

October 6, 2023

USDA/AMS/Dairy Program
Order Formulation and Enforcement Division,
Stop 0225-Room 2530-S,
1400 Independence Avenue S.W.,
Washington, DC 20250-0231

Subject: Testimony on proposals seeking to amend 11 Federal milk marketing orders (FMMOs).
Agency/Docket Numbers: Doc. No. 23-J-0067; AMS-DA-23-0031 and Document Number: 2023-15496

Witness:

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Dear USDA Dairy Programs,

Thank you for allowing me to offer testimony today about how Federal Milk Marketing Order changes would impact me as a dairy farmer and the cooperative we have been a member of for over the past decade. While I've never testified before over Zoom I hope my passion and commitment to the dairy industry comes through in the virtual format. We're getting into our busy season here on the farm with chopping corn and starting our fall calving season, which always gets everyone excited about getting into fall.

I farm with my family on my great grandfather's homestead which dates back to 1942. I represent the 4th generation on the farm and came back to our diversified operation in 2019 after I finished college at North Carolina State University where I studied agribusiness.

On the farm we manage 300 organic milking cows and crop 1500 acres. We have sought to diversify the farm and in 2018 established two poultry barns for broiler production and are in the process of building a bigger beef business. Like many dairy farmers we practice beef on dairy breeding and genetics.

Additionally, in 2022 we established an Air B&B on our farm, and I've come to find out that while I've always loved farm-life, apparently so do a lot of people. People want to stay at our organic dairy farm and actually pay us for that opportunity, now if they'd just pay me for the opportunity to do farm work --- then we would have something.

Our farm employs ten people and we sustain five households as their main income. For the dairy, my primary role falls is herd manager and also working with employees. My father focuses on cropping and other general duties, but it's really all hands-on deck much of the time.

We are a small farm business.

We became certified organic in 2009 and are an active member of CROPP Cooperative which is better known as Organic Valley.

I serve on two membership committees for Organic Valley, one called GenO which is for beginning organic farmers, and the other is Farmers Advocating For Organic, which provides organizations with grant resources for research and promotion of organic agriculture.

As long as we've been farming our family has also been involved in the industry. Beyond my Organic Valley commitments, I was appointed to the West Virginia Farm Service Agency State Executive Committee in 2022 and both my dad and grandfather served on that Committee in the past. Our family also proudly manages the "Birthing Center" every year at the West Virginia State Fair, which is a great way to connect with the public about animal agriculture.

As USDA considers how to modify the Federal Milk Marketing Orders, I want to share a worry that --- challenges to the pricing for organic dairy farmers like myself that may not be addressed appropriately.

Organic milk is produced under strict USDA standard requirements, and it must be segregated from all non-organic milk and dairy products. In my co-op we also strive for a stable pay price that has never since we've been farming organic been at or below conventional milk prices. Our co-op has a quota system, all members must adhere to that ensures we balance our milk needs with customer and consumer demand.

But what happens is my cooperative ends up in a scenario where it is required to pay significant multi-million-dollar pool obligations every year.

For me the FMMOs feel much like taxation without any benefit.

The co-op I have ownership in, pays those pool obligations, but those resources never come back to farmers like me. We are stuck in an old system that has requirements and voting rules where a minority interest, like organic farmers and co-op partners, cannot get fair treatment. This is an oppressive system that organic milk is wrongfully stuck in.

Our certified organic grade A farm milk goes to Winchester, VA for fluid bottling and consumers at retail are willing to pay for organic milk that ensures our higher pay price and stability.

Our farm just built a new parlor in 2014 and we're always investing in our organic land, for those financial resources to leave our co-op and for new proposals, you all are reviewing, that could increase that drain to the FMMO system is wrong.

Please do not create the conditions at the end of this hearing that take more funds away from my cooperative and my organic dairy farm.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I am open to any questions from USDA.