

Senate Ag And Rural Affairs Committee

From: Brian Snyder -- PASA [brian@pasafarming.org]
Sent: Thursday, April 05, 2007 5:29 PM
To: Senate Ag And Rural Affairs Committee
Subject: Re: PA Senate Agriculture & Rural Affairs Committee

Kristin,

I offer these thoughts as a follow-up to yesterday's listening session in Waymart. Please put them in the committee hopper, or at least communicate them to Senator Brubaker when you get a chance.

First, and although I don't mean to detract one bit from the great job you are doing to get around the state and listen to people, I have to say that I was really disturbed by the dairy discussion before lunch. I believe it was disrespectful to start the session as late as it did, and therefore to cut discussion after the panel to "60 seconds or less" for each person. The current dairy crisis (which has really been coming for many years) is simply too important and tragic to be covered in such a limited discussion. As you could tell, many of these folks need significant help, and in this context I define "help" more as an ongoing, reasoned discussion than just as relief dollars.

But aside from yesterday's format and timing issues, I am even more greatly disturbed because PDA's Dairy Task Force and Center for Dairy Excellence have been operating for as long as they have while doing so little for the average dairy farmer. Mike knows very well how hard I've tried in that group to get some focus on saving farms and, especially, on the alternatives that are really WORKING for many farmers (i.e. grazing, organic, value added, raw milk permits, etc...). Some of the more "expert" members of the DTF have clearly said that we in fact must lose more farms before things will get better, at least for the mostly larger farms that will survive. This is a travesty that must be challenged...and I, like the gentlemen feed dealer who spoke yesterday, am concerned that it may already be too late to make much difference.

I challenge you, the Senator and Ag Committee to take a leadership role in doing the one thing the DTF/CDE will never do, and bring together all the factions in this discussion for a straightforward, no-holds-barred, but moderated discussion of what is to be done to save and indeed restore the preeminence of the small, diversified family dairy farm to its rightful place as the flagship of Pennsylvania agriculture. In making this challenge, I am also offering to do whatever I can to help.

FYI, PASA was just recently awarded a significant grant from SARE to work on value-added dairy issues, much as what had been recommended by Emily (a member of ours) who spoke yesterday. So this is going to be a priority of ours for some time.

I have three other issues the committee needs to look into, as follows:

A. One of the main sources of support for local marketing efforts comes from PDA's Matching Marketing Grant Program. This program has been flat-funded by the administration for the past several years even though demand exceeds the supply of funds by a factor of two or three. Available funds are also hampered by the fact that much of what's available has traditionally gone to generic commodity groups (though that's changing), and also that PDA must itself take a portion of the funding for its own

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administration of marketing programs. I believe the entire request by groups looking for grants is only about \$1.4M or so...a drop in the bucket, really.

B. About two years ago PASA completed a study of the commonwealth's meatpacking industry with PSU for the Center for Rural Pennsylvania. Our most significant conclusion was that Pennsylvania should consider reinstating state meat inspection to 1) aid in intrastate sales of meat products that are direct marketed by farmers to the public and 2) encourage the many custom plants found across the countryside to consider upgrading to state inspection standards, and maybe even later to USDA inspection (the standards are the same, but the "state" version would be expected to be more user-friendly). With state inspection, we would also be in position to negotiate reciprocity with neighboring states that have the same (like Ohio), which would expand markets for farms close to those states (Ohio has been wanting this for years). This study sits at CRP and has not yet been published for reasons not fully understood.

C. The commonwealth's laws around raw milk sales do indeed need to be re-examined. I realize this is a can-o'-worms, but the law really is antiquated and could be so much more useful to PA farmers with some reasoned revision. PASA has worked closely with farmers to obtain permits and has acted successfully as sort of an informal ombudsman in cases where disputes have occurred. This issue has huge potential (and some risk of course) for the commonwealth in terms of attracting business from other states.

These are the top four priorities for legislative action as far as I can see, with the status of the dairy industry standing way out on top as number one. To reiterate, the problem there is not lack of solutions, but failure of leadership to effectively communicate ALL the positive solutions that exist. Aside from PDA, the Senate Ag Committee might be the only body of leadership that can do anything meaningful to get this trend reversed in time to make a difference.

Thanks for listening. Please let me know if I can provide any additional information.

Yours sincerely,

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for all people while respecting the natural environment"

----- Original Message -----

From: Senate Ag And Rural Affairs Committee
To: Brian Snyder -- PASA
Sent: Thursday, March 29, 2007 3:08 PM
Subject: RE: PA Senate Agriculture & Rural Affairs Committee

Thanks Brian. See you then!

Kristin J. Ebersole
Executive Director
Senate Agriculture & Rural Affairs

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