

# MILC Payments Require Production Record Updates

## 'Computer Glitch' Won't Allow Transition Payments For Partial Records

**DAVE LEFEVER**  
Lancaster Farming Staff

LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.) — Dairy farmers who apply for federal Milk Income Loss Contract (MILC) payments must submit full production records from the period of December 2001 through September 2002 in order to receive their first payment, according to Kathy Heil of the Lancaster County Farm Service Agency (FSA).

Since Oct. 18, the FSA has been authorized under the Farm Bill to send payments to dairy farmers for periods when the Boston Class I milk price is less than \$16.95 per hundredweight.

Heil said that farmers who submitted applications that do

not include production records through September cannot be paid until the records are updated.

For example, farmers who applied in August without later submitting production records through September will not be paid until they do so.

Previously, FSA officials thought payments would be paid to farmers for a shorter transition period. On Oct. 18, however, they discovered that the administrative setup would not authorize payments until production records are submitted for the entire period of December 2001 through this September.

"It's a computer glitch," Heil said, explaining the misunderstanding.

As of this Wednesday, about 600 dairy producers from Lancaster County have applied for payment. About 270 of those have submitted complete records for the transition period and have received payment, Heil said.

Producers who have not included the last several months of production evidence with their application can fax, mail, or deliver the evidence to the Farm Service Agency, 1383 Arcadia Road, Room 2, Lancaster, PA 17601, fax (717) 393-7289.

Producers in other counties should report to their local FSA office.

To date, about \$3 million has been paid to Lancaster County dairy farmers under the new program.

A typical small dairy of 50 cows in Lancaster County is eligible for payments of roughly \$10,000 for a 12-month period based on Class I milk prices since last December, Heil said. However, declining prices in the last several months will likely make that rate increase for future payments.

While only about a third of Lancaster County producers have applied so far, Heil said she believes many of them, especially the Amish, are waiting for their production records and applications to be submitted through their milk buying companies.

"We still haven't got any regulations on (farmers) receiving payments through dairy companies," Heil said.

The last time federal payments were available to dairy farmers — through the Dairy Market Loss Assistance program in 2000-2001 — Heil said about 800 Lancaster County producers applied for the funds.

Heil expects more than 800 farmers to eventually apply for the MILC program "because it involves more money," she said.

For MILC payments beginning after the transition payment, farmers will have a choice of receiving the funds on a monthly or quarterly basis, as long as they continue to submit production records on time.

Heil also noted that payments for fiscal year 2003 — which started Oct. 1 — will not begin until January of 2003, at the earliest.

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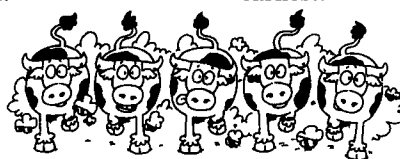
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