

This article appeared in *Farmshine* on July 4, 2008



## ***Partnering for a stronger future***

BELLEFONTE, Pa — Agribusinesses are just as concerned with the sustainability of the dairy industry as the producers who work the front lines. If the dairy producer isn't productive and profitable, businesses that sell products and services to the farmer will not be successful. It is this mutual connectivity that is at the heart of the new Premier Partner program introduced by the Professional Dairy Managers of Pennsylvania. (PDMP)



Always the beneficiary of loyal support from industry suppliers, the PDMP Board of Directors recently created the Premier Partner program to provide a mechanism to acknowledge businesses that carry their commitment to a higher level. As the name implies, these are companies whose pledge of financial support rises to the level of a partnership in PDMP's education, advocacy, information, and networking services.

Premier Partners see themselves as not simply backing PDMP, but as participants in the organization's ongoing efforts to ensure Pennsylvania's dairy industry remains productive and profitable.

From dues rebates designed to build the association's membership to consistent sponsorship of educational programs, AgChoice Farm Credit has demonstrated it shares the mission of PDMP, so it was not a surprise that when the notice went out about the Premier Partner option AgChoice was the first to sign up.

The Premier Partner list quickly grew to its current six members. In addition to AgChoice, PDMP has also signed up Cargill, Inc.; Land O'Lakes, Inc.; Pioneer Hi-Bred International, Inc., Monsanto Dairy, and Lancaster Dairy Farm Automation.

When asked why their companies immediately stepped up to become Premier Partners, representatives from each of the business cited PDMP's leadership role in the dairy industry.

Speaking on behalf of Pioneer Hi-Bred, Matt Antos said his company feels "fortunate that in Pennsylvania there is a strong organization like PDMP. He pointed out, "there are so many organizations that seek our support and we have to carefully choose. There is no question that PDMP is important to the industry and we are pleased to be associated with an organization of such high quality."

Each day PDMP receives more inquiries about Premier Partnership from companies enthusiastic about the opportunity. Long-term investor members or sponsors of PDMP events say they want to develop the new partner relationship because they believe PDMP is an organization that is built on progressive ideas and is action oriented.

Gordon Hoover of Land O'Lakes put it this way: "Our philosophy as a company is to strive to be the top in the industry and any successful business has progressive leaders. We so appreciate the opportunity to partner with PDMP because these are the movers and shakers in the industry."

Hoover also talked about how much more "complex" the industry is now with something new happening every day, saying: "The times we are operating in are unprecedented, and we need to be part of an organization like PDMP to share in guiding the industry through these trying times and to support our co-op members who are among PDMP's progressive leaders."

Over the past year, PDMP has made advocacy a much more important part of the mission to advance the dairy industry in Pennsylvania through improved productivity and profitability. As milk labeling issues, animal welfare activists, environmental protection groups, and economic factors have shown, dairy farming is no longer a business that can stand apart from the world around it. Dairy producers who want to continue operating and even to pass the farm to another generation are facing critical decisions. PDMP has stepped up to make their voices heard.

Jeff Harding of Monsanto Dairy echoed the belief of other Premier Partners that PDMP is the organization that is fighting for the industry's long-term sustainability: "At Monsanto we strongly support PDMP, and have for many years, because we believe that PDMP represents progressive dairy producers, who choose to be in the dairy business for generations to come. We're very impressed with PDMP's increasing role in producer advocacy. We really need dairy and other ag organizations to stand up and promote their industry."

While Cargill, Inc. is enthusiastic about PDMP's new advocacy role, Dr. Charlie Gardner says his company also wants to be a partner in the organization's more traditional activities "providing high quality educational programs, the new Dairy Industry Issue Forums, networking, and on-farm tours."

Pioneer places a high value on another of PDMP's programs, the silage research project. According to Matt Antos, "We participate in many evaluations and we appreciate the effort PDMP puts into their project. It is widely recognized as top of the line third party research and epitomizes the kind of quality that PDMP puts into all its efforts."

Dennis Milhoan of Lancaster Dairy Farm Automation recognizes the leadership position of PDMP. "We have always supported the educational programs because we feel they are so important. We also need an organization that presents a leadership position for the dairy industry in Pennsylvania – on animal rights issues and other major issues facing dairy farm families today. As a producer organization, PDMP is stepping up and pulling everything together to be that leader. We're glad to be a part of their efforts and want to see the organization continue to grow as a premier dairy organization with its agenda of activities and leadership to strengthen the dairy industry for all producers."

As PDMP broadens its role and increases its activities on behalf of dairy producers, the Board recognizes that dues income alone cannot support the organization. Sponsors have long made it possible to offer full-day education programs with low registration fees like the \$25 member rate charged for the Dairy Industry Issue Forums.

With the addition of the Premier Partners, other program areas will have the foundation they need to grow. PDMP President Logan Bower refers to this new cooperative effort as “standing with our allies.” And as in a true partnership, by standing united PDMP and its supporters can build a future with a strong and profitable dairy industry.