

Support for LD 2188: Resolve, Regarding Legislative Review of Chapter 26: Producer Margins, a Major Substantive Rule of the Maine Milk Commission

Dear Chairman Pluecker and Chairman Ingwersen and members of the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee,

My name is Chuck Noyes, and I am the owner of the Noyes Family Farm in Albion. I am a lifelong dairy farmer and worked with my father until his passing in 2015. He began selling milk to Oakhurst Dairy in the early 1950s and the milk has gone there every day since.

I didn't plan to come here today, and my father would not have done so either but while milking this morning I had time to reflect on the dairy business and what has happened the last 50 years.

I graduated from the University of Maine in the 70s with a degree in Agriculture Business Resource Management and planned to take one of the three job offers I had after I help the family farm get the crops in that Summer, well here we are 45 years later.

I believed the propaganda at the time, that the milk companies were pushing along with many other farmers back in the day. Yankee Milk Co-op, now Agri-mark, went around the Northeast and told farmers to get bigger, build free stalls, bunker siloes and do more for less and crowd out the inefficient farms. Then, you would then be better off.

Well, Maine had almost 2900 dairy farms shipping milk then, now we have under 150 and are still dropping.

Are we better off now? Well, here we are asking for help from the state again.

That being said, the Tier Program has been a lifeline for farms to get through low milk prices that are beyond our control.

When people ask me what the Tier Program is, my simple answer is it a minimum wage on milk. And, like a minimum wage for hourly workers, it has to be adjusted from time to time.

Maine people and its leadership have been very supportive of farms through the years for the most part. Most people enjoy riding by a heard of cows grazing in the fields or a newly mowed hay field rather than a bunch of new building going up.

My father always called houses, “the last crop.”

I once asked him why he didn’t sell land and retire, and he snapped back, “I’d rather look at the land than the money.”

It took me about 25 years to figure out what he meant, but now I know exactly.

To close, I’m here not so much for myself but for my children, grandchildren and the next generation of young farmers who I know probably won’t be able to live the good life on a farm like I have, without this program.

I’ve always said it’s a lifestyle, not a job, that few people get to experience.

Respectfully submitted,

Chuck Noyes
Noyes Family Farm
Albion, Maine