

# Chesapeake Milk To Provide Green Money

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mium to farmers whose farms exhibit a high standard of environmental protection, as well as serving as a source of cost-share money to help other farmers achieve such standards.

The Chesapeake Milk program is to be a one-year pilot program that took some time in the making.

A couple of years ago, during a press-education outing on the Chesapeake Bay Foundation's retrofitted skipperjack oyster boat, a concept was presented by the DPN that ideally would set up a pathway by which consumers could directly support local, environmentally conscientious dairy farms, as well as support local farmers wishing to undertake environmental projects without going through federal programs.

Dairy Network Partnership (DNP) had formed in 1995 in an attempt to create a cooperative and coordinated effort to secure more money for environmentally conscientious farmers, and thus to help save family farms and farmland, and encourage effective environmental stewardship.

The effort started with the "green" groups, mainly Rodale Institute, an organization started years ago to promote the healthy soil/health crops/healthy people relationship concepts of the founder of the Rodale businesses.

In addition to Rodale Institute, DPN-member groups include the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA), a group with the expressed goal of creating environmentally balanced farming operations (nutrients in equals nutrients out, or vice versa); the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, which has a goal of restoring the Chesapeake Bay and its freshwater sources; the United States Environmental Protection Agency; and Penn State University Extension.

At the time, the only non-conservation group was Atlantic Dairy Cooperative, which had joined the partnership in order to be in a position to possibly increase profitability and thus sustainability for its members through niche marketing.

Since then, ADC merged into the national Land O'Lakes Inc. cooperative (which recently completed another merger boosting its size and milk volume control), and has dropped out of the partnership.

In the meantime, the project has continued through the efforts of the independent DPN, which has three staff members: Lori Sandman, project manager; Leon Weber, on-farm coordinator; and Shelby Evans, research technician.

During that sailboat tour of the Annapolis area of the Chesapeake

Bay, the term "green" was used to characterize the concept of marketing milk to consumers who have a strong interest in supporting environmental conservation on local farms.

Surveys and polls, as well as anecdotal evidence, apparently had been used to support the notion that if the group could bottle it and get it into the retail dairy case, the public would buy "green" milk to support farmers, as long as the consumers could be sure that the farmers were going to get the money, instead of the middlemen.

However, the concept stayed quiet for many months.

The initial reaction to the concept was that it had some obstacles to overcome: the thought of "green" milk didn't sound very appetizing; getting any milk into retail shelves is difficult as it is, as chain stores reportedly haggle over differences involving small percentages of a cent, much less being involved with a product that carries a sort of "deposit" and potentially more work for the grocer and his accountants.

Nevertheless, the concept was discussed, through it was clear that details needed to be worked upon.

In the meantime, with little publicity, the project has been worked out the point of announcing a go-ahead pilot run.

The program of DNP under which the Chesapeake Milk project is being carried out is called the Environmental Quality Initiative and carries the slogan, "Your choice makes a difference."

The EQI program has its own mark — an painted representation of a pastoral farmstead inside a circle, with the capitalized words "Environmental Quality Initiative" encircling it.

According to promotional materials, "During a one-year test market, the Environmental Quality Initiative mark will be found on cartons of a new milk line known as Chesapeake Milk.

"Additionally, the mark will be found on select Natural by Nature organic dairy products. These products will be sold at regional grocery markets in Pennsylvania,

Maryland and Virginia.

"By participating in the Environmental Quality Initiative, these retailers are taking a lead role on behalf of the environment. They are providing their customers with a chance to make a difference."

"Each time a customer purchases Chesapeake Milk, 5 cents per half gallon will be returned to dairy farmers in the region who are achieving a high standard of natural resource protection.

"The money will also be used to assist other farmers in enhancing environmental protection practices on their farms."

The promotional text goes on to announce that the EQI program is to include on-farm demonstration events, consumer education and outreach programs, and technical assistance for farmers.

DNP intends to identify those farms with qualifying environmental standards of protection through the use of an "environ-

mental farmstead evaluation," described in the promotional material as, "... an objective, standardized scorecard that measures environmental management on Pennsylvania dairy farms."

Initially, producer participation in the EQI program project is being limited to producers sending milk to Sunnysdale Farms in Brooklyn, New York; or Natural Dairy Products Corporation in West Chester, Chester County, the producers of the organic milk, labeled Natural by Nature.

After a year of operation, the intent is to open up the project and to make the EQI mark available for geographic regions and commodities in addition to that produced on southeast Pennsylvania dairy farms.

According to DNP, while Sunnysdale is the processor involved in the pilot program, other processors are welcomed to participate in the program.

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