

Wisconsin Farmers Union: President Rick Adamski, US dairy farmers need real solutions to dairy pricing woes, not status quo

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In the game of Monopoly there is only one winner. If current dairy 'market forces' prevail, we are steadily moving in that direction.

Losing one to two dairy herds per day, as we have in recent years, is not progress. It is a sign that our antiquated dairy policy and ongoing price volatility need to be addressed.

In late March, dairy farmers from local chapters of the Wisconsin Farmers Union and Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation teamed up to host a series of Dairy Revitalization meetings in western Wisconsin. The success of the events indicates interest and the potential for bringing about the kind of change we hope for in the future.

I use quotation marks around the phrase 'market forces' because the fiscal and public policy of past decades has been intended to continue a trajectory pre-determined for us. It is time that we reevaluate these assumptions of 'progress' and evaluate the effects of past policies.

We almost had a more farmer-friendly dairy policy in the 2014 Farm Bill, but it was taken out in the eleventh hour due to powerful lobbying forces at play. The outcome is that we have spent around \$1.2 billion more on government-funded dairy subsidy programs than what would have happened had we adopted growth management in 2014. We have lost countless dairy herds that might still be in business today, if we

would have had a mechanism in place to better balance milk supply with demand. We have witnessed the erosion of farms from the landscape throughout the Midwest.

Thousands of farms have been forced out of dairy production in recent years because of these bad policies and broken markets. Opportunity seems to be reserved for only a handful of farmers and thus exposes how policy creates a history of American agriculture where the big get bigger and the small get out.

It is imperative that we diligently monitor our deliberations leading up to the next Farm Bill in 2023. Those in power want to continue the trends of the past. They want to conserve power with those who have power. It will be easier for politicians to support subsidy programs over meaningful reform, because there is little accountability for those subsidies. Projections will be created upon false hopes to justify more of the same types of policies.

If we look at these policy options as opportunities to learn from our past, we may create a better future.

A new set of data needs to be considered in these discussions. The lessons learned from a concentrated food system during the distress of the COVID-19 pandemic teach us that a diversified agriculture is a more resilient agriculture. This lesson has been learned by countries experiencing the turmoil of war or the losses caused by catastrophic natural disasters. Depending upon a very consolidated supply chain is not as durable as a distributed, diverse production system. We need farms of all sizes that will be able to supply our basic needs in a very uncertain future.

I believe that if you find yourself in a hole, the first thing needed to be done is to quit digging. The hole that the US dairy industry is in is a trend towards fewer and larger farms, which concentrates our food security into the hands of a few.

We can create a better, more diverse future with the plan presented at the Dairy Revitalization meetings. We can restore a more vibrant rural economy based upon more diverse farms. We can start breaking the addiction to government subsidies to prop up only the farms and agribusinesses that are 'too big to fail.'

If you weren't able to attend the meetings, I encourage you to visit www.DairyTogether.com to learn about this plan that could increase farm net income, decrease our reliance on subsidies, stabilize the markets, and create a

future for the next generation of US dairy farmers.

Rick Adamski is the president of the Wisconsin Farmers Union. He and his family run Full Circle Farm near Seymour, WI.