

2012 WINNER: **LOUISE HARTLEY**



'Cuts will force dairy farmers out of business', meeting told

A DAIRY farmer who claims he will be forced out of business within six weeks of the price cuts has pleaded with fellow producers to stand together.

The plea came at the North West NFU dairy crisis meeting at Haydock Racecourse on Wednesday, where 700 farmers congregated on the same day as 3,000 dairy farmers gathered in London to vent their anger.

Richard Jones, Cockerham, Lancashire, spoke with desperation as he explained the price cuts will result in a loss of £160,000 per year and could force his business to shut down.

Mr Jones, who farms a 1,000 animal unit, said: "From August 1 I will be milking my cows for welfare reasons only, because I will not be making any money whatsoever.

"I don't want to go and I don't want my family to lose the farm. I don't want you to be in the same position. Whether you have 50 or 500 cows, aligned or non-aligned, you are all under threat."

Debate was rife over whether farmers should throw milk down the drain.

NFU dairy adviser Luke Ryder said if the industry overwhelmingly decides to throw milk away then the NFU would listen, but he could not advocate such action.

He said: "All options are still on the table. I do believe there is a place for peaceful demonstrations, but these must be targeted and co-ordinated."

Peter Bell, a dairy farmer from Lancashire, questioned whether supermarkets had 'screwed' the processing costs down so much that producers were now cross subsidising the processing of milk.

He asked the NFU representatives if the non-aligned processors were propping up the aligned processors' milk price.

"There is no doubt the processors are earning a lot less from non-aligned contracts," said Meurig Raymond, NFU deputy chairman.

"Maybe the processors are trying to desperately re-coup that extra margin from the non-aligned contracts. We will never find that kind of information out."

Ian Smith, a dairy farmer from Lanark, Scotland, asked the audience how many of the dairy farmers present had written to their processors and retailers after receiving the letter about the price cut. The show of hands was scarce.

Both Mr Smith and Mr Ryder called for farmers to immediately write to processors before August 1, denying them the right to take the 2ppl. "Go home and write to your processor immediately. Do not underestimate the power of a letter," said Mr Ryder.

*Published on the Farmers Guardian website,
12 July 2012*



2012 RUNNER-UP: **DOMINIC KIRBY**



British pig industry faces destruction in a matter of weeks

A prominent pig farmer has warned that the British pig industry has only a matter of weeks left to be saved from destruction. James Hart has become the latest victim of the spiralling costs of pig production. Mr Hart has been farming pigs on his mixed farm in Gloucestershire since 1970 but has been forced to abandon his 400 sow unit and lay off five members of staff due to the unaffordable price of feed.

Second generation tenant farmer Mr Hart said: "We only have weeks, not months, left to save the British pig industry. We have to act now or there will be no pig industry left in a year's time. Consumers cannot expect high quality pork at bargain base prices."

Mr Hart also predicts that 25-35% of British pig farmers will go to the wall by Christmas if things continue as they are: "We worked so hard but in the end it simply wasn't worth it. We would have made a loss of around £100,000 this year for certain. I know that because we made a loss of nearly £100,000 last year." Mr Hart estimates that he has made a loss for eight out of the past 10 years and has vowed never to go back to pig production because he simply cannot afford to: "Friends in the City laugh at me when I tell them I've made a loss for nearly a decade."

Pig farmers like Mr Hart are being forced out of business by a recent sharp increase in the cost of production, according a recent survey by the National Pig Association. This has been caused by a 25% increase in the cost of wheat and soya meal as a result of poor weather, especially in America, which has forced the UK price of soya meal, an essential source of protein for pigs, to around £400/t, up from £295/t at the end of last year. Many farmers are making unsustainable losses of between £18-20 per pig and are consequently being forced out of production.

Dr Zoe Davies, general manager of the NPA, is urging consumers to buy British in a bid to help pig farmers break even: "We are asking shoppers to please be extra careful to look for the British Red Tractor logo on bacon, sausages and pork."

Published in Farmers Weekly, 10 August 2012

