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TCCA farmers back hormone ban

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Headlight-Herald Staff

TILLAMOOK — Officials at Tillamook County Creamery Association say they hope they can get back to business as usual now that the cooperative's membership has voted to support the board of directors in its decision to ban the use of a Monsanto hormone on member dairy cows.

By a vote of 83-43, TCCA

members voted Monday to leave their bylaws unchanged. The vote came after a large number of members objected to the board's decision to ban the hormone.

The dissenting group proposed a bylaws amendment prohibiting the board from restricting "the right of any member to use any pharmaceutical product approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration for use in dairy

cattle."

The petitioners asked for a special meeting of the full membership to vote on the amendment. On Monday, all but 11 of the cooperative's 137 eligible voting members gathered at the Fairgrounds to hear testimony and cast their votes on the amendment.

According to Creamery Association CEO Jim McMullen, a total of 27 members spoke during the meeting,

offering impassioned testimony about their concerns. When the testimony was over, a secret vote was taken, complete with official voting booths overseen by Tillamook County Clerk Tassi O'Neil.

During the vote and as the ballots were tallied, members milled around, chatting and laughing in what appeared to observers peering through the

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Tillamook County Creamery Association CEO Jim McMullen tells reporters he believes the meeting with farmers was productive and gave everyone a chance to be heard.

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windows of the closed doors to be a friendly manner.

After the results were announced, the crowd filed out to the sea of pickups parked in the fairgrounds lot. Some appeared tense, others in good spirits. But few agreed to speak to the waiting television crew outside or print reporters.

As a result of the defeat of the amendment, a ban on the use of synthetic bovine somatotropin (bST) on any cow supplying milk to

TCCA will go into effect April

1. The bST is used by some dairy farmers to stimulate enhanced milk production in cows. It is produced by Monsanto Co. and marketed under the brand name Posilac.

After the vote, McMullen told reporters that he believes the meeting was productive and gave everyone a chance to be heard.

"We all went away united because of the process," he said. "We feel really good about it." He said he observed members who had spoken on opposing sides of the issue hugging after it was all over.

"Dairyman are strong people," he remarked.

"Communication is the key and we will try to do a better job of it in the future."

He said he does not anticipate that halting the use of the hormone will have any serious impact on milk production or milk supplies. He said a majority of local dairyman did not use Posilac at all, or only occasionally.

But, because bST is a naturally occurring substance found in all milk, he acknowledged that there will be no way to test to verify whether member dairies are or are not using the synthetic hormone. Adherence to the ban, he said, will be on the honor system.

He explained that the ban will affect milk suppliers only, at this point. Butter, sour cream, yogurt and the cream used in ice cream, are all sold

to TCCA by outside vendors.

The association has no control over the milk sources for those products, he noted.

"We need to set an example before we ask them to change."

McMullen said there still are no plans to advertise their ban on their product labels at this time.

"This decision puts other dairyman in the Northwest on the spot," he remarked. "And we value our partnership with other producers." But he said TCCA has not ruled out changing its labels at some point in the future.

The controversy began last May when the association voted to require that all milk producers delivering milk to TCCA facilities in Tillamook or Boardman will be required to certify that their milk "is, and thereafter will be, from cows not supplemented" with bST. The rule was scheduled to take effect April 1 of this year.

Although the

U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved the use of bST for this purpose, citing a large volume of evidence of its safety, many consumers and natural foods advocates continue to voice concerns. In addition, a number of countries around the world, including Canada and the European Union, have banned the use of bST on livestock. TCCA's managers say it is these market forces that prompted their decision to ban its use.

"We are increasingly a global marketplace," McMullen told the *Headlight-Herald*. "If we do not respond to what the market is telling us, we are not protecting the interests of our members."

McMullen said TCCA has also heard from major retailers that carry Tillamook Cheese, who are responding to customer inquiries regarding the use of hormones in their food products. He noted that about 200 other milk-products companies have taken a similar stand, including Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream.

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