

## Major Dairy Initiative Announced By USDA

**HARRISBURG** (Dauphin Co.)— Responding to persistent and historically low milk prices, Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman recently told America's dairy farmers that significant new assistance is on the way.

Glickman said the agriculture appropriations bill that President Clinton is expected to sign provides an estimated \$667 million to help dairy farmers cope with the low milk prices. Prices have declined for three consecutive years and are now at their lowest level since 1991.

Approximately 80,000 dairy operations across the country will receive an average of \$8,300 each. The maximum payment per operation will be capped at \$25,000. Overall, USDA expects to distribute more than twice as much dairy market loss assistance this year as it has in the last two years combined.

"Many of America's small- and medium-size dairy farms need this help to survive," said Glickman.

Estimates indicate that Pennsylvania dairy farmers will receive about \$48.5 million. New

York farmers will receive an estimated \$60 million. Minnesota is expected to receive about \$56 million. USDA will distribute an estimated \$51 million in California and \$137 million in Wisconsin.

State Director William Baumgartner added his agreement that the state's small-to-medium-sized dairy operations will benefit from the payment and is very pleased that the quantity eligible for payment was increased from 26,000 cwt. to 39,000 cwt. According to Baumgartner, this will work well for Pennsylvania's typically smaller operations.

In addition, Glickman announced a major expansion of USDA's Dairy Options Pilot Program. This innovative cost-share program helps dairy farmers put a "floor" under the price they receive for milk using the futures and options markets. USDA subsidizes both premiums and brokerage fees for participating dairy farmers. USDA will spend about \$24 million over the next two years expanding this program, but the innovative approach used will allow

dairy farmers to leverage significantly more protection against price drops. The program, currently operating in 61 counties, will expand to 300 counties in 39 states.

The participating counties in Pennsylvania include Bedford, Berks, Blair, Bradford, Butler, Centre, Chester, Crawford, Cumberland, Erie, Fayette, Franklin, Huntingdon, Juniata, Lancaster, Lawrence, Lebanon,

Mercer, Perry, Somerset, Susquehanna, Tioga, Union, Westmoreland, and York.

The market loss assistance payments will be made to dairy farmers who received payments in the last two years as well as new producers. In an effort to speed payments and eliminate the need for a sign-up, payments to previous participants will be automatically calculated based

on 1997 or 1998 production levels, whichever are higher.

To better target small-to-medium-sized producers, payment calculations for all participants will be limited to the first 39,000 cwt. of production. All dairy farmers will receive the same payment rate. Further details are expected to be announced next month. Payments are expected to go out within the next few months.

## Alfred State Receives Grant

**ALFRED, N.Y.** — The Department of Agriculture and Horticulture at Alfred State College has been awarded a grant of \$48,000 through the American Distance Education Consortium (ADEC).

Principal investigators will be Joan Wissert, assistant professor and chair, Agriculture and Horticulture, Alfred State College; Kenneth Mudge, Cornell University; and William Head,

SUNY Morrisville.

Alabama A&M University will also participate. Other Alfred State College Ag and Hort Department participants are James Comes, lecturer, and Rachel LaMorte, assistant professor.

The objective of this project is to extend offerings in the horticultural sciences to undergraduate students through a series of distance learning modules.

Methods include asynchronous Web/CD-based modules, student interaction through discussion and group projects, hands-on instruction in horticultural skills, and synchronous video conferencing. Students at cooperating institutions will gain access to a broader range of expertise than currently available at any single institution.

The program will evolve based on industry needs.

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