

Removing rbST From Dairy Herds Seen As Dangerous Precedent

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As of February 1, Illinois dairy producers are being asked to sign affidavits indicating they have stopped their use of rbST (recombinant bovine somatotrophin). The justification for this movement by dairy processors and retailers is that “consumers are demanding it.” However, surveys have indicated that consumers are indifferent and the movement is an effort by processors to create “value added” products for their benefits. This initiative sets a dangerous precedent for U.S. and global agriculture. Many universities are being asked to sign affidavits verifying that their dairies do not use rbST. We recognize there are economic considerations on both sides. We also believe there are moral, ethical, and leadership roles the universities must address in the consideration of these affidavits. This is a pivotal matter for U.S. agriculture, and it deserves discussion, debate and action.

Illinois researchers evaluated the impact of removing rbST from the University of Illinois dairy herd with various milk prices. The economic loss ranged from \$20,000 to \$60,000 less income annually (based on \$12 or \$22 per cwt of milk, 7 cents per pound of dry matter feed costs, 3 cents for added labor per day, and \$5.80 per

14-day rbST injection). The decision not to use rbST at the University of Illinois dairy farm is entirely based on milk markets; no other economically viable alternative is available. We support rbST technology. The science is clear; rbST does not affect milk quality, consumer safety or cow health. It is effective biotechnology and safe as supported by many U.S. and world research groups.

Consumers and dairy producers are losers when the dairy industry requires removal of rbST. Consumers will lose because milk prices will be higher due to reduced milk yield that impacts supply/demand relationships. In some markets, the price of milk on the shelf has increased by 60 to 80 cents per gallon as “value added” milk with claims by marketing groups as “more natural” while pricing it lower than organic milk. Dairy managers are the losers as the consumer dollars paid for “value added” milk may not be passed backed to the producer. Milk efficiency (pounds of milk per pound of dry matter feed) and profits are also reduced as cows produce less milk. Current and future biotechnology will be at risk (reproductive hormones, antibiotics, feed additives, GMO crops, vaccines), which could negatively impact milk yield and cow health. Δ

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