

Weekly Market Bulletin

State of New Hampshire
John H. Lynch
Governor

Department of Agriculture, Markets & Food
Lorraine S. Merrill
Commissioner

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From Your Commissioner... Eat Local, New Hampshire

An enthusiastic crowd and a glorious, sunny day helped celebrate New Hampshire Farmers Market Week and the inauguration of New Hampshire Eat Local Month at the Concord Farmers Market on August first. Governor John Lynch read from his proclamations, with First Dog Katie, a young Golden Retriever at his feet. First Lady Dr. Susan Lynch, a pediatrician and expert on childhood obesity, spoke of the healthfulness of eating locally produced, fresh foods, and the environmental benefits of local farms and local foods.

Senate President and Concord resident Sylvia Larsen spoke of the good food, and good times and community life that farms and farmers markets provide. Having been instrumental 20 years ago in getting the Concord Farmers Market into its prime location on Capitol Street, she noted with pride how the market has grown and flourished. Executive Councilor John Shea, New Hampshire Farmers Market Association President Kris Mossey of McLeod Bros. Orchard in Milford, and Diane Souther of Apple Hill Farm in Concord also helped us launch NH Eat Local Month and Farmers Market Week. Find more local events and activities at www.nheatlocal.org.

The market transforms Capitol Street every Saturday from June to October into a festive pedestrian street scene. White-tented stands shelter overflowing displays of fresh fruits and veggies, jugs of maple syrup, coolers of farm-raised meats, baked goods, home-made preserves, gorgeous cut flowers and plants, and more. Sanders Lobster Company and Fish Market and The Little Milkman, both from Portsmouth, bring local seafood and dairy products respectively to the market.

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In the midst of all this appreciation of local food and farms, we are experiencing the potential tragedy of loss of a significant portion of our state's dairy industry. Milk is the only category of food that we come close to producing a significant portion of the state's consumption. And we are in danger of losing it.

Some good news came last week, when Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced immediate action to temporarily increase the support price paid for cheese and nonfat dry milk, which underlies the federal order all-milk price paid to farmers. The increases, which will be in place from August 2009 through October 2009, are less than those sought by the group of 20 senators who petitioned the secretary, but will be of some help—as long as further actions are taken to build on this bridge.

The support price increase will likely amount to over \$1.00 per hundredweight for farmers whose production has exceeded the limit for MILC payments, according to Bob Wellington, economist for Agri-Mark cooperative, and under \$1.00 for smaller producers who will continue to be eligible for MILC payments. "These will be a crucial three months if the problem can be corrected," he says, with industry efforts to build on the opportunity the support increase provides to move surplus products to the government. Much of that product can be distributed to food banks and food and nutrition

programs.

The second step that could help repair the terrible damage done to farm families' equity over the last eight months, and to encourage dairy families to continue to farm, involves beefing up the MILC (Milk Income Loss Contract) program payments to a more realistic level, raising the cap on production to provide more coverage for middle-sized or multi-generation farms that support more than one family, and making these increases retroactive to February 1, 2009 when payments began. These MILC increases are being proposed this week as an amendment to the ag appropriations bill. The third necessary step to resolve the dairy crisis, promised by Secretary Vilsack here in New Hampshire at the meeting at Carter Hill Orchard, is the longer-term review and reform of the federal order pricing system for milk.

Lorraine Merrill, Commissioner