

Tewksbury Reports On New York Task Force

ARDEN TEWKSBURY

Manager of Pro Ag
MESHOPPEN (Wyoming Co.)

— On December 18, 1997, one by one dairy farmers from all sections of New York State went to the podium to inform the members of the New York State Governor's Task Force of the seriousness regarding the financial plight of New York State farmers.

It didn't seem to matter whether the dairymen had 50 cows or 500 cows; the message was still the same; if something isn't done to increase and stabilize milk prices to dairy farmers, then many of these dairymen would be forced out of business. These farmers spoke the same message that thousands of dairy farmers have been exploiting at the same meetings Pro Ag has held since November of 1996. The farmers that attended Pro Ag's meeting were not radicals, nor were the ones that testified in Syracuse.

However, more importantly; it didn't matter what organizations these dairy farmers belonged to, they all had the same message. The same message that I've listened to altogether too often during the last 15 months.

To me, there appeared to be a solid support for the Northeast Dairy Compact, and a new pricing for milk that will cover the dairy farmers' cost, plus a return on their investment.

We can't change the past, but we sure can change the future. We can't change the fact that some co-ops and organizations have been dragging their feet on the North-

east Dairy Compact, but we now must work together and give six additional states the opportunity to join. After this happens, then other states may jointly form additional Compacts. We can't change the fact that many people have been willing to accept a milk pricing formula that has cheated dairy farmers out of billions of dollars across the United States.

However, all of us now have the responsibility to develop a pricing formula that is fair to our dairy farmers, without gouging our consumers. This can be done.

We must all strive to have Congress place a floor price under the Basic Formula Price of \$14.50 for an indefinite period of time. If we fail to obtain a decent floor price, then unfortunately the predictions of many of the dairy farmers that testified on December 18, 1997 will come true.

In support of the dairy farmers testimony, many feed dealers, implement dealers, etc. went to the podium explaining the difficulty they were having to maintain their businesses as a result of the low, unstable prices paid to dairy farmers. Alarming, these are the same remarks that I have heard over and over again during the last 15 months.

The remarks of these business people alone should be enough to warrant quick action for higher prices to our dairy farmers.

However, the most alarming testimony was given by Bob Smith from the Farm Credit System. Farm Credit has done a survey of 11,387 dairy farmers from

New England, New York, and Pennsylvania that use the services of Farm Credit. The survey showed:

- 1.) 3,456 clients in a healthy position 30.4%
- 2.) 3,909 some problems 34.3%
- 3.) 1,707 greater problems; showing stress 15.0%
- 4.) 1,220 greater problems than Category 3-moderate stress 10.7%
- 5.) 1,097 sever problems; severe stress 9.6%

While production credits figures are alarming, they further report that if the price-cost squeeze does not improve then they expect a further increase of dairy farmers falling into the stressful categories.

At our Pro Ag rallies it has always appeared that nearly 75% of the dairy farmers were experiencing some form of problems.

Farm Credit figures support our findings.

The main opposition to increasing prices to dairy farmers came from 3 consumer groups or watchdog groups. While these groups appeared not to be against the family farm, however, they did call such programs as the Northeast Dairy Compact a milk tax and the Compact should not be implemented. When Clyde Rutherford, a member of the Task Force asked the groups what alternatives they would suggest, they basically were mute.

My observation is that these groups are on a self-styled mission to promote their organizations and

they don't represent the average consumer. I asked the spokesperson for Public Voice to stay and listen to my testimony. During the last 15 months, Pro Ag has interviewed 30,000 consumers (several from New York City) and only three have not agreed with our ef-

forts.

In addition, we have spent 20,000 petitions signed by consumers to Washington, D.C. support our efforts.

It is now up to all of us to accomplish what must be done for our agriculture producers.

Adams Holstein Board Meets

GETTYSBURG (Adams Co.)

— With January 7, 1998, the deadline for membership renewal in the Pennsylvania Holstein Association's incentive program, the board of directors of the Adams County Club learned that they have some work to do to meet their goal. The board met on Monday, December 29, 1997, at the Adams County Extension Office in a membership wrapup meeting and agreed to make some additional personal contacts. Unpaid members will lose benefits after January 7 and the local club will be disqualified for the goal attained bonus.

Kevin Holtzinger thanked Marvin Brown and Rose Wenger for their special effort on behalf of the successful cheese sale. A total of 64 cases were sold, the profits going to support the club's scholarship and programs for youth and product promotion.

Club secretary Phil Van Lieu reported on his findings of programs conducted for junior members in neighboring Cumberland and Franklin counties. He agreed

to call a meeting of the local junior members for the purpose of establishing an agenda for the new year. He will alert these members of the September 15 deadline for applications for the club-sponsored college scholarship.

Marvin Brown, state director, reminded the directors that the deadlines are approaching for pre-registration for both the Pennsylvania Holstein Convention and the 1998 Pennsylvania Holstein Convention. The latter will be held February 6-8 at the Holiday Inn, Uniontown.

President John Clowney appointed a committee to explore interest in the Dairy Princess program. Club support is available provided interested qualified candidates can be identified. Potential contestants should call him at 334-7011.

Committees are at work on plans for a late winter tour and a summer barn meeting. Plans will be announced at the next meeting of the board which was set for Saturday, February 8, 1998, at the Cross Keys Inn near New Oxford.

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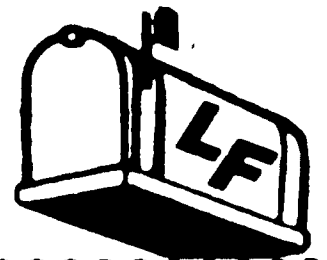
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