

News Release

For Immediate Release

Date: February 18, 1998

Contact: [Robert Lesley](#) (601) 359-1135

SPELL ASKS USDA TO HELP SOUTHEAST DAIRY FARMERS BY ESTABLISHING FLOOR PRICE

In a show of unity, Agriculture Commissioners Lester Spell Jr. of Mississippi and Bob Odom of Louisiana traveled to Washington, D.C. Tuesday to testify before a federal hearing on milk. The two men outlined the severe problems facing dairy farmers in their states, and called for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to set a “floor price” of \$13.50 for Class I and Class II fluid milk.

Speaking before an Administrative Law Judge at USDA headquarters, Spell said immediate action is needed. “I have seen a lot of changes in agriculture over the past few years, but I have never seen a situation as bad as what dairy farmers in our state face right now,” Spell said. “We have lost a greater proportion of our commercial dairies in the last five years than any other southern state, except for one. Nearly 3 out of every 8 dairy farms that existed in 1992 are gone; we are losing about one dairy farm per week.”

The hearings, which began Tuesday, are likely to continue through the week. They were called by Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman in response to a resolution adopted in Kansas City last year by some 37 states that called for raising the base floor price of fluid milk to \$13.50. Though no one was predicting the outcome of the hearings, many felt that the fact they were even held was a victory for farmers.

Commissioner Spell pointed out at the hearing that the entire milk pricing structure is scheduled to be revamped by next year and a floor price would help the farmers make the transition to the new system. “We are not asking for a handout or a bailout,” said Spell. “We are just asking for implementation of sound policy that would calm the waters as we go through a transition. This effort, coupled with passage by the Mississippi Legislature of the Southern Dairy Compact, should give our hard working, family dairy farmers the time they need to strengthen their investments and lifestyles that have meant so much to Mississippi.”