



Countryside Veterinary Clinic, LLP

January 2017 Newsletter



Milk Prices in Lewis County: Where Do We Go from Here? A Review of the Open Farmers Forum Jan 13, 2017 Lowville, NY

Cornell Cooperative Extension, in conjunction with local Lewis county dairy farmers, recently organized and led an open forum to discuss methods to improve north country milk prices. County legislators, upstate political appointees, Farm Bureau representatives, members of the media along with agribusiness leaders and dairy producers were all in attendance. The floor was open to any individual wishing to discuss the current dairy climate. Speakers were allowed 2 minutes to share their comments with the approximately 200 people assembled.

Despite very diverse opinions discussed to remedy the situation, all participants were in agreement that weak milk prices paid to farmers have negative consequences for the local economy. The meeting was certainly a wake-up call for elected officials as it was clear many of their constituents are clearly suffering financially. I don't pretend to fully understand all the nuances of how mailbox milk prices are ultimately calculated but what I do know is that the current pricing mechanism allows our farms few options. (Andy Maciejko) When milk prices are low, producers ramp up to make more milk to stay afloat financially. When prices are high, producers make more milk to recoup their previous losses. As a result, more milk is bad for an industry already awash with product but a necessity at the local farm level. It's obvious that this reoccurring cycle is not supportive of a healthy, sustainable farm economy. I chose to speak at the meeting to lend a veterinary perspective to the conversation. The following were my comments: **Peter G. Ostrum, DVM**

"Many changes have recently occurred for the dairy industry. The "FARM" program, VFD's and VCPR's are just a few of the new hurdles that veterinarians and dairy farmers will have to navigate together. The farmers assembled here today are expected to do *more* with comparatively *less* income. It's not hard to understand why our clients are frustrated. I'd like to highlight several observations that need to be clarified at this juncture:

1. We all need to realize that the various animal rights groups (PETA and HSUS) are serious in ending animal agriculture as we know it. We need to defend our business but we can't ignore consumers demands nor good science when it's done appropriately.
2. We need to pick our battles. Dehorning and GMO's are absolutely worth defending. The good news is our farms have become more transparent to consumer scrutiny. Consumer education is a key component to securing dairy markets in the future.
3. Right or wrong, we all know that we're working and living in a global economy. What happens in New Zealand and China does affect us in the United States. Lewis County doesn't operate as an isolated community any longer in the dairy world.
4. Consumers do have a voice and they vote loud and clear with their purchases. Just visit "Whole Foods", "Wegmans" or "Trader Joes" and see what prices people are paying for their organic products. You will be amazed. Consumers *do* care where and how their food is produced.
5. The "FARM" program does make sense. The program is basically a series of "Best Management Practices" that sets the standard for animal welfare in the US. How many of you have actually read the complete document? In my opinion there is really nothing out of line presented. It's an excellent template that outlines the *expected* animal management and husbandry protocols that our farms should be following.
6. The new "VFD" mandates are the direction the industry needs to take. Less reliance on antibiotics coupled with improved facility designs, better treatment protocols and new vaccine strategies is the appropriate position moving forward for all of us.

In summary, I think the take home message is we have to adapt to a changing economic climate. Regardless of farm size, change is inevitable. It's unsettling and uncomfortable when we acknowledge that outside forces can influence our industry. As a result, individual farm business plans may have to be redefined in order to survive in the 21st century. I look forward to continuing this conversation with our clients, local co-ops and industry leaders. Thank you for your time and attention".

Winter 2017 Lewis County Rabies Clinics for Dogs & Cats

Saturday January 21 at Maple Ridge Center, East Road, Lowville from 10 am to 12 noon.

All cats should be in carriers or confined in pillowcases. Dogs must be on a leash.

