

Danone Horizon Task Force Meeting

September 10, 2021

Secretary Tebbetts welcomed task force members and stated that we all need to work together to find options for the farms impacted by the decision of Danone Horizon to cease working with Vermont Farmers in August 2022. He thanked everyone for their work! This is a difficult situation and thanked everyone for being willing to assist the farmers.

The meeting began with update on any issues heard by task force members since the last meeting. A concern was voiced by a dairy farmer representative that there was considerable delay in getting a return call from Danone Horizon regarding contract information.

The task force reviewed the work of the subgroups.

The Farmer subgroup has been hard at work contacting the farms to collect information regarding milk production, quality, components etc. There are 5 farms remaining to be contacted. The data collected at this point indicates the following:

Yearly milk pounds - 22,195,000

Average pounds per farm - 1,300,000

Minimum number of cows – 25 and maximum number of cows 300

The two farms in New Hampshire have been contacted and their information has been added to the data.

The subgroup who put together the farmer resource list provided the document for review. Two things were requested to be added:

1. information for the farmers to contact Danone Horizon concerning the Winter Premium and the Quality Premium.
2. Information for the Vermont Law School Legal Food Hub who can provide assistance with contract review.

The resource list will be updated and sent to farmers. The Agency of Agriculture has developed a web page on their site <https://agriculture.vermont.gov/administration/danonehorizon-task-force>. The resource list will be posted there as well.

The group discussed the processor survey. This survey will be sent to all Vermont processors to determine if there is interest in processing organic milk or specific milk for processing (high butterfat, grass based, no silage etc.) may or may not be organic. The group decided to adjust some of the questions to indicate that the first priority is organic certified and with an organic pay price and a second priority for a premium price but organic certification not required. A question for a pay price range will be added to the survey. Organic certification provides many other benefits of management beyond pay price.

The group discussed how the collected information from the farmers and the processors would be used. The goal is to provide information on the possible options to the impacted farmers that has been reviewed and found to be authentic – not just exploratory – no wild goose chases for the farmers. The group determined that there would be a “gateway” to the farmer information. The processor would show interest through the survey. Representatives from the task force would discuss further with the processor to determine authenticity prior to

providing further information to the farmers. It can be a two-way communication between farmers and processors once the gateway has been accessed. Expectation that an options sheet will be developed from the processor survey and the follow-up discussions that can be shared with all impacted farmers.

Farm Bureau stated that a regional discussion on the Danone Horizon issue took place. Discussing many of the things this group has been working on. A request was made to share the farmer questionnaire with New York State. This will be shared.

Secretary Tebbetts discussed a meeting with the impacted state Ag Department leadership and USDA Secretary Vilsack. USDA will work with the impacted states on this issue in a coordinated manner on processing and other solutions. Secretary Vilsack stated that later in the fall there would be movement on the origin of livestock rule of the organic standards.

Leahy Staff member Andrew Bahrenburg stated that a multi-state letter is being prepared from the congressional delegation indicating the concerns with the organic standards for origin of livestock and pasture rule. These two areas are not managed in the same manner across the United States by different certifying bodies.

Next steps:

- Completing collection of data on farms.
- Complete drafting and distribution of processor survey
- Provide resource list to farmers