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## **‘We need to support each other as dairy producers; and open eyes’**

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Special for Farmshine**

CAMP HILL, Pa.—“Kids remember their trip to the farm,” said Tricia Adams during her presentation about how the Hoffman family of Kar-Dale Acres conducts group tours of their 700-cow dairy farm near Shinglehouse, Potter County, Pa.

Two generations—including Dale and Carol and their children Keith, Brad, Tricia and Joshua—operate the farm with 15 employees. They started opening their dairy to group tours 15 years ago.

During the Women in Dairy Conference, presented by Penn State Dairy Alliance in Camp Hill last week, Tricia, her mother Carol, and niece Skyler presented a break-out session: Educating Our Youth through Farm Tours.

Speaking to about 40 women in the small group session, Tricia acknowledged “It can be very hard to open your farm and yourselves to tours, but we have found huge satisfaction and fulfillment in sharing with the community what we accomplish here. It has long-lasting effects.”

She stressed the point that “educating our youth is more important than ever before. When a high school senior comes back and says he remembers coming to our farm as a child, that’s a good feeling,” Tricia confirmed.

The Hoffman family is passionate about communicating with their community. In addition to the 200 to 400 children visiting their farm each year, they also have a website (kardaleacres.com), and they encourage visiting school children to come back with their families. The Hoffmans invest in telling their story, offering the tours free of charge.

“A lot of what we tell the children, we are also teaching the adults who accompany them,” Tricia said. “As farmers, we are very credible. The media has done us a huge disservice (as an industry). As dairy farmers, we have a responsibility to educate because no one else will do it as well as we would as farmers. We need to support each other as dairy

producers because we have a very important job to do in getting people to look past the grocery store and help open their eyes.”

For the Hoffmans, their mutual support system with other dairy farmers includes being members of the Professional Dairy Managers of Pennsylvania (PDMP). In fact, Dale Hoffman was re-elected in November to a second term on the PDMP board of directors.

The family shares with their visitors the benefits of efficiency in agriculture. “The numbers speak for themselves,” said Tricia. “From the 1940s to 2008, the U.S. population more than doubled from 130 million to 300 million and yet the number of cows providing more milk has been cut to one-third from 26 million to 9 million. They can see how efficient U.S. farmers have had to become.”

The Hoffmans also take the opportunity to show their farm as “a giant recycling operation,” she explained. “My Dad likes me to tell the children this simple story about the benefits of manure: 1) Manure is spread on the field; 2) The seed is planted and grows from manure nutrients; 3) Plants eat the carbon dioxide and give off oxygen; 4) We harvest the plant for food for our cows; 5) The cows eat the plants and produce milk; 6) The cows produce manure and the cycle starts over.”

In addition to some of the practical elements of conducting a farm tour, Tricia noted the four keys to a successful tour are to take biosecurity seriously, be presentable, have a good attitude, and be prepared with your farm facts.

“Let your farm and actions speak for themselves,” she added. “We want them to come to our farm and have a really good first impression and a really good time. We decorate the front porch for the season or holiday. We have our own farm T-shirts everyone wears. And we take advantage of the oodles of freebies that are available from the Mid-Atlantic Dairy Association, milk cooperatives, and processors, so we can give the kids treats to eat and things to take home.”

(For the younger age groups, the Hoffman women have found that oversize ziploc bags, partially closed, work better than the conventional biosecurity booties for small feet.)

One of the biggest things Tricia emphasized “is to show visitors you are having a good time and that you love what you are doing. By knowing our farm operation and explaining why we are doing what we do, our dedication comes across to show how we love our animals, the land, and the environment.”

Tricia also stresses the points relating to natural resources. “We want people to know that most farms are environmentally friendly with the help of Nutrient Management plans and practices; that the manure is a natural fertilizer we use on our crop fields; and that water is an essential product, which is collected and stored in a pond,” she said. “We do a lot of walking on the two-hour tour, so the visitors get to hear and see these things along the way.”

They cover a lot of ground, but keep the facts very simple. They also encourage the children to be hands-on, touching cows and their feed.

In the hospital barn, Tricia will explain that cows get sick just like people do and how they care for them. She will use this opportunity also to explain that all milk sold is free of antibiotics and there is no difference in the safety or nutrition of all the milk sold on the U.S. market today.

“People are amazed by the parlor and they love to hear how many gallons each cow gives each day,” she explained. “They also like hearing how everything is computerized, that we can pull up the data on each cow. We also go over the milk collection process

and how the milk never touches a human hand. They also like to hear where the milk is going and what it is made into.”

The Hoffmans try to schedule all tours in the afternoon when the cows are milking because it is a major part of the tour.

While the parlor is a major educational stop, the calf barn is certainly the favorite stop. “All the kids are hands on when it comes to the babies,” Tricia observed. “At this point, the kids are very happy, and we have the opportunity to explain the life cycle of the cow.”

The Hoffmans note that doing farm tours requires work and preparation, but, in the end, they say it is really worth it.

A copy of their farm tour presentation, with photos, is available at the farm website: [kardaleacres.com](http://kardaleacres.com).

## **Dairy farmers supporting each other**

Did you know the Professional Dairy Managers of Pennsylvania (PDMP) is a producer organization made up of dairy farms ranging in size from 40 cows to 2000, with an average herd size of 300 cows?

Did you know that membership entitles dairy producers, their families and employees to discounts for attending important events?

Now more than ever, dairy farmers need to support each other. PDMP is the organization for progressive dairies of all sizes, for education, advocacy, ideas, and fellowship. To learn more about membership, call toll-free at 877-326-5993 or visit [www.pdmp.org](http://www.pdmp.org).

### **PHOTO CAPTION:**

*Carol Hoffman (left), wife of PDMP board member Dale Hoffman, their daughter Tricia Adams (center), and their granddaughter Skyler Hoffman (right) gave a presentation on Educating Our Youth through Farm Tours during the Women in Dairy Conference last Thursday (Nov. 20). The family's Kar-Dale Acres in Potter County, hosts dozens of tours every year, including elementary and middle-school groups, church groups, and families. The 700-cow dairy is owned and operated by Dale and Carol and their four children. They say their ultimate goal is to keep the farming tradition strong and successful as the family grows (with 10 grandchildren at present) along with their future dreams.*