

Progressive Agriculture Organization

The following testimony is being presented by Arden Tewksbury, Manager of the Progressive Agriculture Organization, to the members of the Pennsylvania Milk Marketing Board regarding the length of time that milk handlers must give dairy farmers before the handlers can cease to market the milk of an independent dairy farmer.

July 2, 2018

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My name is Arden Tewksbury of Meshoppen, Pennsylvania (Wyoming County).

I want to thank the members of the Pennsylvania Milk Marketing Board for allowing me to testify at this important milk hearing regarding the length of time that a milk handler must submit to an independent dairy farmer before the handler may cease to market a dairy farmers' milk.

Because there are two new members of the Board, I am submitting my credentials to you, but I will not read them.

Credentials:

*In addition to operating my dairy farm in Meshoppen Township, Wyoming County, Pennsylvania for over 50 years, I have also been involved with many farm organizations. In the 1960s I served on the dairy committee of the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, later on I served on the dairy committees of the Pennsylvania Farmers Union, and the Pennsylvania State Grange for several years. In the 1970s, I was

elected to the Board of Directors of Eastern Milk Producers, which I served for 9 years. While there, I was on the Executive Board for 7 years, 2 years as Vice-President, and 5 years as President of the Co-op. During my term as President, we were successful in bringing Leprino Foods into South Waverly, Pennsylvania, which took care of a substantial amount of milk that many times was homeless. After leaving the Board, I served as assistant to the General Manager, and later on, I did consulting work for Leprino Foods. During the 1980s, I was hired to do membership and dairy work for the Pennsylvania Farmers Union and was named manager of the Northern Tier Farmers Union Co-op. I also became a director of the Regional Marketing Cooperative Agency and also the Regional Bargaining Agency. In 1985, I was named Granger of the Year for the State of Pennsylvania. In 1991, several dairy farmers started the Progressive Agriculture Organization, which I have managed since that time.

Mr. Chairman, today in addition to representing the Progressive Agriculture Organization, I'm also representing the Dairy Subcommittee of the National Family Farm Coalition of Washington DC. The Coalition has other members in Pennsylvania in addition to Pro-Ag. Members of the Coalition come from at least 20 other states. *

There is no question that the large majority of dairy farmers are suffering one of the greatest financial losses of their careers.

There is no question that the over-order premium of the PMMB has continued since the middle 1980's has helped many dairy farmers in Pennsylvania, plus this premium allows some of us to negotiate premiums from other milk handlers in surrounding states.

Unfortunately, we all know that there are millions of dollars of the PMMB premium that is paid for by consumers that never reach dairy farmers. However, this hearing does not concern the premium, but the problems of thousands of dairy farmers not receiving a premium could have some effect on some dairy farmers losing a market for their milk.

Thousands of dairy farmers in the Northeast have either been cut loose by milk handlers or forced to lose their market for their milk or have been coerced into joining a dairy cooperative.

Forcing dairy farmers to join dairy co-ops or lose their market was never the intent of the PMMB or the intent of the Federal Milk Marketing Orders.

I was heavily involved in 1976-77-78 when thousands of dairy farmers were threatened to lose their markets for their milk. In addition, some milk handlers, especially in New York City and New England, changed their buying procedures, which caused severe

problems for many dairy cooperatives. The fact that the farmers in Federal Order #2 had the protection of the Cooperative Payment Provision which helped many of these dairy farmers to have their milk marketed.

In addition, in New York State, dairy cooperatives were allowed to waive bonds that were geared to help dairy farmers in case of bankruptcies. What a mess it was.

One would think that everyone would have learned several lessons from that mess.

All that dairy farmers gained, was to have the termination notices in New York and Pennsylvania be raised from 21 days to either 28 or 30 days. What a joke.

Now, here we are today, trying to change the law that protects independent dairy farmers from receiving short notices that they are losing their market.

I will say to the independent dairy farmers: you are now fully realizing the fact that you are not always an independent dairy farmer. You are finding out that you are very dependent on other people helping you!

However, I've always felt that I had a responsibility to help any dairy farmer that was in trouble. And more trouble is potentially around the corner.

Members of the Board, dairy farmers cannot wait any longer for real protection from losing their milk markets.

Suggestions from Pro-Ag: 1a) In the past, a few milk handlers had bona fide written contracts with dairy farmers.

1b) It's high time that milk handlers should have a written contract agreement with the dairy farmers that they market their milk for. We would recommend these contracts be yearly that must be adhered to by both milk handlers and dairy farmers. We recommend that a 60 day notice be given by either party, if they want to terminate the contract. Remember, most dairy cooperatives today have a one year membership contract.

Anything less than a one year protection would be a slap in the face to our independent dairy farmers.

In conclusion, I hope everyone realizes that the majority of dairy farmers that have lost their markets, have come at the hands of national milk companies, but not our local dairy companies here in Pennsylvania. Something to think about.

Pro-Ag strongly recommends that appropriate action be taken as soon as possible to protect Pennsylvania's dairy farmers from losing their markets.

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