

30.5.2008 European Milk Board: short reports from the European countries

NETHERLANDS

The Dutch Dairymen Board is currently blocking the Friesland Foods dairy in Nijkerk with 40 tractors and trailers. Trucks can no longer enter or leave the dairy's premises. The farmers are determined to maintain the blockade until Saturday morning or even lunchtime. Ever more dairy farmers are joining the strike, including non-members. There will be a large gathering at the above-mentioned dairy tonight, while farmers who have stopped delivering their milk are meeting every night throughout the country. Saturday will be spent communicating with the consumers, with days of the open door and actions in supermarkets. In addition, sponsors have offered money to buy dairy products which will then be given to consumers for free.

LUXEMBOURG

The Luxembourg Dairy Board today organized a rally in front of the town hall in the capital of Luxembourg (Knuedler square) to announce its decision to join the milk supply stop. Placed between two majestic lions, a herd of life-sized artificial cows representing the EMB member organisations was observing the buzz of activity in the square. Some 150 dairy farmers and many curious consumers gathered around a small football pitch where 22 small-sized Faironikas wearing the colours of the other 14 EMB member states were engaged in a thrilling match. Freddy de Martines, member of the LDB executive board, explained the goals of the milk supply stop in Luxembourg: "We aim to support our German colleagues. This is about obtaining a milk price of 43 eurocents per litre; the dairies must ensure they are able to pay this price to the milk producers. We will not content ourselves with a temporary price increase. We want the system to change. What we need, therefore, is flexible supply control." After the rally, the farmers walked the streets of Luxembourg City with wheelbarrows full of dairy products which they gave to passers-by, using the opportunity to inform them about the dairy farmers' demands. The consumers expressed sympathy with the dairy farmers' situation and their intention to stop delivering milk to the dairies.

The milk supply stop was officially launched at 4:30 p.m. on a dairy farm close to the German border, with journalists from Luxembourg, Germany and Belgium being present. 100 of the approx. 870 farmers in Luxemburg have already joined the milk strike. This number is expected to grow over the next days.

FRANCE

The Organisation des Producteurs de Lait (OPL) blocked access to the Alsace Lait cooperative dairy north of Strasbourg from Thursday night to Friday noon. No trucks left the dairy during this time. After a long night's trip, 200 dairy farmers from Germany joined their French colleagues for a press conference at 10 a.m. The dairy director: "Quit dairying if you can't produce milk at 30 eurocents a litre." Needless to say, these words were not received well by the farmers present. Jean-Louis Naveau, OPL President, explained to a large number of journalists: "Our aim today is to show our colleagues in the other countries that the French farmers, with France being the second largest milk producer in the world, will not stand by and watch while our colleagues are tackling a problem that concerns the entire farming profession. In addition, we want to raise public awareness for the fact that milk producer prices have been on the decline for the past 15 years while our production costs have risen by 40% in a single year." The campaign targeted the Alsace Lait dairy as it does not pay cost-covering milk prices and supplies milk to Germany. In many French districts ("departments"), OPL members have today submitted a petition explaining their demands to MPs and prefects.

EMB – European Milk Board

Office / Bureau central, Bahnhofstraße 31 □ D – 59065 Hamm/Westf.

Tél.: 0049 - 2381 – 4360495 □ Fax: 0049 - 2381 – 4361153 □ office@europeanmilkboard.org □

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Various actions are scheduled for the weekend under the heading of “Opération Escargot” (Operation Snail), including tractor blockades. The aim is to sensitize and mobilize milk producers in all parts of France. On Sunday, another dairy close to the German border and supplying milk to Germany will be “cordoned” off.

UK

Dairy Farmers of Scotland, the Farmers Union of Wales and the English association Farmers for Action have today declared their solidarity with their colleagues on the continent (see also press releases / declarations of solidarity). Iain Smith from Scotland writes: “Milk producers in Scotland share the same feelings of frustration and desperation brought about by years of exploitation and the struggle and inability to negotiate a fair cost-covering milk price.” He points out that fair milk prices are also in the interest of consumers as they are the basis for the continuity of a high-standard food supply.

DENMARK

The milk producers’ association Landsforeningen af Danske Mælkeproducenter (LDM) has called upon its member to support campaigns targeting dairies that supply Aldi with cheap milk. Furthermore, Danish dairy farmers will join a BDM event in Lübeck (Germany) tomorrow.

GERMANY

More than 35,000 milk producers have attended almost 400 events organized by BDM members all over Germany since the start of the milk supply stop. The district team managers, who are in charge of these events, report about a wave of solidarity among farmers and a growing number of strikers, especially in the North and East of Germany. “The fact that ever more dairy farmers spontaneously decide to join the milk supply stop is striking evidence of how serious the situation is”; says Martin Kugler, milk producer from Baden-Württemberg and member of the BDM executive committee.

Each day, the dairy farmers receive new letters of support from public figures and officials, companies from upstream and downstream industries and from consumers. The *Westfälische Nachrichten* daily newspaper reports, for example, that both the Catholic and the Protestant Church in Westphalia support the dairy farmers’ campaign.

German TV station RTL quoted Dr. Karl-Heinz Engel, managing director of Hochwald dairy and President of the dairy industry federation MIV, as saying: “If deliveries continue to decrease and the farmers’ propensity to strike remains strong, we will no longer be able to compensate for the reduction. The impact will be felt by consumers and retailers alike.”

In Rendsburg, a rally bringing many farmers with their tractors to the premises of the GNV cooperative federation attracted public attention to the dairy farmers’ situation.

SWITZERLAND

Uniterre today held a meeting in Palézieux attended by 200 milk producers; those present decided to continue the milk strike which was originally meant to last two days. The number of dairy farmers supporting the strike has risen considerably since yesterday. Approximately 2,500 dairy farmers from all over Switzerland have stopped delivering their milk to the dairies; they are feeding it to their animals, giving it away for free or using it in other ways instead. BIG-M, the federation of German-speaking Swiss dairy farmers, is holding its fourth

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daily strike meeting tonight and is expecting 300 attendants. Swiss farmers do not only feel tricked because of the failed price negotiations. They were told by the dairies that any excess milk they agreed to produce would be exported, but the additional volume now causes surpluses in Switzerland.

AUSTRIA

The Austrian federation IG-Milch constantly receives letters of support and solidarity. The number of farmers retaining their milk to protest against ruinous prices keeps growing. The Alpenmilch dairy in Salzburg reported yesterday (when the milk strike was launched in Austria) that the volume of milk it received from farmers dropped by 2,000 litres. The volume is said to have decreased by 40,000 litres today. The EMB member association calls upon all dairy farmers “to join the solidarity campaign of European milk producers and to immediately stop delivering their milk until the system changes and a cost-covering milk price is achieved as a calculation basis for the milk value chain”, declares President Ewald Grünzweil. IG-Milch also asks consumers for support by only buying milk at more than 1 euro, thus saying “no” to destructive price dumping.

ITALY

Following an invitation from EMB member APL Pianura Padana, milk producers in Northern Italy gathered on Friday afternoon to decide on their strategy regarding participation in the milk strike. The majority of associations expressed their solidarity with their colleagues in the other European countries. They decided, however, not to join the milk supply stop for the time being. In order to support the campaign launched by the European Milk Board, it was agreed to use all the milk normally reserved for fresh milk production to make Grana Padana cheese. All farmers have undertaken not to supply milk to Germany, Austria, etc., even if they should be directly contacted by the dairy industry. Furthermore, price negotiations with the Italian dairy industry shall only be concluded after the European Milk Board has decided on a new strategy. Farmers said it was important for the milk strike to continue so that less milk from Germany reaches Italy, forcing the Italy dairies to reconsider. The Coldiretti farmers’ association will be asked whether its members are prepared to join a milk strike in Italy over the next days.

BELGIUM

On Friday morning, dairy trucks were blocked in many places so that they could neither pick up milk from the farms nor deliver products to the retailers. This is why one dairy stopped dispatching its transport vehicles altogether. The number of farmers involved in the milk supply stop in the eastern part of Belgium continues to grow. A rally on fair milk was organized in the city of Eupen, attracting 150 dairy farmers. Talks held with the Minister-President, the three ministers and the President of the Parliament of the German-speaking community were very positive. They all promised to back up the milk producers. Activities involving the artificial cow Faironika and aiming at keeping consumers informed and establishing contact with politicians were also organized in six other Belgium cities.

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