

WinkWorld December 2003

Not only are we sharing a short article from Kenneth Remsen of Vermont, we also want to share his community school's interactive website. Burlington Free Press on July 25, 2003 www.underhillid.k12.vt.us

For our Prairie Pals, please just substitute the word, rancher, every time Remsen writes farmer.

NO COW LEFT BEHIND

By Kenneth Remsen

As a principal facing the task of figuring out all the complexities of the No Child Left Behind legislation and its impact on education I have decided that there is a strong belief that testing students is the answer to bringing about improvements in student performance.

Since testing seems to be a cornerstone to improving performance I don't understand why this principle isn't applied to other businesses that are not performing up to expectations. I was thinking about the problem of falling milk prices and wondering why testing cows wouldn't be effective in bringing up prices since testing students is going to bring up test scores.

The federal government should mandate testing all cows every year starting at age 2. Now I know that it will take time out of the farmers necessary work to do this testing every year and that it may be necessary to spend inordinate amounts of money on the testing equipment but that should not detract us from what must be done.

I'm sure there are plenty of statistics to show what good milk producing performance looks like and the characteristics of cows who achieve this level of performance. It should, therefore, be easy to figure out the characteristics necessary to meet this standard. We will begin our testing finding out which cows now meet the standard, which almost meet the standard, which meet the standard with honors and which show little evidence of achievement. Points will be assigned in each category and it will be necessary to achieve a certain average score. If this score is not achieved, the Department of Agriculture will send in experts to give advice for improvement. If improvements do not occur over a couple of years, the state will take over your farm or even force you to sell.

Now I'm sure farms have a mix of cows in the barn but it is important to remember that every cow can meet the standard. There should be no exceptions and no excuses. I don't want to hear about the cows that just came to the barn from the farm down the road that didn't provide the proper nutrition or a proper living environment. All cows need to meet the standard.

Another key factor will be the placement of a highly qualified farmer in each barn. I know many of you have been farming for many years but it will be necessary for all farmers to become certified. This will mean some more paperwork and testing on your knowledge of cows but in the end this will lead to the benefit of >> all.

It will also be necessary to allow barn choice for the cows. If cows are not meeting the standard in certain farms they will be allowed to go to the barn of their choice.

Transportation may become an issue but it is critical that cows be allowed to leave their low performing barns. This will force low performing farms to meet the standard or else they will simply go out of business.

Some small farms will be probably go out of business as a result of this new legislation. Simply put, the cost per cow is too high. As taxpayers we can not be expected to foot the bill to subsidize farms with dairy compacts. Even though no one really knows what the ideal cost is to keep cows content the legislature will set a cost per cow. Expenditures too far above this cost will be penalized. Since everyone knows that there are economies of scale, small farms will probably be forced to close and those cows will merge into larger farms.

Some farmers may be upset that I proclaim to know what is best for these cows but I certainly consider myself capable of making these recommendations. I grew up next to a farm and I drink milk. I hope you will consider this advice in the spirit it is given and I hope you will agree that the NO COW LEFT BEHIND legislation may not be best for a small state like Vermont.

Kenneth Remsen is the author and is the principal at Underhill I.D. School in Jericho, Vermont.