

**ROHART FARMS
8069 CORNER RD
MERCERSBURG PA 17236**

USDA/AMS/Dairy Programs
STOP 0231- Room 2971
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-0231

September 24, 2006

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing concerning the consideration of new proposals for the pricing of milk to the producers. I can assure you that if more equitable pricing is not forthcoming, this country will soon be relying on foreign food sources as well as foreign energy sources and we all know where that has led us. You will have fewer protections as to quality and will certainly sacrifice freshness.

In 47 years of dairy farming, we have never had as serious a financial situation as we face right now. As a family farm of 700 production acres and a milking herd of 250 head and a comparable number of replacement animals, we are struggling to pay our bills. Both my daughter-in-law and I have been forced to take off farm jobs just to try and stay afloat.

As a family, we have done all the "right things", expanded our herd which required the building of a new milking parlor to become more efficient, worked mostly with family labor hiring as few others as necessary to keep the work done. We do all of our own crop work with the exception of combining. Our machinery purchases are negligible. But despite all of our efforts, we fall further and further behind. Fuel prices have tripled during this past crop season. Of course with an election looming, they are now temporarily going down but it is too late to make up for the overwhelming costs we have faced this past year. Health care costs are out of control. It costs us \$1800 per month to have just the most rudimentary health care coverage. These costs are a problem for all small business. The difference is we cannot pass those costs on to the consumer because we have no control over the price of our product. Naturally, we are having those costs passed on to us.

The question is, why are our costs of production not considered when the price is set for our product? In this age of computerized records, it is certainly possible to establish an average cost of production to factor into the price of milk. We pay for advertising through deductions from our checks. We pay for hauling our product. Through the ridiculous "make allowance", we even pay some of the cost of processing, but OUR cost of production is never considered.

In a society that feels that cheap food is their inherent right, these same people should be willing to help keep the American dairy farmer in business through a decent price for the product they produce. It has been my experience that when you talk to the average

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consumer, they are appalled at the financial plight of the dairy farmer and would have no problem paying a little more for milk at the store if they were sure the farmer was actually getting the increase. The problem is that the current horrendous price of milk to the farmer has not been reflected in the grocery store.

I am pleading with you to make cost of production a part of dairy pricing. I could go on about the total ineffectiveness of the CWT program but that is another issue. It has been proven time and again that the family farm is the most efficient means of producing milk but if something is not done to preserve those farms through a decent price for our product, it is the American consumer who will ultimately suffer the consequences.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kathy Hartung". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Kathy Hartung