

President's Letter
Al Squire
February, 2016

Remembering the 1997 pre-Christmas snowstorm that caused widespread power outages throughout our area for several days, this year we were going to be ready for anything. We already had generators for our milking barns and wells and water systems, so we added a new generator for our house just days before Christmas. We had no idea what Mother Nature had in store for us. Those of us in Eastern New Mexico and West Texas and the Panhandle were given a strong dose of reality with two feet of snow distributed and re-arranged by 60-80 mph winds. In spite of everyone's best efforts, all roads soon became impassable. Feeding and milking our cows became extremely difficult or impossible. Compounding these problems was the fact that people who were willing to work over the holiday season could not leave their driveways or drive on any roads to get to work for several days. Transporting workers to and from work and rescuing those who thought they could drive through huge snowdrifts became a large part of our daily routine before, during, and after we took care of our cows and calves. Many of us helped dig out or rescue neighbors on our way past their places with our tractors and loaders. Linda and I will always remember our midnight rescue mission using one of our dairy loaders to pull out three stranded vehicles at one site halfway between our dairy and the town of Hagerman.

I would like to offer a very special "thank you" to all of our friends and neighbors in the local farming community who worked for hours on end helping plow the roads. They also helped plow out some of our dairy driveways and roadways so that we could get workers back and forth and be able to concentrate on feeding and milking our cows and caring for our calves and heifers. If it were not for the "can-do" and "will-do" spirit of the farmers, silage harvesters, and dairymen taking care of the roads, our entire area would have remained impassable well past New Year's Day and our losses would have been much more severe.

Also, I would like to offer a sincere "thank you" to all of the electricians, plumbers, mechanics, and other service people who helped repair all of the electrical shorts and outages, pumps, plumbing and equipment that failed because of the blown in snow that seemed to infiltrate everything. They continued to work all hours night and day for weeks as more and more new problems were discovered. A "thank you" is certainly due to Central Valley Electric Cooperative, our local provider of power. During the entire duration of the monster storm, our power remained reliably "on" and this helped us deal with other more pressing issues.

Many producers are hoping for assistance from our state and federal government to help on some of the losses. New Mexico cannot legally help producers even if they wanted to because the New Mexico Constitution has an "anti-donation" clause which prohibits taxpayer money from being used for private sector businesses. An emergency disaster declaration from the federal government might help to some extent.

Hopefully the USDA Farm Bill's Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) will assist those who qualify. Be sure to ask about the rules and keep good up-to-date records. Also if you do not want to be disappointed, consider lowering your expectations somewhat. We recently learned that the first 1½ % of your herd mortalities will not be paid because it is a "normal mortality rate."

As far as other financial help for our lost production, excessive culling from mastitis and other health issues, frozen teats, and other losses we will encounter over the next year, I would have to say that our odds of meaningful relief or direct assistance to offset these losses is about like the odds of seeing a state or county snowplow working in Southeastern New Mexico during and shortly after the Goliath Holiday Blizzard of 2015!

The Co-op members of the Southwest Agency who came up with a slight financial boost to help producers cover some of their production losses for the last five days of 2015 also deserve a "thank-you" from affected producers. Even though much of it came out of our own pockets, I know that some came from other producers as well. It was not expected, and I sincerely hope that it does not create any hard feelings.

Finally, "thank-you," Beverly, Kaye and Susan for watching out for all of our producers' interests at the State House and elsewhere during this 30-day session while all of us are at home putting the pieces of our dairies back together again.