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and past Master of the Pennsylvania State Grange.

However, the most important people present were the dairy farmers. One by one, the dairy farmers told the same story concerning the economic crunch they were feeling on their farms.

Under questioning from the chair, they all acknowledged they needed between \$16 and \$18 per CWT on an annual basis to maintain their farms. All of them agreed that imports of dairy ingredients and dairy products coming into the U.S. had to be curbed. All but one of the presenters said they would support

milk supply management providing the dairy imports were limited and a right price was paid to the dairy farmers.

The need for a new pricing formula based on the average cost of production rang loud and clear throughout the hall. The need for a new pricing formula came from all the dairy farmers as well as businessmen who testified, such as Butch Gow, Chuck Place, Eric Emmerich, and Dave Derr from Blue Seal.

Also, three consumers presented their views to the audience. They exhibited their concern for the injustice that was happening at the farm level. Two Methodist ministers, Rev. Bill Reed from

Tunkhannock and Rev. Cheryl Cavalari from Trucksville, were appalled that many dairy farmers were suffering the way they are. Ed Pavilski, a consumer from Scranton, took the stand to talk about the fact that consumers are taking for granted their food supply. Pavilski urged all consumers to back the efforts of the local dairy farmers as they attempt to insure consumers of a safe food supply.

Gil Gillespie from Corwell University related to the psychological impact local dairy farmers are suffering from low milk prices. Privately, some of the guests present told me they heard things today that they were not aware of.

Certainly everyone knows that one milk hearing, as good as it was, will not solve the dairy farmers' plight. However, we are confident that other events will be held to keep the ball alive. Already, other hearings are being planned for the Syracuse, N.Y. area as well as Bradford or Tioga County in Pennsylvania.

The average dairy farmer has had it — they want changes! The next editorial will list the dairy farmers who testified. Remember, they are the important ones.

Attention Dairy Farmers: The dairy market loss payments will begin again on January 2004 production.

Pro Ag can be reached at (570) 833-5776.

— Arden Tewksbury
Pro Ag
Meshoppen

Editor:

Do you like green onions and ham?

Someone may want to consider revising Dr. Seuss' popular children's book, "Green Eggs and Ham," after the recent hepatitis A outbreaks that have been linked to Mexican green onions. More than 1,000 people have become ill, and three have died, from the viral disease in Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Georgia, and North Carolina, and all the illnesses have been linked to green

onions grown in Mexico.

Recently, a national reporter asked our organization what consumers should look for at the produce counter to protect themselves from food borne illness. Certainly, consumers can thoroughly wash and cook their fresh fruits and vegetables before serving. Beyond that, consumers are not allowed many

other choices. Most grocery stores do not provide information to consumers so that they may differentiate between meat and produce grown in the United States or grown in other countries such as Mexico.

Although mandatory country-of-origin labeling (COOL) cannot prevent hepatitis A or any other food borne illness, it would help reassure consumers and our markets. Since the Food and Drug Administration has warned consumers against eating green onions, continued uncertainty could hurt the industry. Instead of reacting to all produce when food safety concerns arise, with country-of-origin labeling, consumers would be armed with information to make educated decisions instead of decisions based on fear and doubt. It is a consumer's right to make these choices.

In addition, mandatory country-of-origin labeling would allow U.S. agricultural producers to differentiate themselves from countries that may have disease or food safety concerns. Mandatory COOL would provide an opportunity for the United States to expand the level of consumer choice, confidence, and knowledge in the retail marketplace and potentially increase the demand for U.S. origin commodities.

Recent events like the hepatitis A outbreak and the case of Canadian BSE should encourage all consumers, farmers, and ranchers to stand united to make sure mandatory country-of-origin food labeling is implemented. Before the Senate returns in January to decide the fate of this beneficial law, your lawmakers need to hear from you.

Do you like green onions and ham?

I do like green onions and ham.

Especially when they're labeled by Uncle Sam!

— Dave Frederickson
President

National Farmers Union

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Dennis C Wolff
Secretary of Agriculture

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Secretary Wolff Discusses Dairy Plan In Northwest Pa.

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — Secretary of Agriculture Dennis C Wolff met with dairy farmers from Erie, Warren, and Crawford counties to discuss the Department of Agriculture's new Dairy Action Plan and Center for Dairy Excellence.

"Through these regional dairy meetings and other outreach efforts, it is my hope that we can move Pennsylvania's dairy industry forward and make dairy farms more competitive and profitable," said Wolff. "Meetings like this one in Erie County help us to understand the challenges and needs of farmers in all areas of the Commonwealth."

Wolff, a dairy farmer from Columbia County, created a 40-member Dairy Task Force in July. The Dairy Task Force developed the Dairy Action Plan, which coordinates existing dairy services to meet the needs of the state's dairy industry.

The Department is also creating a Web-based resource library for farmers, containing information about farms for sale or rent, programs for economic development assistance, sample business plans, marketing opportunities, risk-management assistance and more.

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