

Written submission for June 16, 2021 Whole Milk Hearing of the Senate Majority Policy Committee

As the owner of a business working with dairy farmers and having done two outreach events to offer whole milk to those in need in our community, I thank you Honorable Chairman and this Committee for having this hearing on whole milk choice in schools.

My name is Mike Sensenig, owner of Sensenig's Feed Mill in New Holland, Lancaster County. My wife Nancy and I are the third generation in this business with our sons Kyle and Kurt being the fourth. The 250 dairy farms we serve across Lancaster, Berks, Lebanon, York and Dauphin counties represent the majority of the infrastructure of our business, including 30 employees.

The price of milk paid to farmers and the price of dairy products in the stores doesn't always add up. Their input costs continue to rise, and some are getting paid what their fathers did even though everything else is higher.

I see the stress on the farms. When farmers are faced with selling their cows, it is difficult because it is not only their business, but also a lifestyle rooted in generations. They are part of our communities and a key to our agriculture infrastructure.

Dairy farmers work hard to produce a high quality and nutritious product. They love what they do caring for their cows and the land. But when they see what is happening to milk marketing and rules about what milk children can choose in school, it's discouraging.

On one hand, it is unbelievable how little people really know about what milk is and what it provides, especially whole milk. We are at a place where it is assumed that everyone knows what milk is. But it has been taken for granted as just milk – and the perception is the alternative beverages give the same nutrition.

Not even close.

Making school children drink milk that has the good taste and healthy fat taken out of it leaves kids thinking milk is blah. So, if someone has the option of fat free or 1% low fat milk and something else, they can more easily turn to something else, and future sales are lost.

Whole milk is standardized at 3.25% fat. When Nelson Troutman started painting his wrapped hay bales with the Drink Whole Milk (virtually) 97% Fat Free, it got a lot of attention. People didn't know this because whole milk fat content is not on the label and whole milk is not promoted. Young people didn't know how good milk can be because whole milk isn't offered at school.

On the other hand, whole milk sales are now rising in the past couple of years as awareness grows. So much nutritional science is available showing the benefits of whole milk, especially for children.

As the facts get out, people are coming back to whole milk for their families. But not many know their kids can't have it at school. They don't really think about it.

Just think about this: if the children don't like low fat milk, they aren't going to drink it, so they aren't getting the nutrition people think they are getting.

We found out how important whole milk is when we did a Milk Donation Drive Through event in April of 2020 at the height of the pandemic shut down. At that time, whole milk was hard to find at grocery stores, and retailers put limits on milk purchases of any kind.

We secured and gave away almost 7500 gallons of whole milk that day, working with local bottlers. Some who drove through, said: "Oh good! It's whole milk!" They were so grateful. Some were emotional, some had tears. Some were picking up for neighbors, and teachers were picking up for underprivileged students.

We were amazed by the community response, and I was more mentally drained than physically that day, to know what we take for granted. People were just so happy for a couple gallons of whole milk. It was humbling.

I remember attending a seminar where a guest said the number one company for spending money on promotion is Coca Cola. People already know what Coca Cola is, but they spend the most on promotion anyway.

Where milk is concerned, we have a different situation. We have lost a generation of milk drinkers that has grown up since 2010 thinking the milk they get in school is what milk is. Even the schools take it for granted as a milk with every meal, but what's missing is the flavor and the satisfaction that translates to getting those important nutrients.

There is so much need in our community. Our school district of Eastern Lancaster County is the second highest in poverty level in Lancaster County. We should be able to offer the whole milk the children prefer so they actually drink it.

On June 9, we had a second community outreach event. This time was different because we are not in the middle of a pandemic. We gave away 1500 free lunches to our community, featuring whole milk and dairy products for June Dairy Month. We partnered with other local businesses like Hostetter Realty, Little Stream Auto Rental, Yoder's Country Market, Eby's General Store and with organizations like Dairy Pricing Association and 97 Milk.

We had some people drive through asking if the milk was whole milk, and we were proud to say it was. Most of the kids asked for chocolate milk, and we were proud to offer whole chocolate milk. Did you know when the fat is left in the flavored milks they have LESS added sugar?

When people don't know what milk does for them, when children aren't able to choose milk they like at school, it's easier for fake 'milk' products to fill a void and lead people to believe they have something equal or better, when they don't.

Today, people have so many beverage choices. It's more important than ever for the message about whole milk to get out to consumers and for the choice of whole milk to get back into the schools.

We at Sensenig's Feed Mill fully support the efforts of Congressman G.T. Thompson on this issue in Washington, and hope that the Assembly in Harrisburg will see how important it is to our kids and our farms, and take action also – to bring the choice of whole milk back to schools.