

## Dairy Practices Council Works For Mutual Benefit



The Dairy Practices Council is a collection of representatives from three different sectors of the dairy industry — regulatory, educational, and production/processing. Here, a representative of the dairy industry of Washington state talks about proactive work the industry did there to curtail environmental concerns with the industry.

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and lecturer, and served as deputy commissioner to the Vermont Department of Agriculture, Food and Markets, prior being named to head the Northeast Dairy Compact.

He discussed the Compact, the loss of small dairy farms that characterize Northeast production, the positive effect the Compact has had upon New York dairy producers (they are in an adjoining non-member state and they provide about a quarter of the milk in the Compact), and the fact that while dairy production may have increased within the Compact, it hasn't been shown to necessarily be a consequence of the effects of setting a marginally profitable producer price for milk.

He said that while consumer prices and producer prices were

different when it first started up, the current consumer prices are very close to those outside of the Compact region. He said the prices are about a cent different on drinking milk.

"The Compact isn't gouging consumers, but is providing stability of consumer prices, and prices for producers."

That lack of price stability was a growing concern and the Northeast Dairy Compact was seen as a way to allow Northeast dairy producers to transition to market-driven production without governmental support.

During Farm Bill negotiations that allowed for the temporary establishment of a Northeast Dairy Compact, it was widely predicted that continued instability of dairy price, especially dips into the sub-production level prices, would

only add to the demise of the open spaces and rural economic support that the small family farms provide in the Northeast.

Arguments for the Compact have also been offered that without the small family farms, the tourist industry would falter and farmland preservation efforts diminish.

Becker said that while the general public wants to retain its family farms and open spaces, and seems willing to support them in that concept, they were not willing to continue to support a broadly applied, tax-based federal commodity support program.

The regional approach

encompassed in the Compact is seen as a way to eliminate the federalism (and distrust of potential system corruption at a national level) of farm support, while maintaining the benefits of a local family farm sector.

The Northeast Dairy Compact was to have been ended in April 1999, and the short-lived nature of the Compact has been given as a major reason to oppose its expansion (by the time different state legislatures could discuss the merits of joining, it would be too late to be of benefit to join).

That is still seen as the case by many, although Becker said that a recent 6-month extension granted the Compact by the United States Legislature and President Clinton leaves open the life of the Compact.

He noted that a pre-November election federal omnibus spending bill included authorization for the continuation of the Northeast Dairy Compact past its April cutoff.

Becker cited the fact that several non-contiguous states and low dairy production states have passed legislation authorizing joining the Compact.

However, New York State would have to authorize and join, and Pennsylvania would have to authorize and join, in order for most of the states with enabling laws to participate.

Some have expressed the opinion that members of those states' legislatures approved Compact-enabling legislation knowing full well it would not come to pass in their states, but that, as harmless

legislation, it would serve to placate a portion of their political constituencies.

The reasons given for the extension of the Compact is the delay in the implementation of a new federal milk marketing order system.

There are a couple of proposals for a new system still being weighed and debated, although a new system was to go in effect in April.

Becker said that to handily dispense with the Compact won't necessarily work, because, "As a matter of public policy, there are a number of groups that support the Compact."

He said the other groups aren't necessarily agricultural in nature or commitment.

There are pressures from those concerned with the loss of open spaces and protection of watersheds who see the support offered by the Compact as a means for securing their real desires.

For example, he cited the concerns expressed in New York state about its Delaware County, which comprises a significant and critical area in the watershed that supplies drinking water to the city of New York.

(For years, a series of interconnecting reservoirs within the Delaware River watershed have provided fresh clean water to New York City.)

There are a number of small family dairy farms in the area that sell milk into the Compact and, because of it are considered to be economically feasible.

Becker said that while pollution

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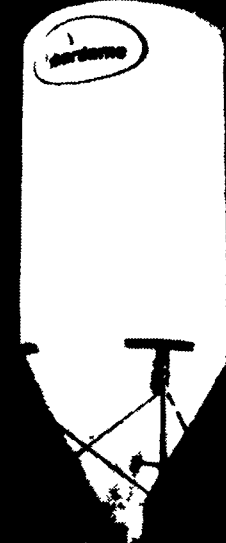
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