

NFU Asks USDA To Correct Price Reporting System

WASHINGTON, D.C. — In a May 22 letter to U.S. Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman, the National Farmers Union (NFU) called on the USDA to immediately correct reporting problems in the long-awaited mandatory livestock price-reporting system that began in early April of this year. The NFU alleges that computer program errors in a system that provides transparency for livestock markets has cost producers millions of dollars. The let-

ter also called on USDA to eliminate the department's "3/60 rule," a guideline that according to the NFU, protects the confidentiality of firms but nullifies the intent of the new program and is detrimental to producers.

"We have worked with farmers and ranchers for a long time to create a level playing field for producers trying to receive a fair price for their livestock," said Leland Swenson, president of NFU. "Underreporting by

USDA is unacceptable. The error should be corrected immediately, and farmers and ranchers need to be compensated for their losses."

The letter calls for immediate action to rectify alleged erroneous calculations by USDA for boxed-beef prices that have occurred since the beginning of mandatory price reporting. It also encourages the department to compensate producers who have endured losses due to errors in reporting of boxed beef

values.

Farmers Union also calls for the immediate elimination of the 3/60 guideline that protects companies' identities when there are fewer than three firms buying livestock in a market or when one firm controls at least 60 percent of the market. The rule is designed to protect confidentiality and proprietary information for firms purchasing livestock but has adversely affected producers by reducing price transparency and limiting

the availability of important information.

"The mandatory price reporting program will not work effectively until the 3/60 guideline is eliminated," Swenson said. "In this increasingly concentrated industry, the existence of this rule has led to less disclosure of information than that provided under the previous protocol. The mandatory price reporting system should set us one step forward, not two steps back."

Pa. Businesses Should Apply For Export Awards

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — Gov. Tom Ridge recently encouraged Pennsylvania businesses to apply for the 2001 Export Excellence Awards.

"We have worked hard over the last six years to make Pennsylvania internationally competitive," Gov. Ridge said. "The Export Excellence Awards are a perfect way to honor those employers who have worked with us to make Pennsylvania a major player on the world economic stage. These businesses should stand up and be recognized for their outstanding efforts."

Pennsylvania is not only a leader among states but also a competitor among nations. Under Gov. Ridge, Pennsylvania has opened 13 trade offices around the world, bringing the total to 17 — more than any other state.

Eligible applicants must produce, manufacture, or assemble a product or provide an exportable service from a registered Pennsylvania business.

Up to eight awards will be presented in the "Agriculture" and "Manufacturing" categories (includes new-to-export, small, medium, and large size or type of company). Two awards also will be presented in the category of "Services" for either an exportable or trade-support company.

Ten additional awards will be given in a new category this year. The "Special" category was created to recognize Pennsylvania companies that have achieved international success that does not reflect in their export sales. This category will be by nomination only from an entity other than the nominee.

Each applicant must submit a

copy of the appropriate financial data for the past three years (except for companies that fall under the "new-to-export" and "special" categories), along with a narrative about their business' experience of exporting products.

Applications will be rated using a mathematical formula based on financial data to determine increases in exporting over the past three years. A panel of judges made up of members of

the Team Pennsylvania Export Network will review the applications. The judges will focus on company financials, trade activities during 2000 provided in a written narrative, and international success to determine the award finalists.

The Team Pennsylvania Export Network was developed to assist Pennsylvania business with global development and is comprised of a network of trade pro-

fessionals within 10 regions of the state. Its mission is to enable Pennsylvania firms to expand their sales into international markets and to increase the number of Pennsylvania firms selling their products and services overseas.

All applicants will be notified by the end of July as to their selection. The finalists will be invited to the Governor's Export Excellence Awards on Sept. 25 in Pittsburgh.

Applications must be submitted to the Office of International Business Development, Fourth Floor, Commonwealth Keystone Building, Harrisburg, PA 17120-0225 by 5 p.m. Monday, July 9. For more information or to obtain an application, contact a local Team PA Export Network Regional office at 1-888-PA-EXPORT or call the Office of International Business Development at (717) 787-7190.

Pro Ag Urges New Pricing Formula

PHILADELPHIA — Testifying at a hearing conducted by the U.S. Senate Agriculture Subcommittee on Appropriations, Arden Tewksbury, manager of the Progressive Agriculture Organization (Pro Ag), warned the committee that the milk pricing formula used to pay dairy farmers must be changed in order to assure a continuance of our family dairy farms and to assure the U.S. consumer an adequate supply of domestically produced milk.

The subcommittee hearing, which was chaired by Sen. Arlen Specter from Pennsylvania, was conducted recently in Philadelphia.

The main purpose of the hearing was to explore the wide range of prices paid to dairy farmers and the prices paid by the consumer for dairy products. Tewksbury told the committee that the retail price for dairy products often remain at a high level, even after prices to dairy farmers collapse. The Pro Ag manager informed Sen. Specter that

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talked with 120,000 consumers in the past 26 months and the consumers are baffled regarding the disparities of milk pricing.

The Pro Ag official pointed out some of the discrepancies:

1) In November 2000, the price paid to dairy farmers across the U.S. for milk used to manufacture cheese was \$9.57 per CWT (74 cents per gallon). This price was the lowest since November 1977. Even with the low farm price, cheese was selling for \$15 for a five-pound block in many supermarkets. Yet, at a store in Meshoppen, the price was \$8.50 for a five-pound block.

2) Recently, a Pro Ag survey of butter prices in a Berwick supermarket found a pound of Land-O-Lakes butter selling for \$3.44. In another Berwick store, another brand of the same grade butter was selling for \$2.29 per pound.

3) In a supermarket in Hon-

esdale, Pro Ag found milk selling for \$2.87 per gallon (Pennsylvania Milk Marketing Board minimum price). Yet, three feet away, a gallon of Deans milk was selling for \$3.25 per gallon. Officials of the supermarket told Pro Ag that Deans was supposedly bottling both gallons of milk.

The Pro Ag manager warns the committee of the increased amount of dairy products being imported into the U.S., especially casein and milk protein concentrate (MPC). Tewksbury told Specter it appears foreign countries have found ways to circumvent the GATT agreements by shipping milk products into the U.S. in concentrated forms. MPC appears not to be regulated by the GATT agreement.

Pro Ag thinks the imports of dairy products are displacing several billions of pounds of domestic milk, causing additional problems for local dairy farmers.

The Pro Ag leader made several recommendations to the committee.

- Investigate the legality of MPC being imported into the U.S.

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- Investigate the amounts of casein coming into the U.S.

- Pro Ag strongly recommends there be no imports of dairy products into the U.S. from countries where hoof and mouth disease has been discovered. Furthermore, there should be no imports of dairy products from countries where mad cow disease exists.

- Pro Ag strongly urges the U.S. Congress to adopt a new dairy bill that would price milk to dairy farmers based on the average cost of producing milk as determined by the USDA.

- Pro Ag strongly recommends the reauthorization of the Northeast Interstate Dairy Compact. Pro Ag further urges the U.S. Congress to authorize any state, or group of states, to enact dairy compacts.

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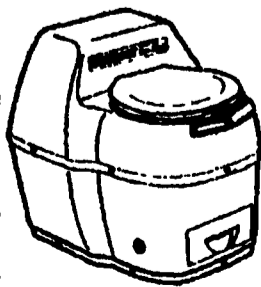
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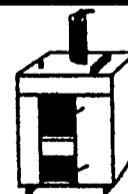
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