



News Release

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MISSISSAUGA — Successful enhancements to Ontario’s world-leading milk quality programs, commitment to enhance the school milk program and progress on national solutions to several dairy marketing concerns were among the highlights for dairy farmers in the last year, says Bruce Saunders, chair of Dairy Farmers of Ontario (DFO).

In his address to the more than 600 people attending DFO’s 41st annual meeting, Saunders discussed these issues and a number of others the industry had faced during 2006.

Sophisticated equipment to continuously record milk temperatures and washing operations was installed on 90 per cent of Ontario dairy farms in the first phase of the program last year. “This is only one example of the commitment Ontario dairy farmers have to providing consumers with the highest quality milk,” Saunders said. The Canadian and Ontario governments provided financial assistance to the program and this commitment to quality and food safety is appreciated by farmers, Saunders added.

Positive reaction to discussions with the Ontario government about enhancing the province’s successful school milk program was another positive development this year. “An Interdepartmental Committee, with representatives from Agriculture, Education, Health Promotion, producers and processors is being set up to examine barriers to increased consumption of milk in the schools,” he added.

DFO’s offer is to provide school milk at a reduced price in addition to the program that has already grown to serve more than 70 per cent of Ontario’s schools in the program’s 20-year history. “If we can enhance the consumption of dairy products, which the latest research shows brings a host of beneficial health aspects including helping to curb obesity, then all partners in the project will benefit,” he added.

A number of serious concerns facing dairy farms, including dairy product standards and increasing imports of milk ingredients through various trade loopholes, are moving towards positive solutions as a result of initiatives by federal Agriculture Minister Chuck Strahl, Saunders said.

“Minister Strahl, although missing some of his timelines, I believe is committed to the process and will attempt to impose conditions that all parties can live with,” Saunders said. “The Dairy Industry Working Group that the Minister created has made progress on the issue of standards for cheese but there is still some disagreement when the competitiveness of processors gets affected.”

“The DFO Board and the Ontario producers fully support any initiatives that will lead to growth in our markets and this includes all the initiatives that have been discussed within the Working Group,” he added.

The long-standing issue of the World Trade Organization (WTO) talks is quiet at this time with the suspension of the negotiations but the concerns remain for dairy farmers and the commitment of the federal and provincial governments remain strong.

Saunders referenced statements directly from Prime Minister Stephen Harper as indication of that commitment. ‘Prime Minister Stephen Harper said during the Leaders Debate on January 8, 2006 and I quote "We're going to continue to defend supply management in the international bodies and the three pillars of supply management. This is the one sector of agriculture that has actually been making a profit in the last four years'...end of quote.”

He also referred to the House of Commons motion that calls for Canada to obtains results that ensure that the supply management sectors are subject to no reduction in over-quota tariffs and no increase in tariff quotas. The provincial legislature, in the fall of 2005, passed a motion unanimously that stated a similar desire in the trade talks to that passed in the House of Commons.

The trade talks are expected to make little progress in the short term with the U.S. political timetable dictating that 2009 is the most realistic time for the further action, Saunders said.

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