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FFD Mission

Family Farm Defenders is a tax-deductible non-profit activist organization made up of farmers and concerned consumers. We are seeking ways to bring fair prices back to farmers and to insure a safe and sustainably produced food for consumers.



Wisconsin's Dairyland Disaster

By: Joel Greeno,
Farmer and President of Family Farm Defenders
(*Madison, WI*), 5/23/15 *Capitol Times*

Last month the Agricultural Census made it official: Wisconsin now has less than 10,000 dairy farmers.

The exodus of dairy farmers continues unabated as the price paid to dairy farmers drops — to about \$15 a hundredweight or \$1.50 a gallon, a near record low. Dairy farmers are now being paid 40 percent less for their milk than a year ago.

Deans, one of the largest and most powerful milk processors in the U.S., even told their buyers in a recent memo that despite paying farmers less, the retail price for milk in stores would not change for consumers.

Imagine losing 40 percent of your income while the bills continue to pile up for land, seeds, fertilizers, utilities, machinery and fuel?

I am one of the thousands of dairy farmers who no longer milk cows. In late 2013, I sold my dairy cows. It was not an easy decision. But the ups and downs of dairy prices just made it too hard to continue. It makes me angry that nothing is being done to fix this “pricing” problem that has been the scourge of the dairy industry for three decades. Citizens need to act now if we want to have any dairy farmers left in Wisconsin in the next decade.

**We need solutions, not more rhetoric.
Here are some things we need to do to save
those dairy farmers who are left:**

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CHICAGO MERCANTILE EXCHANGE SETS THE DAIRY PRICE!

We need solutions, not more rhetoric.

Here are some things we need to do to save those dairy farmers who are left:

1. Get Dairy out of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange!

Each day an elite group of commodity traders gathers at the CME to swap cheddar cheese. Very little cheddar cheese is actually sold, but within seconds this “thin” market reverberates around the globe, affecting farm gate prices and grocery bills for billions of people. Among these bad actors are many of the world’s largest food giants and even corrupt farmer co-ops. For instance, in 2008 the Commodity Futures Trading Commission found Dairy Farmers of America guilty of rigging milk prices at the CME and levied an unprecedented \$12 million fine. But this type of manipulative speculation continues today. The U.S. Justice Department needs to stop this criminal activity once and for all and guarantee that farmers get a fair price for their milk from a truly competitive market.

2. Stop Fast Track and the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement!

Congress is now considering giving President Obama fast track authority to approve another round of trade deals that would be disastrous for farmers, workers and consumers. Among the worst of these trade deals is the TPP, which would open U.S. floodgates to unsafe milk powder imports, driving down domestic prices even further. Of course, if you are a giant food processor and there is no COOL (country of origin labeling) required for dairy products, you could care less about buying fresh milk from U.S. farmers when you can use imported milk protein concentrate instead. One of the major players now lobbying U.S. politicians to railroad through fast track and the TPP is Fonterra of New Zealand, which controls about 30 percent of the world’s dairy trade. Congress needs to say No to Fast Track and impose a moratorium on more bad trade deals. Didn't we learn our lesson from NAFTA?

3. Change how Dairy Farmers are Paid!

Imagine working in a business where you don’t know your wage until one month after you finished a job. The wage could be \$15 an hour or it could be the minimum wage. It all depends on what the company wants to pay you. In essence this is how dairy farmers are paid. It is an archaic system that is even a mystery to most dairy farmers. We need a 21st century pricing structure so farmers actually know the price they will receive for their milk the day it leaves the farm. The price should reflect the cost of production and fair wages for dairy farmers — in other words a living wage — just like what other workers in our food system are now demanding. The U.S. already imports over 20 percent of our food. Can we really afford to continue to bankrupt our family farmers and drive them and their families off the land and out of our already struggling rural communities?

Unless we take action, Wisconsin will no longer be able to call itself “America’s Dairyland.” Wisconsin will be stuck with some other less flattering nickname — like the Frac Sand Mining Playground of the U.S. or the Midwest’s Largest Manure-Tainted Water Park.