

Libby Bleakney  
Cornish  
LD 384

Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. LD 384

I am Libby Bleakney, one of four owners that represent the fifth generation at Highland Farms located in northern York County in Cornish. Highland Farms is the oldest registered Jersey cattle farm in the United States. We were established in 1886. The family farm is currently being operated by the fifth and sixth generation with the seventh generation, beginning to take interest.

Highland Farms is the largest land owner in Cornish with 1,200 acres, 240 acres of open space /cropland and 1000 acres of Woodland. We have 490 cows with 250 milking. Our farm sits on top of a hill overlooking Mount Washington. We enjoy sharing this view with our many visitors who enjoy outdoor recreation, like snowmobiling, snowshoeing, skiing, hiking, hunting and fishing. We also offer an area for people to come and enjoy the wonderful sunrises and sunsets in a rural community. A place to escape their everyday lives for a bit.

Now, for the real reason I am writing to you. Our dairy industry in the state is facing some very challenging times. As you all know, the dairy farmer has no control over the price we get for our milk and that's leaving us in a very difficult position. We have been able to get more efficient and with the wonderful support we have received from our state when the price paid for our milk drops below the cost of production. Now, with the import costs rising faster, then we can even imagine. Every where we turn, we are seeing increases in electricity, fuel, grain costs, labor costs, bedding, fertilizer costs, and rising interest rates and couple this with the milk price forecast going down every month for the rest of this year. We are in a terrible squeeze. The State of Maine only has 160 dairy farmers left. What is this going to do to the infrastructure in the state of Maine for grain suppliers, equipment dealers, crop suppliers, truck drivers and milk processing operations?

I realize this problem is bigger than the State of Maine can ever solve with this LD 384 bill but we are very appreciative for the support that you can give us while hopefully something can be done on the Federal level with the current milk pricing system.

I am sorry I cannot be with you for this hearing. I am attending a cost of production workshop today and tomorrow trying to find more ways to combat the squeeze that we are all in. Again, thank you for all you have done in the past and your continued support going forward as we try to work on this problem. The situation is not just unique to Maine but to many other states. Our thanks to you again.

Highland Farms  
Libby Bleakney