Pennsylvania the 1997 Census of Agriculture will be coordinated by the Pennsylvania Agricultural Statistics Service (PASS).

American agriculture is a dynamic, evolving industry and many changes have occurred in rural America in the five years since the last Census of Agriculture was taken. The need for reliable statistics about our nation's farmers and ranchers has never been greater. Conducting the agriculture census is the only way we get information to measure trends in the structure of American agriculture at the national, state, and county level. It is

the only source of uniform, comprehensive data on production, inventories, sales, expenditures, and operator characteristics — on a county-by-county basis for some 3,100 counties.

Agriculture census data serve as a foundation for agricultural statistics. They are widely used by farm organizations, legislators, and those who provide goods and services to farmers and ranchers.

The census report form is detailed, but all information on individual farm operations is kept confidential by law. Only statistical totals are published, and only sworn National Agricultural Statistics Service employees see the individual report forms.

Considering the need for accurate information to face the challenges of the next five years, sitting down and filling out the 1997 Census of Agriculture report form may be the best few minutes farmers and ranchers can invest in the future of American agriculture.

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own yogurt and cheese.

Does this make financial sense? Just look at grocery market shelves.

Typical cheese prices charged by stores range from \$3 to \$25/pound, depending on type, age, origin and import (which includes customs duty).

Cow milk cheeses range from \$3 to \$15, while sheep and goat milk cheeses, such as Roquefort, Pecorino, Chevre and Feta (some from domestic production), often command higher prices.

In England, the new alternative on some farms has become milking sheep for the high prices sheep cheeses bring. In Norway in recent years, the alternative for some cow farmers has been milking dairy goats for their popular goat cheeses.

Packaging in smaller units instead of gallons or pounds also improves the final price per pound; so does "low fat," "low salt," "low cholesterol" or organic designations.

If one assumes that 50 percent of the retail price reflects the cost for processing, storing, packaging and

promotion, then the cheese prices from \$4 to \$25 per pound mean \$1.50 to \$12.50 per pound toward the cost of the milk in each cheese.

If we assume 10 pounds of cheese are derived from 100 pounds of milk, then the milk price looks better for farmers retailing their own milk in the form of cheese — \$15 to \$125.50 per 100 pounds milk!

In addition to the "produce-less" strategy, the "sell-more" strategy, and the "value-added" strategy, you might try what some Florida farmers have done for years. Instead of sticking with low-fat Holsteins, breed for high-test Holsteins or add Jerseys to the herd.

How does this strategy make financial sense?

A herd with 100 Holsteins at 1,300 pounds bodyweight and 20,000 pounds milk per year might be equal to 130 Jerseys at 1,000 pounds bodyweight and 15,000 pounds milk, in terms of total feed

consumption, although more labor and housing are needed.

In terms of bodyweight, the two herds are equal; they also are about equal in terms of total milk produced — 2,000,000 pounds Holstein milk vs. 1,950,000 pounds Jersey milk per herd per year.


However, the farmgate price for Holstein milk is currently about \$13 per 100 pounds; for Jersey milk, it is \$15 per 100 pounds, because of the difference in composition.

This is \$260,000 per year for the 100-head Holstein herd versus \$292,500 per year for the 130-head Jersey herd. A nice little extra \$32,500 milk money for the Jersey herd per year.

The same could be said of any Holstein herd, if they are bred to produce a higher milk composition.

My wish for you for the New Year is that one of these strategies will prove to be a solution to your current too-low milk price.

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