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Dear Sir/Madam,

Please accept the following document as a submission to the Senate Enquiry on Milk Prices.

On hearing the news that Woolworths & Coles had begun a 'price war' on milk, my heart sank; here we go again. It seems that the Australian dairy industry is constantly trying to recover from disasters; be they natural or man-made and yet as whole, we pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off and say 'right, let's get on with making this work'. Personally, I don't know how many more times I can do that. I can only hope that my passion for our land and our animals will give me the strength to persevere and to support my husband in the career he feels compelled to continue.

My children, aged 12 and 8 years, see the disbelief and although I attempt to hide it, the fear in my eyes as we listen to the news that generic branded milk will be reduced to \$2/2 litre bottle. They know that this will be another enormous hurdle for their family to jump; will it be the one that finally pushes their family off the land? What will Mum and Dad come up with this time to ensure that they have enough food on the table, access to educational opportunities and will there be anything left for us to have just a day or two away from the farm to take a break from the stresses of farming life. They immediately start asking questions of what this will mean and what will we do. How do I answer them when I don't know myself? They know all too well the issues that face the dairy industry despite their young years. How can they not, their future is riding on the success of our family farm business. Already they spend their spare time helping us, not only with the routine farm chores but also with building up our agri-tourism venture intended to supplement our farm income into the future. They never complain; they know this is just the way it is, the way our lives have to be so that we can continue on the farm.

I work 2 part-time jobs already, along with helping out on the farm whenever possible, in an attempt to support the family while this venture is in the early stages. Perhaps, one day, there will be enough money for me to return to the farm to support my husband who runs the farm entirely on his own as there is little money left over for extra workers. As parents, we feel enormous guilt that we have to work 7 days a week to try to ensure our family has enough money to secure our future – we don't have a weekend or a holiday and rarely pay relief milkers as this is a luxury. As a result our children rarely have a weekend or break as they work with us around the farm. Their family has farmed this property for over 130 years and we hope that when their time comes they will continue to share our passion for this beautiful farm and keep agriculture the focus of the property. In all honesty, I don't believe that will be the case. Not because they don't share our passion for our

family property and love for our animals but simply because dairy farming has become 'too hard'. It's just too hard to ensure that your family will have enough money to keep them going into the future. It simply is not enough to work hard; farmers must find another source of income and I doubt there are many without at least 1 member of the business working off-farm. Quite honestly, I would not want my children to have to struggle the way we have with young children and running a farm with such tight profit margins. Farming is always a gamble in itself as we try to work with Mother Nature and her ever changing ways. Add supermarket giants to the equation and it seems there is no answer for farmers.

From the age of 2 my son watched us struggle as deregulation was introduced. Our dairy farm supported our family and my husband's parents until deregulation became a reality. My daughter knew only of drought conditions until she was 3 years old. It was at this point that the family relationship was tested to the limit as there simply was not enough money to support both families.

To compound the effects of deregulation we were hit with one of the worst droughts in history and it was thanks to the Federal Government's support that we kept afloat during this time. We continued to struggle for several years and use up all financial reserves both personally and within the farm business. Many would say this was a result of our small farm; talk to those who have larger farms and they will confirm that the struggle is not only for small farmers.

Finally in 2006 the decision was made that one family must leave the business and being the older generation, it had to be my parents-in-law. The emotional stress and loss to them was enormous, so much so that I don't believe it will ever leave them. Naturally the stress of this is felt by the entire family; our parents-in law, ourselves and our young children.

Over the past 5 years my husband & I have worked hard to develop a plan to ensure that we can continue to farm into the future. We believe that we can achieve this through diversification into the agri-tourism industry. This allows us to continue to dairy farm whilst educating others on the importance of agriculture, introducing another income stream to our farming business. My part time jobs are intended to supply the capital required to establish this side of our business, resulting in our entire income source being our farming property in one way or another in the future. I fear that working off the farm will be a necessity to keep the farm afloat if prices drop dramatically as they did with deregulation.

We are not simply dairy farmers because we can't do anything else with ourselves and our land; we are both articulate and intelligent people who could easily succeed in the workforce or with another small business however, we have chosen to continue the family tradition of dairy farming, our passion is dairy farming. Does that decision mean that we have forgone the right to job security and satisfaction; to a fair days pay for a fair days work?

Our vision is to become certified organic dairy farmers; despite our small size we believe that by staying this way we can farm with integrity and honesty and the values that are important in life. We strive to produce a quality product for Norco Co-Operative and ultimately, Australian consumers. Our quality assurance audits consistently return an A rating; something we are extremely proud of. Our milk is also of a consistently high standard and our herd health is our utmost priority. We believe that the way we treat our animals and our land is a direct reflection of our character and as such, we are not prepared to compromise on either of these.

All of these goals take considerable amounts of money and time to achieve. If profit margins become even tighter I don't believe we can continue to farm with integrity and to the standards we believe our animals and our land deserves, to the point where our land and animals would suffer. We have too much respect for both to allow this to occur and would have no option but to leave the industry. To struggle for so many years and in the end, to cease dairying in any case would be a waste of our hard work and dedication and to be quite honest, a loss to the industry as I believe small farms are the backbone of dairying.

Through our agri-tourism enterprise not only do we hope to supplement our farm income and make our farm more sustainable in the long term but also strive to heavily promote the Australian agricultural industry and more particularly, the dairy industry. We educate school children and perhaps more importantly, their teachers and parents, about the excellent standards achieved with the Australian agricultural industry and why they should support Australian farmers when purchasing their food. Why should they have to purchase inferior quality products for their family? Do they realise that this is what will happen should Australian farmers continue to be pushed out of the industry?

Through research and development and field days, farmers constantly try to improve industry standards; the quality of their product and the welfare of their animals. Reduced revenue for the dairy industry can only mean one thing; cost cutting. Throughout the industry, I believe this will inevitably mean that these areas of improvement will suffer the most as farmers struggle to make ends meet. Shouldn't consumers have a voice in this; about whether they purchase inferior quality food for their family sourced from overseas countries lacking the basics of simple hygiene practices, questionable ethics and possibly slave labour. We are certainly seeing a change in consumer trends; they want to have a connection with where their food is coming from and see how it's produced. Intensive farming does not enhance the image of farming and unfortunately this will be the way of the future should Supermarket giants win this 'battle'.

It was our passion for the industry, our farm and our animals that kept us going through the past 10 years and possibly the most difficult time in our lives, along with our firm belief that things would eventually have to improve; they simply cannot go without dairy farmers in Australia. My belief in that is beginning to wane. Do we really have the support of Government to ensure that Australians are given access to quality fresh milk into the future or has it now become easier to import all of our food products from overseas?

As Aussies, we are generally regarded as having good common sense; a sense of mateship – where does this sort of behaviour leave these values? Are the giant corporations of Australia no longer expected to be held accountable for their actions; actions which ultimately affect the lives of Australians whether consumers or farmers? This inquiry has the ability to set a precedent for the future actions in this area. Please make it count. This submission is not intended as a hard luck story about a long suffering family farm, merely a reality check for those who have the power to change the future for hardworking farmers just like us; for people who are attempting to make this great country of ours even better.

As I write this submission, I can feel the emotions of the past 10 years since deregulation come flooding back to me; the heartache, stress but sheer determination to succeed; to continue to do what this family has done for over 130 years, with integrity and high moral standing. We love what

we do; we are simply asking for a fair and accountable system. Farming is hard work, we all accept that. It is the way in which farmers are dictated to and their contributions devalued that it is in question.

I implore you to consider all parties involved as you make your way through this inquiry; consider the impact on the communities that rely on farmers spending money within their towns; the Australian consumer who deserves to know that the food they are eating is of the highest quality and grown in a sustainable and ethical way; and most importantly, on farming families of Australia who are the backbone of this country.

Yours sincerely,

Kay Tommerup