

Dairy business turns sour as out-of-staters milk cash

By PAUL SULLIVAN

MILK FARMERS in Massachusetts appear to be a dying breed and as those farms dwindle down to a precious few, mom and dad may be expected to pay more for milk at the supermarket.

Consumers are already paying 10 cents more a gallon because of a milk shortage in November and December. A future shortage could hike prices as much as 45 cents a gallon, according to State Food and Agriculture Commissioner August Schumacher.

"We had to import one million pounds of milk per week," in the late fall, Schumacher said, "and the price went up about a dime a gallon."

But if the state loses more and more local dairy farms, consumers will definitely notice it in the supermarket.

"We would have to bring in more milk from Ohio, California ... and it could cost another 45 cents a gallon for families who live in Malden, Medford, Everett ..."

Schumacher has moved to help out the Bay State dairy farmers. On Jan. 13, he set a premium price on milk that large processors like Hood pay to the farmers. The price, \$1.35 for 11.6 gallons of milk, will stand until the end of the year.

He hopes this will ease the farmers' burden a bit because of the grain shortage, while not affecting the price of milk on the stores' shelves.

The milk shortage here is the result of a combination of factors and officials said things may get worse before they get better.

Schumacher said in the last four to five years, the federal government, which mandates milk prices on a nationwide level, has been favoring the large milk farmers in Texas, California and Wisconsin.

"There's a tremendous surplus of milk in California, Texas, and that drives the

price down in Massachusetts. We need prices to be based on regions of the country," such as New England, Schumacher said.

Another factor is the number of developers who have begun to buy up dairy farms and turn them into housing developments.

A third factor is the rise in the price of grain because of the drought in the Midwest this past summer. It's now costing Massachusetts farmers more money to feed their livestock.

Because of these factors, the number of milk farms in the Bay State has dropped from 772 in 1983 to 462 in 1988, according to Schumacher.

It's a discouraging picture and no one knows better than Jim Talvy, 29, who has a small dairy farm in Upton with 60 head of cattle.

"The way things are now, you have to be crazy to see a future in this business," Talvy said.

"But some of us are hopelessly optimistic."

Talvy said he believes more farms will be going under in the near future.

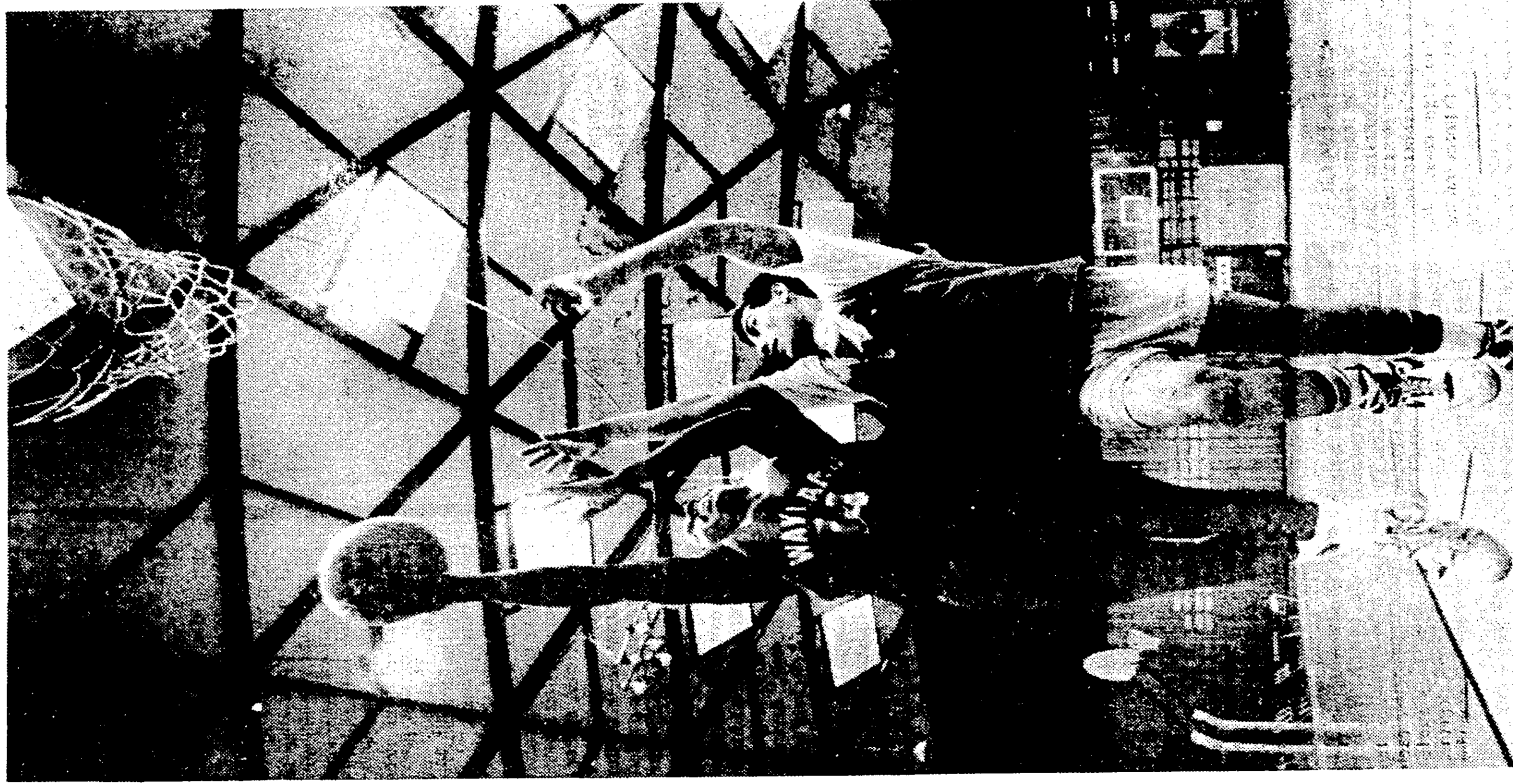
"Oh, sure. There's plenty of people near retirement age and they know the price of land in town.

"It wouldn't take them long to get rid of their farms."

He added, "People still love the farming business and the lifestyle but they can't get the monetary returns for that business. It's become a labor of love. "That's how it is for me. But I'm optimistic I can make decent money."

Talvy pointed to the national pricing of milk.

"That's the big issue for New England farmers but it's falling on deaf ears in Washington. Jim Talvy is being bled to death even though some farmer in Texas has 5,000 cows."



TEAMMATES: Mike James of Roxbury, left, and John Boyajian of Wayland shoot some hoops during basketball practice in the Wayland High School gym. Staff photo by Renee DeKora

dream for most city kids

But life as a METCO student hasn't been all rosy, Harrison points out. First there's the whole idea of being labeled a "METCO student," which doesn't agree too well with her and her friends.

"I found myself getting in fights with people," Harrison says, recalling her first days in Wayland nearly 12 years ago. "Some of them are my best friends now."

Darrick Edwards, another Boston transplant, plays tailback on the football team. Once in a while he finds himself lining up against friends of his from Boston's Latin High.

Even though, he professes to have loyalties in both Wayland and Boston, the stocky running back says the town's pre-game day potluck suppers are something

he probably would not get back in the Hub. "It's a good thing to have a small town behind you," Edwards says.

Although the Boston students come to Wayland for a better education, it's the suburban students who end up learning more, says Manuel Fernandez, Wayland's METCO program coordinator.

In addition to integrating the Wayland community, the METCO program has taught suburban students that there is another world beyond their sheltered lives.

"I think these kids teach suburban kids more than the suburban kids teach them," Fernandez says. "This world looks more like Boston than it will ever look like Wayland."

— LEONARD GREENE



A DYING BREED: Jim Talvy, of Upton, hangs on to one of his precious cows and to his farming lifestyle as the milk shortage is expected to get worse. Staff photo by George Mano