

**§ 106-816.4. Payment and collection of assessment.**

(a) The assessment shall not be collected unless more than half of the votes cast in the referendum are in favor of the assessment. If more than half of the votes cast in the referendum are in favor of the assessment, then the Association shall notify the Department of the amount of the assessment and the effective date of the assessment. The Department shall notify all dairy producers of the assessment.

(b) Each dairy producer shall pay an assessment on each hundredweight of Grade "A" milk produced in this State and sold commercially.

(c) Each milk handler or dairy cooperative shall collect the assessment by deducting the amount of the assessment from the proceeds of the sale of Grade "A" milk. The milk handler or dairy cooperative shall remit to the Department no later than the twentieth day following the end of each calendar month the assessment on Grade "A" milk sold during that month. Any fluid milk producer-processor who markets Grade "A" milk of its own production directly to consumers, or any dairy producer who does not use the services of a milk handler or dairy cooperative located in this State, shall also pay the assessment under this section. Any dairy producer who fails to remit the assessment for the previous year's sales by January 20 shall pay a penalty of five percent (5%) of the unpaid assessment plus a penalty of one percent (1%) of the unpaid assessment for each month after January 20 that the assessment remains unpaid.

(d) The Association may conduct inspections or audits of the books of any dairy producer. If the inspection or audit reveals that a dairy producer has willfully failed to remit assessments when due, the dairy producer shall pay the Association the reasonable costs of the inspection or audit.

(e) The Association may bring an action to collect unpaid assessments, penalties, and reasonable costs of any inspection or audit as provided in subsection (c) of this section against any dairy producer who fails to pay the assessment, penalties, or costs. If successful, the Association shall also recover the cost of such action, including attorneys' fees. (2023-63, s. 5.4(a).)