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# Wayne County dairy farmers are hurting

## Many may go out of business

By TOM KANE

HONESDALE, PA — Dairy farmers in Wayne County are under siege, afraid that they may be forced out of business.

Things have never been worse for dairy farmers in Wayne County. The price for milk varies widely, “up and down like a roller coaster,” say farmers, while the costs of production are going up steadily — and rapidly.

Over 60 farmers met in Honesdale on Friday, February 2, calling for their elected officials and anyone else to do something to help them.

The meeting was attended by State Senator Lisa Baker, State Assemblywoman Sandra Major, Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture Dennis Wolf, and representatives from the offices of State Assemblyman Mike Peiffer and US Congressman Chris Carney, who could not themselves attend.

“I’ve been here a long time and I haven’t seen things this bad,” said Peter Wilken, a local Agway supplier.

A similar meeting was held by 400 farmers in Cobleskill, NY last week.

“They’re facing the same problem as Pennsylvania farmers,” said Mariane Kiraly, Cornell Cooperative Extension Educator in Delaware County. Kiraly said that 564 farms closed down in New York during 2006.

“This could be the end of the family farm,” said farmer Brian Smith, who conducted the meeting. “In the last six years, the county has gone from 210 farms to 105 farms. We’re losing them by the day.”

To add to the urgency of the situation, local realtors are becoming a factor in exacerbating the problem. “I’m getting weekly calls from realtors asking if I want to sell,” said Hamlin farmer Linda Wagner. “When I don’t have enough to pay my 2006 taxes, I wonder what I’m going to do.”



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Angry farmers sound off in Honesdale, PA. (Click for more photos.)

One after the other, farmers voiced alarm as they related dire conditions they are facing.

“Something has to be done to help these farmers,” said Dennis Nearing, owner of Cochection Mills, a major supplier of feed and fertilizer. “My costs have gone up 40 percent in the last year. Spring is coming and the time for planting. These people work hard and long.”

Farmers are asking that the price of milk match the price of production. The federal Milk Marketing Board determines the price of milk. The price is also determined by the milk co-ops that farmers join. The co-ops sometimes give discounts to their best customers.

“That discount comes off the back of the farmers,” one farmer yelled. “We shouldn’t be the ones who are hurt by this practice.”

Many farmers at the meeting questioned the integrity of the co-ops, urging that they should fulfill their primary purpose — to benefit farmers only.

“A twenty-five-cent rise in milk prices wouldn’t hurt anyone,” another yelled. “Why can’t something like that happen? People pay for gas and cigarettes no matter what the price. They don’t seem to mind it. Why not with milk?”

Young people are not going into dairy farming in large numbers, another threat to the existence of the family farm.

“I’m 18 and I want to be a farmer and continue the tradition in my family, but I can’t do it because you can’t make a decent living,” said Adam Diehl.

“This will end our three generations in farming,” said his father, Louis Diehl. “I’m discouraging him from farming. It just insures a life of poverty.”

The question of what effect the production of ethanol could have on farming profits came up, but no one had enough information on this rapidly growing trend. The price of corn is going up rapidly to supply these new ethanol plants.

“I don’t think ethanol will hurt farmers,” said farmer Marlyn Shaffer who is on the Pike/Wayne Farm Bureau.

(See the article on ethanol on page 3.)

### **What officials can do**

Baker, Major and Wolf said that they would return to Harrisburg and pressure the state agriculture department and the legislature to take strong measures to equalize the price of milk.

“There’s a new Farm Bill going through Congress that must reflect these concerns,” said Dave Williams, a director of the Pike/Wayne Farm Bureau. “Congress, the co-ops, the milk retailers and the public

have to know what is happening here. The time to take effective remedies is now.”

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