

NMPF Issues Positive Report Card on 2002 Farm Bill as Part of Senate Hearing on Dairy Policy

During a Senate Agriculture Committee hearing in late July on the state of U.S. dairy policy, the National Milk Producers Federation told the Senate that the current Farm Bill, created in 2002, "is a reasonable, rational and fair approach to farm policy," according to Charles Beckendorf, Chairman of NMPF. The Senate held the hearing to examine what has happened in the dairy industry since the passage four years ago of the current Farm Bill.

Beckendorf, a Texas dairy farmer, said most of the policy positions advocated by NMPF were included in the 2002 Farm Bill:

- Extending the dairy price support program through the five-year lifespan of the 2002 Farm Bill.
- Reauthorizing the Dairy Export Incentive Program, which is the U.S. industry's primary tool to counter export subsidies used by Europe's dairy industry.
- Funding animal health programs, such as a John's Disease Control program, along with a new veterinary lab in Iowa.
- Expanding the usefulness of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, which is the primary federal resource for helping farmers make environmental improvements in their operations.

Beckendorf noted it is important for Congress to establish an economic safety net for dairy producers, as it did four years ago through the reauthorization of the dairy price support program. He said the program "is the most effective, efficient and equitable safety net program" for farmers, and doesn't discriminate based on milk production, farm size or location.

He reminded the Senate that NMPF remains a strong supporter of the Federal Milk Marketing Order program, and that, "it remains an essential part of federal dairy policy."

Most of the Senate hearing was oriented toward examining economic policy issues, but Beckendorf reminded the Ag Committee that it must incorporate a broad-based perspective on agriculture. NMPF believes the Farm Bill must also address issues including animal health, environmental compliance, trade policy, and energy and rural development.

Beckendorf noted the dairy industry's three year old self-help program, Cooperatives Working Together, is not intended to take the place of federal government, but rather is a complement to, not a replacement of, farm programs.

He reminded Senate members that one of the key determinants of what may happen in the future with U.S. farm policy is dependent on trade agreements made with other countries.

He concluded by urging the Senate to stay involved in monitoring U.S. farm policy. "Our message to the Senate is that dairy farmers are not looking for a handout. Nor are we looking for a hand up; what farmers are looking for from government is a handshake," Beckendorf said. "Dairy farmers want a sign of commitment, such as a handshake, indicating, when times are tough, that there will be a modest safety net in place to help catch those who are vulnerable."

A full copy of the NMPF testimony is available at www.nmpf.org.

ACTION ALERT

Got Milkers? Farmer Support Needed

Immigration Hearings Planned

The House of Representatives is in the midst of holding various field hearings on the immigration reform issue. NMPF is continuing to press for a comprehensive reform bill based on the immigration reform principles laid out by the board earlier this year. In order for this effort to be effective, producers need to show up at the immigration hearings and communicate the needs and concerns of the dairy industry to the media present there. NMPF is not asking for producers to testify at these hearings, but rather to be present and speak about the need for a comprehensive approach to this issue.

The messages NMPF is seeking to convey include the following key points:

- The difficulty in finding people willing to work in agriculture, particularly in a business that runs 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, such as dairying.
- Because of this, immigrant workers are essential to the continued health of the dairy industry.
- Without a reliable workforce for dairies, the price of milk in grocery stores will increase significantly due to a shortage of labor.
- Significant price increases in a wide variety of industries would ripple through the economy, having a negative effect on it.

In promoting the importance of these issues, NMPF suggests using placards with the phrase "Got Milkers?" in the hopes of getting media attention.