

## **Resolution Supporting Dairy Farmers' Cooperatives**

WHEREAS, dairy farmers in Wisconsin are buffeted by the milk markets and do not always receive a just return on their investment and effort; and

WHEREAS some local dairy farmers have formed a cooperative where they can stabilize milk prices through a \$.10 per hundred pound check off that allows them to buy milk products when the price of milk dips below a certain level; and

WHEREAS the cooperative donates the milk products they buy to local food pantries to feed hungry people; therefore be it

RESOLVED that the La Crosse Area Synod express support for the efforts of the cooperative to both support local dairy farmers and feed hungry people and encourage others to do similar activities with other commodities; and be it further

RESOLVED that the Synod's World Hunger Subcommittee lead the synod in these efforts.

## **RESOURCE FOR RESOLUTION 8**

For generations my family has farmed the hills and valleys of southern Trempealeau County. We, like so many others, have worked side by side with family, friends and neighbors not only to provide for our families, but also to build our communities of which our church is a central part. We learned at an early age that you helped your neighbor no matter what and that anyone in need was your neighbor no matter where they lived.

Over the past several years the rural landscape has seen a dramatic change. No longer are these areas home to dozens and dozens of family farms. In our own church a generation ago a majority of the members were tied in some way to agriculture. Now there are less than 10 families that make their living off of the land. The businesses in the small towns that these farms supported have all but disappeared. Some of the churches in these communities struggle to survive, let alone thrive. Is this an ending of an era or is there an opportunity to revitalize these communities?

In 2009 the dairy economy, like the overall economy, was in a steep downturn. Dairy producers had lost a third of their income and input costs continued to rise. While farmers have weathered these types of storms in the past, this one seemed to be particularly devastating. That year a couple of dairy farmers met with some industry processors and marketers to discuss a plan to try and stabilize the milk price. After a second meeting these two farmers realized the only way this plan was going to happen was if they did it themselves. One of these farmers is my cousin Tom Olson from Black River Falls. After trying for a year to secure a grant to get this project going, Tom's sister decided to get involved and helped with some start-up money and so the Dairy Pricing Association was born!

DPA's main goal is to provide a stable and profitable milk price to the dairy producer, and by doing so making it possible that future generations might choose to stay on the farm and keep rural America alive. It is a fairly simple program where each member of the association voluntarily gives a 10 cent/ hundred pounds of milk donation to the program. An example would be if your farm sold 100,000 lbs. of milk in a month your donation would be \$100. This money is then put in a pool so that when the market's pay price falls beneath a certain level that money is used to purchase dairy products that are then distributed to those in need. This is a 100% producer funded program with no government involvement.

This program has grown from 3 initial producers to nearly 250 from Pennsylvania to California. In 2013 568,377 lbs. of raw milk were purchased at a cost of \$124,389 and donated to places such as Second Harvest, Blessings of Hope, Feeding America and the Hunger Task Force right here in La Crosse. Other local food banks have been recipients of donations as well. The single largest donation was 30,000 gallons of whole milk. In 2012 I was privileged to be along as 2,000 lbs. of cheddar cheese was given to the Second Harvest Food Bank in Madison. The director there said the cheese would be gone in 24 hours. I truly believe we are making a difference in people's lives.

As you can see, this program can both help the dairy farmer and provide a highly nutritional product to those in need. Can this somehow be a starting point to revitalizing our rural areas? Will there be another generation and another in these hills and valleys? I don't know the answer for sure, but I do know that like generation after generation we will help our neighbor wherever they are.

Tim Byom, Dairy Farmer, Dairy Pricing Association member and member of Hardies Creek Lutheran Church, rural Ettrick