

PA Milk Marketing Board

Carol A. Hardbarger

A Dairy Rapid Response Team

As expressed by some of those in attendance at our four listening sessions, we currently have a fair number of organizations, agencies, and individuals who have been meeting to discuss and work on the dairy crisis in PA. A lot of thoughts and ideas are circulating in print as well as in cyber space; there have been some concrete actions taken, but the day-to-day crisis experienced by farmers may need quicker attention than can be provided by these thoughts and discussions. Long-term strategies and policies are important to address the systemic issues, but as I stated, some things need to be addressed quickly. The recent Dean Foods bankruptcy has made this issue even more important to the Milk Marketing Board.

We envision the formation of a PA Dairy Rapid Response Team, the basic structure of which would be a relatively small number of committed individuals headquartered primarily in the Harrisburg area, all of whom have power to waive regulations and who have good problem-solving abilities, with perhaps one or two relevant personnel. Our initial thinking is to include the PA Departments of Agriculture, Economic Development, Environmental Protection, and Conservation and Natural Resources, as well as individuals from the banking industry and the Governor's office.

Once a problem is brought to the group and discussed, the appropriate local and additional state people would be brought in to fine tune and work on solutions. The Governor's office and/or Assembly may be a key in creating the group since locals will only be brought in as needed for any issue – and – mandates to participate and work within structure of group to facilitate solving the problem may be necessary.

Recognizing that everyone is busy care will have to be given so that each meeting is productive, and the available technology can be used as much as possible. Selection of individuals for the group would be a key since all must be committed to the time necessary to conduct its activities. A mechanism would also have to be put in place to funnel issues to the group as soon as they are known.

We think it is also important to somehow compile all the recommendations/decisions made by each of the entities that have been working on this issue for the past few years. That might be a good start!

If this sounds like a good idea to you, please discuss with your local agriculture and dairy organizations and your local legislators. We stand ready to advocate for this idea and others to help with the current dairy industry crisis. You may contact me at 717-210-8244 or by email at chardbarge@pa.gov.