

Louis Escobar, Dairy Farmer

Regular Monthly Meeting of the Northeast Dairy Compact Commission, Newport Marriott, Newport Rhode Island, May 11, 2001

Before the Compact had been introduced in Rhode Island a few Rhode Island farmers had gathered and were working with the Farm Bureau to do something. Massachusetts had some legislation and were marketing this great idea. Those of us who were already in the trenches jumped on board. At the time there were 35 dairy farmers, and we wondered how we would get Rhode Island's general assembly, in a consumer state, to do this deed. We took a stand that this was beneficial to the consumer, and it was very well received. When the Compact was passed in Rhode Island it was because it was a win/win for everyone. I've been very fortunate. Agrimark drafted me several years ago to be their legislative educator. I've been to Washington several times. I have an excellent rapport with Rhode Island's Congressional delegation.

To those of us that are farming in Rhode Island, it seems that to reach the public and the consumer about the Compact, before you mention dairy, if you want to get their attention you speak open space and rural atmosphere. Isn't that crucial, to protect what little is left?

In the town I live in, it was about ten years ago, a very expensive survey was done. It took about an hour to do. It was so well done it got a 75 percent return on an hour-long survey. At that time, as a youngster growing up in that town, you could have cussed me or you could have called me a farmer. It was about the same. And in my lifetime, I have seen quite a change. What has happened is, and the survey pointed it out, that a young boy named Escobar growing up in Portsmouth is now respected for the job he does. He provides a rural atmosphere and open spaces. There's so little of that left in the community, they look up to me. I stepped up that rung on that ladder, which I think is about a half a step higher than all of the professional people in my town. I serve on an open space committee. I can continue to farm this way, as long as I can receive a price for the product that I produce. The Compact has done that for me.

As an Agrimark producer, you get that milk check and you think, "my God, how am I going to make the payments I need to in order to operate the farm?" They separate the Compact check. Believe me, I think I might know how one of my sick animals feels when she gets some antibiotics, because that third check of the month really does it for us. It's helped us. Probably if it wasn't for the Compact, I'd stand before you as an ex-dairy farmer. If we are going to be able to continue, the few of us that are left, we will need the Compact.

As a lifetime farmer I tell people, "Nothing good lasts." We see a better price, it lasts maybe six, seven, eight months, but when it drops, it drops like a bomb. And then the Compact will kick in. I think it is the best piece of legislation that I have ever supported and I thank you all for serving on this commission. And a special thanks to Rhode Island. I wondered, with 35 farmers like there were at the time, (there are 23 now) could we even get people to even serve? I am proud of Rhode Island's delegation. I think I'm as well represented as any other farmer in the United States. I thank you all.