

## **Senate Majority Policy Committee Whole Milk in Schools Hearing, June 16, 2021**

Thank you Chairman Scavello and the Policy Committee for taking time out of your busy schedules to hold this meeting today. I am honored to have the opportunity to discuss milk choice in Pennsylvania schools.

My name is Krista Byler from Spartansburg/Crawford County, professionally I am a culinary school graduate and for the past 16 years I have been the Foodservice Director for Union City Area School District in Union City, PA. I am the mother of two teenage student athletes and the wife and granddaughter of Pennsylvania farmers.

During the 2019-2020 school year my district ran a milk choice trial at our middle and high schools in order to gather data for the Pennsylvania Grassroots Dairy committee as well as to see if we could determine whether the ultra-restrictive policies regarding milk in the school meals programs are largely responsible for the loss of a generation of milk drinkers.

As a school food service director for 14 years (at the time of the trial), I had seen a significant decrease in the amount of milk taken with meals and a huge increase in milk wasted on a daily basis, beginning in about 2012. The results of this loss of school milk consumption are far reaching and we are now hearing of very early onset osteoporosis, increase in malnutrition and/or obesity and large decreases in consumption of a product which directly impacts Pennsylvania dairies. You will hear from experts today who can speak about the false premise that obesity rates would increase if we put 2% and whole milk back into school meals.

I was interested in conducting this research for many important reasons: I hated seeing such an exorbitant amount of milk wasted daily in our small district and was hearing stories of even larger waste ratios in larger districts. I strongly disagree with the legislation which allows a la carte sales of products containing chemicals/caffeine but does not allow for 2% or whole milk.

Lastly, I am the wife and granddaughter of proud PA dairymen, and I knew the decrease in milk we were ordering for schools would impact PA dairy families.

I have seen farm-to-table, farm-to-school, ADANE, Fuel Up to Play 60 and other state and federally funded groups promote many great PA-produced items in my (now) 16 years as a school foodservice director; however, I have never seen anything other than skim milk included in a promotion. Since the "Got Milk" campaign there has not been anything that helps our PA dairy producers with marketing, even though they must provide checkoff funding for said marketing. I am sure that others will provide some details about checkoff funding here or in written testimony.

As a school foodservice director and a farm wife, I am thankful to Nelson Troutman and 97 Milk for informing our PA families (and now many other states) of the benefits of milk and for marketing the product like no one else will! I would love to hear the reasoning that we can promote yogurt and cheese in schools but only SKIM MILK?!

It is shameful that our youth cannot have a choice of a wholesome, nutritious PA-produced product that is as farm-to-table, farm-to-school as anything in the Commonwealth, yet they can

choose to purchase Mt.Dew KickStarts and Diet Pepsis all day long!

What I want to impress upon you today is that our youth and our dairies need help, they need you, our elected officials to take note and take action! You have the ability to, at a minimum, take action at the state level to introduce legislation which would allow PA public schools to offer all fat levels of milk and reinstate milk as a standalone meal component again.

We cannot afford to continue to watch and wait! In 2019-2020 in my small Spartansburg, PA neighborhood there were 5 thriving dairies. Today 2 remain. The farms that decided to exit the business were all debt-free, multi-generational farms that were holding on financially but the physical and emotional tolls were outweighing the benefits.

On June 5th, I watched as the dairy that was started in 1950 by my husband's grandfather auctioned their fine herd of cows. These cows were lovingly cared for, many cows were producing 100+ pounds of milk and many of those cows were sold to JBS to be used for beef.

Watching our dairy herd sell was heartbreaking but not as heartbreaking as trying to educate, trying to lobby for change for our PA youth and dairies and getting NOWHERE in the past five years.

What I know based on 16 years in school nutrition, raising 2 children and being part of two PA dairy families is that restricting milk offerings to our PA school children DOES NOT benefit our children or our dairies! It benefits big corporations who have exponential marketing power and are preying upon our youth.

The facts in our middle school and high school trial are, offering all levels of milk fat to our students resulted in:

- 50% increase in milk consumption
- 95% reduction in milk waste
- 63.6% of the students who responded to our survey chose milk more often since they had the option to choose which milk fit their needs
- 84.7% of the students who responded to our survey drink whole milk at home (which is why they do not choose milk at school)

The survey results show that something as simple as offering 2 additional milk fat options within school meals can significantly change the amount of milk chosen, consumed and NOT discarded.

Please be the change makers that our PA students and PA dairymen and women need, bring back milk choice in Pennsylvania schools!