

Bill/ National raw milk sales a debate topic

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Most disagreements on the bill have crossed geographic lines: Southern lawmakers say it compromises the safety net for peanut and rice farmers, favoring Midwest crops such as corn and soybeans.

The bill's reforms include eliminating the direct-payment system and tightening payment and eligibility requirements.

While Wisconsin Democrat Herb Kohl voted with the majority, state Republican Ron Johnson was one of eight senators who tried to block it from reaching the full Senate.

In a statement, the freshman senator said, "This isn't a farm bill. It's a welfare bill."

Johnson said almost 80 percent of the spending in this bill — a little under \$800 billion — is for food stamps.

"When the Senate spends a trillion dollars, we should be clear about why we are spending it," he said. "That's particularly true when we are borrowing more than \$1 trillion every year to finance our spending. Additionally, the Democratic majority refused to commit to a practice where senators are allowed the ability to truly debate the bill and offer amendments."

Johnson said Congress should do more to get federal agencies out of the way of farmers.

"As I travel around Wisconsin, I frequently hear that agencies like the EPA, Department of Labor and others are making it harder for them to expand operations and increase hiring," he said.

Dairy industry split

The dairy industry remains divided on aspects of the DSA included in the Senate package. Some say its supply-management control would discourage industry growth and make the U.S. an unreliable supplier on the world market, while others argue that the plan doesn't do enough to secure farmer incomes.

Fourth-generation Virginia dairy farmer Sarah

Leonard last week urged Congress to pass a new farm bill soon to give farmers some certainty.

Speaking at a Senate news conference, Leonard, who milks 325 cows with her parents, spoke about her experiences as a young farmer on a multi-generational farm.

"On our farm, we don't focus on the latest polls or whose campaign is raising the most money," she said. "We focus instead on how much rain we received last night, how much milk the cows are generating today and what the market price of corn and soybeans are. That's our daily reality. But part of that reality is, we need a new farm bill."

Leonard said she was excited to see that the legislation has provisions to help beginning farmers make a living on family farms, including access to capital, crop insurance and mentoring.

"I can rely on my parents for their wisdom and perspective, but it would be great to know that the farm bill also has tools that I can use to keep our family business going," she said. "I would like to sell milk, not sell our land to developers."

She said the bill is not just about the next five years but the next generation of farmers.

On the other side of the dairy debate, Jerry Sломinski of the International Dairy Foods Association reiterated the group's opposition to the dairy title passed by the Senate Ag Committee.

"The new dairy supply-management program in the bill will hurt exports, encourage imports and limit job growth in the dairy processing industry," he said. "Consumers will pay more for dairy products, and nutrition programs such as SNAP will be forced to pay more for basic food items like milk."

"Instead of imposing even more regulations on dairy manufacturers, we urge the Senate to support a compromise plan that provides a safety net for dairy farmers without also having our government intervene in

dairy markets by limiting milk supplies," he said.

The National Family Farm Coalition continued to push for S. 1640, the Federal Milk Marketing Improvement Act of 2011, introduced by Sen. Bob Casey, D-Pa.

The FMMIA features a pricing formula that pays farmers based on a national average cost of production and triggers a supply-management program when necessary.

In a media teleconference, the NFFC pointed out that the dairy-pricing system is broken, and New York dairy farmer Gretchen Maine said the DSA would be "the demise of the dairy farmer."

Recent market drops have been disastrous on her farm, she said, adding that she received \$17.80 per hundredweight for milk this April, compared to more than \$22 for the same month last year.

After deductions for haul-

ing and marketing, she was left with \$16.15 to spend, she said.

"We are being robbed," she said. "We need a new pricing formula that includes cost of production. We keep getting hit with increases we can't pass on."

California farmer Joaquin Content said his state has lost a couple hundred dairies over the past few years, with 300 more on the verge of financial ruin.

"We lack a functioning marketplace," he said. "The support price has not been adjusted for a couple decades and yet our costs have gone up."

Pennsylvania farmer Brenda Cochran said processors need to "stand on their own two feet" and the new farm bill should "liberate dairy farmers from being the dairy industry's cash cow."

Monroe County dairy farmer Joel Greeno said flawed trading practices

at the Chicago Mercantile Exchange further diminish the value of dairy farmers' product.

"Supply and demand mean nothing to the CME," he said. "Volatility is where speculators make money."

Raw milk proposal argued

Among the many amendments being offered for Senate consideration is one that would legalize the national sale of raw milk.

In a rare showing of solidarity, the NMPF and IDFA jointly announced their opposition to the amendment introduced by Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., which would allow the direct sale of raw milk and raw milk products across state lines.

This could greatly enhance the chances that people will become sick because of increased consumption of unpasteurized milk, the two groups wrote in a letter to Senate members.

"Pasteurization is one of the greatest public health tools," Kozak said. "To compromise or reduce its use through this legislation is not just bad politics — it's a huge, inhumane step backwards and one that will cause sickness and death."

Federal law prohibits the interstate sale of raw milk but gives states discretion to regulate raw milk sales within their borders. Several states have liberalized the sale or distribution of raw milk in recent years.

Connie Tipton, IDFA president and chief executive officer, said "while consumer choice is an important value, it should not pre-empt public health and well-being. Legalizing the sale of raw milk and raw milk products to consumers, either through direct sale or through cow-share programs, represents an unnecessary risk to consumer safety."

Senate votes to begin farm bill consideration

Dairy industry still divided on policy approach

By Heidi Clausen

Regional Editor

Nudged on by farm groups who want a 2012 Farm Bill this year, the Senate last week voted to begin consideration of the Senate Agriculture Committee's proposal.

On a bipartisan 90-8 vote, the Senate voted to proceed to deliberation on the bill formally known as S. 3240, the Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act of 2012.

This is the first hurdle committee leaders needed to clear to get the bill passed on the Senate floor.

Senate Ag Committee members are urging senators to swiftly OK the legislation, which sets a blueprint for national farm and food policy for the next five years.

The Senate is expected to begin taking up amendments to the bill, which could number in the hundreds, this week. The process could take several weeks.

Meanwhile, the House Ag Committee is planning to mark up its version of the farm bill later this month.

National Corn Growers Association President Garry

Niemeyer said "the overwhelmingly positive vote" on the floor reaffirms senators' understanding of the importance of passing a bill this year.

He said the Senate bill "creates the reforms needed to not only reduce the federal deficit but ensure a positive beginning for the next generation of America's farmers."

Jerry Kozak, president and chief executive officer of the National Milk Producers Federation, also voiced approval, saying the Senate's action greatly increases the odds that the NMPF can get its reform proposal, the Dairy Security Act, through the Senate and the House and passed into law this year.

The Senate legislation includes a new voluntary margin-protection program that aims to safeguard farmers against disastrously low margins such as those generated by the low milk prices and high feed costs that cost dairy farmers \$20 billion in net worth between 2007 and 2009.

Among other things, the Senate bill would slash federal farm program spending by almost \$24 billion over a decade, mostly in direct payments to farmers.

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