

# Bill Would Allow More States To Join Dairy Compact

WASHINGTON (D.C.) — The U.S. House of Representatives recently introduced legislation that would indefinitely extend the Northeast Interstate Dairy Compact past its September 30, 2001 expiration date as well as expand the compact to include states that have already passed compact legisla-

tion. Introduced by U.S. Reps. Asa Hutchinson (R—Ark) and Bob Etheridge (D—NC), the proposed bill, known as The Dairy Consumers and Producers Protection Act of 2001, also seeks to create a dairy compact for southeastern states.

Tracy Jackson, Pennsylvania

Milk Marketing Board (PMMB) Director of Consumer Affairs, said that the PMMB remains neutral in its position toward the compact because current PMMB price regulations in Pennsylvania are serving the needs of farmers.

"We do in Pennsylvania what the compact is doing in the rest of the region," Jackson said. "Pennsylvania farmers already have the premium (price paid for milk)."

Jackson said that the PMMB

will continue to remain open to the possibility of joining the compact if conditions would warrant.

According to a New York Farm Bureau press release, 27 of New York's 31 representatives signed on to sponsor the new legislation.

The states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont have maintained an official Northeast Interstate Dairy Compact for the past three years.

Proponents of the compact cite regional stabilization of milk prices, local marketing incentives and zero operating costs to state and federal government as benefits of the compact.

The Maryland Dairy Industry Association (MDIA) showed its support for the new bill.

"We need dairy compacts to help reverse the decline of independent farm operations," said MDIA president Myron Wilhide.

## Network Wants Ag Ed To Be In Forefront

ANDY ANDREWS  
Editor

MANHEIM (Lancaster Co.) — Numbers often tell the story.

About 10 years ago, 200 schools in the state had some kind of vocational agricultural program.

Now only 167 of 501 school districts have some type of agricultural education program.

"That's something that really concerns me," said Mike Pechart of the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau.

Pechart helps coordinate the Agricultural Education Collaborative Partnership Network. The network includes the Farm Bureau working with a consortium of universities and industry on the re-invention of ag education in Pennsylvania by the year 2020.

Pechart spoke to about 20 agri-industry representatives last week at an Ag Issues Forum at Kreider's Restaurant in Manheim.

Said Pechart, "We're losing these agricultural programs in school that have been helping to prepare our kids."

Those programs, once a tradition in area schools, are becoming lost as successive generations move away from traditional production agriculture.

One teacher asked some children once where popcorn came from. A common response, noted Pechart, was "the microwave."

Though ag remains Pennsylvania's number one industry the past 250 years, in the last 50 years the state has lost 50,000 farms, Pechart noted.

The average age of a Pennsylvania farmer is 53. "That's something that really concerns me," said Pechart, who remembers growing up in Boiling Springs on a family farm.

"I had friends who lived on a

farm," he said. "Now I can only point to one that remains on a farm."

About 20 percent of Pennsylvania's working population are related in some way to agriculture, if they're not actively farming. Some are bioengineers, plant pathologists, landscape architects, and others.

There are so many occupations, Pechart noted, that involve food and fiber production and distribution. They include truck drivers who transport farm commodities.

The problem with promoting a program such as the collaborative network is there is a lack of funds, and also a lack of teachers, he said.

Less and less farmers and those related to ag serve on school boards. So ag education doesn't remain a priority in schools. And many teachers, Pechart was surprised to learn recently, believe agriculture is simply "a farmer on a tractor" with a couple of cows.

More and more, Farm Bureau is seeing ag programs that are having their funds cut in schools. But the Network seeks ways to provide lifelong learning, environmental stewardship, long-term ag viability, personal development, professional development, and use emerging technologies.

The focus remains on providing a system to educate students in schools about agriculture and its importance to the state's economy.

"We must not let misconceptions become emotions and create problems for those of us involved in ag," he said.

The network seeks to involve teachers and school administrators in a more enlightened way.

"If we don't, I don't know who is going to," Pechart said.

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