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## It's udderly disgraceful

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## Shoppers urged to act while farmers get milked

**MATTHEW KILLORAN**

QUEENSLAND shoppers are being urged to send a clear message to supermarkets that they won't tolerate badly hurting farmers being "exploited" and forced to sell milk at a loss.

Negotiations between milk producer Lactalis, behind brands such as Pauls, and a group of 110 Queensland farmers collapsed, sparking accusations of alleged "unconscionable conduct". Dairy farmers were being offered 62 cents/litre for milk that costs 71 cents/litre to produce. The dairy farmers, who have collectively bargained as "Premium Milk" for 20 years, said that after talks collapsed, Lactalis sought to deal with some farmers

individually. The move comes ahead of the Government instituting a dairy code of conduct by year's end, which would protect farmers in negotiations.

LNP Senator Susan McDonald said it was "unconscionable conduct", urging consumers to write to Woolworths or

speak to their store managers. Woolworths buys milk from Parmalat and is negotiating its own contract with them, demanding farmers get a fair go.

"Farmers are already using their superannuation or selling blocks of land to cover costs. We run the very real risk of generations of milk producers, land management and genetics being lost to Australia forever," she said.

"Australian consumers have demonstrated they support our farmers by continuing to buy milk at increased prices and they're happy to pay more."

Premium Milk chairman Peter Jervis accused Lactalis of attempting to circumvent the bargaining process by giving

individuals until December 6 to respond to their offer. "It's a bullying tactic. Everyone is struggling big time," he said.

A spokeswoman for Lactalis declined to comment.

A Woolworths spokesman said it was a contractual matter between Lactalis and farmers.

"Since September 2018, our drought levy has contributed an extra \$7.5 million in relief to more than 160 Queensland dairy farmers," he said.