



## The Long Road to a New Farm Bill

September 30, 2007 will mark the end point for the current 2002 Farm Bill. Reverting to a 1949 program, which would translate to \$34.00 milk (75 percent of parity), isn't going to happen, because that program was terminated by the 1996 Freedom to Farm Act. The realistic expectation is an extension of the 2002 Farm Bill or an entirely new Farm Bill on October 1, 2007.

The process for the upcoming Farm Bill started quite some time ago both at USDA and with each group affected by the Farm Bill. We generally think of the Farm Bill in terms of the effect it will have on our industry and our farms, but if you have ever attended a Farm Bill hearing or an informational session with a legislator, you are immediately struck by the diversity of participants. We attended such a session with U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.) this spring in East Lansing. It seemed like production agriculture was outnumbered by other groups – ones we don't normally associate with being affected by a Farm Bill. Groups interested in nutrition, food assistance, feeding the poor, sports activities such as hunting and fishing, and environ-

mental issues, among others, are involved.

With so much diversity and limited dollars to apply to a Farm Bill, the competition for funds becomes difficult. You soon realize the need for unity in at least your own commodity group. You also soon realize the need for strong, competent leadership representing your commodity group and the need for people in Washington D.C. who understand the issues, the system and the people who make the system work.

The dairy industry has just such an organization in the National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF), where MMPA has been a member for decades. NMPF, along with the input of individual members like MMPA, formulates a program that understands the political realities and fulfills the needs of its members. In other words, they don't advocate something NMPF members don't agree on or something they know won't "fly" with Congress.

NMPF's Farm Bill process began 18-24 months ago when they began gathering input from the member co-ops. Those ideas were discussed, refined and accepted by the member co-ops before lobbying started in Congress to formulate a plan agreeable to most participants. In the end, any disagreements between members were minor, and we were able to create a list of unified goals for the upcoming Farm Bill.

The dairy provisions of the current Farm Bill voted out of the House Agriculture Committee are not far from what we agreed upon

at NMPF. Some provisions didn't come out of Committee quite the way we would have liked, but House Committee Chair Collin Peterson (D-Minn.) has stated our concerns will be addressed in the full House version of the bill.

MMPA also participated in Farm Bill formulation with the National Council of Farm Cooperatives, another farming organization MMPA belongs to. The process there works much the same as NMPF, except that we worked with a broad spectrum of commodity groups from Almonds to Zucchini. There, MMPA represents the dairy portion of the Farm Bill but works in cooperation with the other agricultural cooperatives to maintain a united front within production agriculture. NCFC performs a vital role in the Farm Bill process, providing an organization where various interests can and do work together for the common good.

The road to completion of a Farm Bill is long and complex with the great diversity of involved parties. The decisions will have to be reached by harvest time this year. By then we will have a more complete picture of how dairy will fare. Until then, we will keep you updated on the progress through this column and other articles in the *Messenger* (see story on page 11), as well as mailings to members. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the upcoming Farm Bill, please contact me through the Novi office.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken".

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