Plain Talk

By Elwood Kirkpatrick
President

Michigan and National Legislation Will Affect Our Dairy Farms

During this busy time of planting, farm planning, and worrying about depressed milk prices, the last thing dairy farmers want is one more "job" to do. I understand that we are all very busy trying to keep everything running on our own farms, but current legislation that is pending in Lansing and in Washington, D.C. will affect all of us and needs our immediate attention.

In Michigan, all farmers stand to benefit from a package of bills, House Bills 5711-5716, known as the "MAEAP Legislation," currently awaiting a vote by the full Michigan House of Representatives. An important aspect of the bills is, if passed, will shift some of the control and funding of environmental farm issues from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) to the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA). The legislation will also help to clarify a farmer's environmental responsibilities by giving a clear understanding of what those responsibilities are.

At press time, the House had not yet voted on the legislation and it was hoped that the bills would be brought to the floor during the last week of April or first part of May. If that happens, the legislation will move to the Michigan Senate. Several of our Dairy Communicators met with their Senators on April 18 to discuss the MAEAP Legislation. Many returned from their meetings stating that many Senators voiced they would support the legislation. We need to keep a continued presence through personal visits, phone calls and letters to maintain our Senators' support.

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It is very important that you contact your Michigan Representatives, Senators and Governor Granholm, to urge them to support the legislation. Your April 26 milk check contained a letter to the Governor requesting that she sign the legislation once is has passed through the House and Senate. If you have not already sent that letter to the Governor, please take the time and do so today.

Nationally, our Legislators are facing some tough decisions regarding immigration reform. The U.S. House of Representatives has already passed border control legislation, but it addresses few of the objectives MMPA and National Milk Producers Federation policies call for in a comprehensive immigration reform package. For effective immigration reform, we feel we need to have border control, guest worker programs, and liability for hiring guest workers transferred from the employer to the government. The Senate's bill, S. 2454 appears to satisfy the key requirements our policies state must be included in a satisfactory immigration reform bill.

I recently had the opportunity to meet with Representative Bob Goodlatte (R-VA), chairman of the House Agriculture Committee and Representative Joe Schwarz (R-MI) and discussed our concerns with the immigration reform legislation. Representative Goodlatte indicated when the legislation is passed in the Senate and goes to a House and Senate Conference Committee, he has prepared an amendment that will address the objectives called for in our immigration reform policy. We are hopeful that when the legislation progresses to a conference committee, that the agricultural industry's needs are addressed along with border enforcement and security.

It is very important that our U.S. Representative and Senators continue to be made aware of our policies on immigration reform. I urge you to contact them to make sure they know our position. More information on immigration reform and ways to contact your U.S. Legislators can be found on page 10 in the *Legislative Watch* section of this issue.

If you need any assistance contacting your legislators, please contact the Member Relations Department or me in the Novi office.

Elwood Kirkpatrick