

Dairy group's new leader meets with local milk producers, sees some relief in prices coming this year

Bruce Alsobrook

Alas, poor dairy farmers, they knew you well. But they come not to bury you, but to praise you. Perhaps it's inappropriate to compare the Hopkins County dairy industry to a Shakespearian tragedy. The tenor of today's milk markets more resembles a modern anti-morality play, one where hard work and diligence is paid off with crushing debt and a bleak outlook for the future.

But that same future may have some promise yet, says Darren Turley, who recently was named executive director of Texas Association of Dairymen.

Turley was in Sulphur Springs Thursday, speaking to dairy farmers and local officials about the state of the industry and other issues affecting one of the biggest dairy-producing counties in the state.

Darren Turley, a second generation dairyman, joined the organization about one year ago as its new assistant manager. He recently stepped into the role held by longtime TAD Executive Director John Cowan.

Turley, who lives in Dublin, is a 20-year veteran of the dairy industry and a graduate of Tarleton State University. He has been recognized by the Texas Farm Bureau with its Excellence in Agriculture Award and is a graduate of the TFB's Agriculture Leadership Program. He has also served on the Texas Farm Bureau Young Farmer & Rancher Committee. Turley has also chaired young farmers programs for the National Milk Producers, Dairy Farmers of America and Associated Milk Producers Inc. He and his wife, Deanna, have two daughters, Jaclyn, 14, and Madison, 4.

Turley, who looks younger than his 42 years, points out that dairy farmers are in crisis due to high production costs and low prices paid for their milk.

Depending on production, producers are losing about \$3.50 per day on each cow. Prices paid to farmers for their milk averaged \$19.37 per hundred pounds in 2007. In 2009, the average was closer to \$11.94.

Meanwhile, corn prices have dropped from a record high of \$7 per bushel in the summer of 2008 to less than \$4 a bushel. But corn had averaged between \$2 and \$2.50 a bushel for the previous 20 years.

All these factors have left production flat, yet there's too much milk in storage still, Turley said, which helps depress the price.

"The outlook still isn't great," he said Friday.

Nevertheless, he said, prices could go up in the late summer or fall, at least enough to equal the cost of production. After that?

"It's still too early to tell how low or how far it will go," he said.