

House Committee on Agriculture
Public Field Hearing
At
North Country Community College
Sparks Athletic Complex
23 Santanoni Avenue
Saranac Lake, New York 12983
March 9, 2012

Testimony of Jeremy Verratti
Dairy Farmer from Gasport, New York
(a fourth generation family farm)

My name is Jeremy Verratti. I am a dairy and crop farmer from Gasport, New York near Lockport.

I received my 4-year Bachelor's of Science Degree in Business Administration from the University at Buffalo. I am a member of the Asset Liability Committee (ALCO) at Cornerstone Community Federal Credit Union and an active member of the Lockport Alliance Church.

I have also been a leader of the Young Cooperators program at our dairy cooperative, Upstate Niagara, along with my late wife, Stephanie, who passed away in a car accident a bit over a year ago.

Members of the Committee, thank you for giving me this opportunity to testify about the future of family farms in America. The farm policies that guide your formulation of the 2012 Farm Bill will have a major impact on sustaining family farms such as ours.

We are a fourth generation farm, called Verratti Farms. At the moment, my father (Dan), my two brothers (Daniel and Ben), and I support our families by working on our farm. To help our families do all of the work on the farm, we have 7 full-time employees and about 2 part-time employees.

We milk over 450 cows. This means that there are about 50 cows to generate enough income for each family that is depending on our farm for their livelihood.

Our farm's main source of income comes from milking cows. We feed our cows corn and hay that we grow on our own farm. In addition, we generate cash by selling some of our corn, soybeans and wheat. We grow these crops on about 400 acres of land that our farm owns and about 1,000 acres of land that we rent.

Verratti Farms has been recognized as a Dairy of Distinction for 20 years and has won various awards for the high quality milk we produce.

Our farm has been a member of a cooperative for decades. As our cooperative has grown, so have the markets for our milk—both in terms of geography and in terms of the numbers and types of customers.

For example, instead of just selling fluid milk to retail chains in Western New York as we did successfully for decades, nowadays our cooperative sells many different products throughout the United States and overseas. Among these products are traditional dairy products such as yogurt, cottage cheese, chip dip, and ice cream mix, as well as a number of shelf stable, innovative products such as sports drinks and dairy-based alcoholic beverages.

It is essential that the 2012 Farm Bill help cooperatives and farms such as ours continue to benefit from these growing markets for dairy products in the United States and overseas. The package of ideas called "Foundation for the Future" achieves this goal and is the basis for the Dairy Security Act.

The package of ideas set forth in Foundation for the Future is being supported by National Milk Producers Federation and many others, including myself, Verratti Farms, and my cooperative, Upstate Niagara.

In my brief time with you today, I want to emphasize one of the essential policies advocated by Foundation for the Future that should guide your formulation of the 2012 Farm Bill—sustaining family farms such as Verratti Farms.

Why do I care so much about sustaining family farms? Our farm in Gasport is now supporting its fourth generation of Verrattis. We want to stay dairy farmers. And we want to stay in Gasport. Not only is Western New York our home, and a great place to live, but our family is heavily invested financially and emotionally in this farm that has been our home for 75 years.

Financially, here are some of the keys to sustaining family farms.

In the long run, the price level for milk depends on demand growing for dairy products in the United States and overseas.

But in the short run, from time to time there are bumps in the road in pricing that cause great financial and emotional stress on family farms. Sometimes these bumps are the price we are paid for our milk. Sometimes these bumps are the price we must pay for feed, fuel and fertilizer.

A key part of Foundation for the Future is to focus on the margin between milk prices and input costs such as feed. Margin insurance that is promoted and partially subsidized by the Federal government would be very helpful in weathering the bumps in the road that disrupt normal market pricing. In fact, sometimes (as in 2009) these “bumps” are more like a boulder in the field you’re plowing, a small seismic shake, or even a widespread earthquake that threatens the foundation of an entire industry. As a young dairy producer, I will never forget the financial hardship of 2009.

However, sustaining family farms is more than a matter of good financial policy. Sustaining family farms is a matter of good public policy in the broadest sense of the term. We must work to keep our farms in the communities they are in and we must do it now.

Being widowed at the age of 26, changed my view of life and time. Time is short. God gives us days to work as farmers and he gives us days to work as elected officials. However, none of us knows how long that particular opportunity will present itself. I want to marry again, have children and be able to raise those children around the farm. Members of this Committee, please move forward with meaningful change so that I may realize these dreams.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Information Required From Nongovernmental Witnesses

House rules require nongovernmental witnesses to provide their resume or biographical sketch prior to testifying. If you do not have a resume or biographical sketch available, please complete this form.

1. Name: Jeremy L. Verratti
2. Organization you represent: Verratti Farms, LLC
3. Please list any occupational, employment, or work-related experience you have which add to your qualification to provide testimony before the Committee: Co-managed Verratti Farms for 12 years; served on the Niagara County Farm Bureau Board for 2 years; served on the Assett/Liability Committee at Cornerstone Community FCU.
4. Please list any special training, education, or professional experience you have which add to your qualifications to provide testimony before the Committee: Bachelor's of Science in Business Administration from University of Buffalo; training in public speaking (various); Public speaking experience including testimony given to Senator Chuck Schumer and Christine Varney from the D.O.J. (March 2010) Continued below.
5. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list the capacity in which you are representing that organization, including any offices or elected positions you hold: Part owner and account manager at Verratti Farms, LLC

PLEASE ATTACH THIS FORM OR YOUR BIOGRAPHY TO EACH COPY OF
TESTIMONY.

4. Continued
Young Cooperator representative for Upstate Niagara Cooperative
at National Milk Producers Federation for 2008 and 2009.

Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Required Witness Disclosure Form

House Rules* require nongovernmental witnesses to disclose the amount and source of Federal grants received since October 1, 2009.

Name: JEREMY L. VERRATTI

Organization you represent (if any): Verratti Farms L.L.C.

1. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) you have received since October 1, 2009, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract. House Rules do **NOT** require disclosure of federal payments to individuals, such as Social Security or Medicare benefits, farm program payments, or assistance to agricultural producers:

Source: _____ Amount: _____

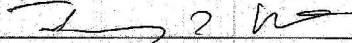
Source: _____ Amount: _____

2. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) the organization has received since October 1, 2009, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract:

Source: FSA Amount: \$81,407.85

Source: NRCS / CSP Amount: \$194,271.58

Please check here if this form is NOT applicable to you: _____

Signature: 

* Rule XI, clause 2(g)(5) of the U.S. House of Representatives provides: Each committee shall, to the greatest extent practicable, require witnesses who appear before it to submit in advance written statements of proposed testimony and to limit their initial presentations to the committee to brief summaries thereof. In the case of a witness appearing in a nongovernmental capacity, a written statement of proposed testimony shall include a curriculum vitae and a disclosure of the amount and source (by agency and program) of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) received during the current fiscal year or either of the two previous fiscal years by the witness or by any entity represented by the witness.

PLEASE ATTACH DISCLOSURE FORM TO EACH COPY OF TESTIMONY.