

# Weekly Market Bulletin

State of New Hampshire  
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Governor

Department of Agriculture, Markets & Food  
**Lorraine S. Merrill**  
Commissioner

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## From Your Commissioner... Emergency Drill for Plant Disease

Last year State Veterinarian Steve Crawford and his staff participated in an emergency management exercise with state, federal and local authorities involving a hypothetical outbreak of foot and mouth disease. Last week it was our Division of Plant Industry, led by State Entomologist Tom Durkis, that had a turn at what the professionals refer to as a 'tabletop exercise' to see how well prepared we are to cope with a noxious plant disease.

After this summer's ferocious late blight epidemic, the notion of a plant disease emergency does not seem so far-fetched. The Plant Industry Division staff has been involved in preparations for this event since June. The exercise is intended to develop the capabilities of our Department and the US Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service/Plant Protection and Quarantine (USDA APHIS PPQ) to conduct a unified, onsite incident management response to a simulated plant health emergency. "We were simply involved in a wide range of scenarios dealing with a forest pathogen," Tom explains. They tried to answer questions around what we would do if various scenarios were to happen—who would respond, and how.

The exercise was a practice run for the discovery of a newly discovered plant pathogen which could seriously impact our agricultural and forest resources. The hypothetical disease was a Phytophthora, similar to the organism that causes Sudden Oak Death, but with the potential to cause even greater harm to our forests. The exercise was designed to provide all participants—the Department of Agriculture, Markets & Food, USDA APHIS PPQ, and cooperating state agencies including DRED's Division of Forest & Lands and UNH Cooperative Extension—an opportunity to evaluate their capabilities for response and cooperation.

The final event on October 21 resulted in development of an incident action plan. Overall the exercise helped strengthen our emergency response capabilities and homeland security preparedness, Tom says. He thinks it would be beneficial to run a similar exercise in the not too distant future, concentrating on the state's response to discovery of Emerald ash borer or Asian Longhorned Beetle.

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Rules governing producer-handlers—generally defined as dairy farms that process, bottle and market their own milk—are among the many abstruse aspects of the federal milk marketing order system. USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service has posted its recommended decision on proposed amendments to the producer-handlers provisions of the federal milk marketing orders. A hearing was held and comments taken on proposals by organizations representing dairy producer cooperatives and dairy processors to limit the exemption of producer-handlers from the pooling and pricing requirements of the federal orders. The proposals were in response to the growth of very large producer-handlers perceived to have created unfair competition for processors, and loss of higher-priced Class 1 milk income to producers in certain regions of the country.

However, the proposed limit of 450,000 pounds per month was so low that even medium-sized farm bottlers like Hatchland Dairy in North Haverhill, or Vermont's Monument Farms, would have lost their producer-handler exemption. Another proposal would have eliminated future opportunity for farmers to get into processing and bottling their own milk without paying into the pool. The Department of Agriculture, Markets & Food submitted joint testimony with the Vermont, New York and Wisconsin state departments of agriculture in support of a 3 million-pound per month cap, and for preserving opportunity for more farmers to provide locally produced and bottled milk to customers.

USDA's decision recommends that the producer-handler definitions in all federal milk marketing orders be amended to limit exemption from pooling and pricing provisions to those with total route disposition of fluid milk products of 3 million pounds or less per month. The exempt plant definition, which includes many of the smaller producer-handler operations in the Northeast, would continue to limit disposition of Class I milk products to 150,000 pounds or less per month. A 60-day comment period on the recommended decision will end December 21.

**Lorraine Merrill, Commissioner**