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First of all, regarding the farm bill, Dr. Bill Thomas also was instrumental in helping the Southeast. He was part of a group from Georgia privileged enough to actually get in to see Newt Gingrich. It took months of work to do that. We had a strong coalition throughout the Southeast. If you read the National Milk propaganda, put it where you keep toilet paper because that is what it is worth. The fact of the matter is there were some strong objections from Georgia and congressional delegations from Alabama and Mississippi. We at least got a standoff. We had some strong support including Congressman Livingston, who really buttressed and supported Mr. Solomon. Livingston, a Republican from Louisiana, also is high in the House hierarchy. I can't recall his specific committee responsibility, I believe it is the Ways and Means. He had clout and he backed Solomon.

The other thing I would like to mention about the farm bill is that two weeks ago (late March, 1996) I was at the Mid-Am annual meeting and Colin Peterson was one of the guest speakers. For those of you that were at the Okeechobee [Federal Milk Marketing Order] hearing, he is a Congressman from Minnesota. Both he and Gary Hammond stood up and talked about how great the farm bill was. We absolutely cleaned their clock and they claimed victory. Politics are strange!

With respect to marketing, I think some things need to change. Joe Wright's view of the perfect world for the Florida dairy farmer would be keep prices up, send feed prices down, have Wayne Wiggins say he doesn't want the money, for the Florida Coops to merge, to retire existing Coop managers, and find a young aggressive manager to lead us into the 21st Century. To go along with that, for Mid-Am not to ride into the state of Florida on a silver horse and to let us deal at arm's length with the dairy farmers in south Georgia without threat or retaliation. So that's my view of the perfect world. Joe's list will probably strike out on most items, but that's where I think we ought to be headed.

I think we need to be aggressive in marketing and pricing our milk. If it gets to the point where boxed milk is going to put us out of business, then let it put us out of business. But we cannot afford to price our milk so low that we go broke anyway. If boxed milk is ultimately going to replace us, let us know quickly, so we can find something else to do. I started out as a lawyer, I am already in my second career, and I'm still young enough that I can have a third career if boxed milk is going to shut me down.

It is critical that we communicate with our customers and I am very glad to see Mr. Gene Smith from Superbrand here today. I just am sorry it took as long as it did, because we're at least a year or two too late. We have met with all of our customers with the exception of one to discuss how we have gone through a long four or five years of miserable prices, of losing money, and how it is exacerbated this past year by beef

prices going down and feed prices going up. We want our customers involved so that we can work together and price milk so we can make a little bit of money and keep our customers competitive.

Expanding to a regional view, I'll share some numbers that the Georgia Department of Agriculture shared. It's been my view for the last year that what we are dealing with is an extreme milk deficit in the Southeast, the deep South in particular. In the long run we might have surplus milk in Tennessee and Kentucky, but everything south of that is going to be a deficit. Look at Georgia for example. Georgia cruised along in the first part of '95 but now their statistics look like ours did last year. Starting October, Georgia's production was down 5.1% compared to the prior October. In November it was down 6.9%, December 8.4%, January 7% and I haven't heard the February and March figures yet but I would guess they are much the same. I think this gives us an opportunity to work with the cooperatives to the north of us because we are all in the same boat.

With respect to mailbox prices, there have been quite a few times this past year when the mailbox prices in Wisconsin were higher than in Atlanta, GA. I think decoupling is a partial solution and I am glad to hear Dr. Thomas refer to that as well. And I think we need to look at some of the things that affect mail box prices. In Wisconsin, they start with a formula order price then add on, down here we start with formula order price, and maybe add a little premium, but then start deducting. We might have to do what they do in Wisconsin where the processors start paying the freight. I know that won't be popular but we may have to do that if we go through a prolonged period of continued prices below our production costs. I would say that we can't be too greedy, we have to be fair with our customers. I think we need to go overboard in making our position clear, because the processors are not winners in the long run either if we all go broke. I want to be an advocate for change. I think we react slowly, we're reactive or have been reactive. We have started being proactive in the last 6-8 months but I think we need to continue doing that more.

I want to share a few suggestions that I heard recently at a meeting regarding building a new hospital in Avon Park. There were a lot of problems and the administrator was giving a pep talk on how to deal with change. I think this applies to dairy farmers in Florida. He stated six quick things to deal with change: 1) keep on top of what is going on; 2) come to the conclusion that things will never be the same again - we are not living in the good ole' days; 3) have a positive attitude - because complaining doesn't help; 4) do not waste precious time blaming others - we are all in the same boat; 5) take control of your own emotions - don't expect others to make life easier for you; and, finally, 6) try to adapt to change.

It is my hope that the Florida Cooperatives will expand their sights. We need to change because if we don't we will end up as the dinosaurs did.