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The road ahead: Next week's Dairy Summit will help producers drive their businesses through economic downturn

By SHERRY BUNTING
Special for Farmshine

LANCASTER, Pa.—Driving the future of the dairy farm in the year ahead, will be a lot like driving a car in winter weather: White knuckles and all.

World class drivers will tell you: When the 'vehicle' starts sliding out of control, don't look at the tree you're headed for. Instead, steer in the direction you want to go by turning your gaze completely away from the obstacle and toward the spot on the road where you want your vehicle to be. Your body, and hence your steering, will naturally follow the direction of your gaze. The unconscious part of steering a car is that we tend to move in the direction we are looking toward.

The same is true for managing the dairy farm in tough times. Each day, it seems, there's yet another piece of disturbing news about the U.S. economy, the global economy, the ag economy and the eroding market for milk.

How do dairymen stay focused and positive amid this constant assault of bad news? By evaluating the conditions of the road, preparing the vehicle for tough travel, and keeping your gaze in the direction of where you want to go.

"As farmers we've gone through these challenges many times, and we will get through it. We're producing food, and people have to eat," says PDMP vice president and longtime member Dale Hoffman. He and his family operate Kar-Dale-Acres near Shinglehouse, Potter County, Pennsylvania. "If we take care of the little things, the big picture will take care of itself."

Like many progressive-minded dairy producers, Hoffman bolsters his positive attitude through his relationships with fellow dairymen.

While there are a host of informative meetings for producers to attend throughout the year, especially in the winter time, Hoffman has found that his membership and participation in the Professional Dairy Managers of Pennsylvania (PDMP) has helped not only with the tangible business side of dairy farming, but also the intangibles, like motivation, attitude, and looking beyond where



you are to where you want to be.

As bad as the market looks right now, is there any other sector of the economy we would rather be in?

Dairymen who attend the Pennsylvania Dairy Summit next week (Feb. 11 and 12) will have the opportunity to turn their gaze away from the 'tree' and toward the direction on the road where they want to be.

They'll draw strength and support from the opportunities to network with other producers. They'll learn about the conditions of the road ahead and the big picture in food production. They'll learn about valuable resources to help prepare their 'vehicle' for the road ahead.

PDMP president Rod Hissong perhaps put it best earlier this year when he said:

"As we enter 2009, all of us in the dairy industry know that we are in for a battle... It is a time when we all would like to stay home... crawl in a hole and let the world pass us by. The world will pass us by if we are not involved. Policymakers do not stop making policy just because of a downturn in the dairy economy. When things do turn around, and we crawl out of our hole, the world may be different than when we went in. It may be a world where we can't compete, where we don't have access to the technologies or the labor, or have the opportunities to move our businesses in a direction

to compete," said Hissong, who operates Mercer-Vu Farms with his family near Mercersburg, Franklin County, Pa. "We won't be able to thrive in the next upturn, let alone survive the next downturn, unless we work together to effectively navigate whatever climate we find ourselves in."

As dim as things may seem, the big picture is brighter. The Dairy Summit offers a host of important business-building topics and the insight of experts who are in the food industry and who study the food industry. Summit-goers are guaranteed to come back to their dairies with a fresh outlook, a few new friends, a contact, resource or idea that could make a huge difference in profitably managing their dairy business.

The Dairy Summit is the place to turn our gaze away from the obstacles ahead and toward the direction we want our 'vehicles' to travel.

Wednesday's session kicks off with Dr. John Stanton of St. Joseph's University,

who has spent the past 30 years working in the food marketing industry. He has worked with many nationally-known companies, including Campbell Soup, PepsiCo, Kellogg, and others. He has spoken before many major U.S. and international food association groups and is regularly quoted in the media. He is the current editor of the Journal of Food Products Marketing and will share what he sees as emerging trends in the food industry.

The two-day Summit agenda of speakers, breakout sessions, interactive discussions, and trade show opportunities will deliver value to your dairy business, and positive energy for the road ahead.

If you haven't registered: Don't worry. Walk-ins are welcome at the upcoming 2009 Dairy Summit Feb. 11 and 12 at the Lancaster Host Resort and Conference Center in Lancaster, Pa. For more information, contact PDMP at 877.326.5993 or visit www.padairysummit.org.

PDMP supports call for Milk Marketing Board decision on petition to expand premium to PA milk sold in NJ

By SHERRY BUNTING
Special for Farmshine

HARRISBURG, Pa.—The Pennsylvania Milk Marketing Board (PMMB) has before

it a decision to make on a previous petition to expand the over-order premium to cover milk produced in Pennsylvania, but sold in neighboring New Jersey.

Estimates are that more than a half billion pounds of milk produced in Pennsylvania annually would be eligible for the premium if the PMMB issues an Order in favor of the pending petition. The petition was previously filed by Governor Rendell, the Secretary of Agriculture, dairy cooperatives, and the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau.

Last week, Ag Secretary Dennis Wolff sent a letter to PMMB requesting a timely decision on this petition.

This week, on behalf of the membership, the leadership of the Professional Dairy Managers of Pennsylvania (PDMP) sent a letter to the Milk Marketing Board supporting the Secretary of Agriculture's request for a decision.

The original petition last year requested that PMMB use its authority to capture over-order premiums in other states that also have mandated producer premiums. The evidentiary period of hearings on this petition were concluded before the recent downturn in milk prices. However, prior estimates are that a favorable decision to expand the over-order premium could return a collective \$2.5 million to Pennsylvania dairy producers.

The PDMP letter also expressed appreciation for the PMMB saying in the past it "has demonstrated its concern for the health and vitality of the industry."

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