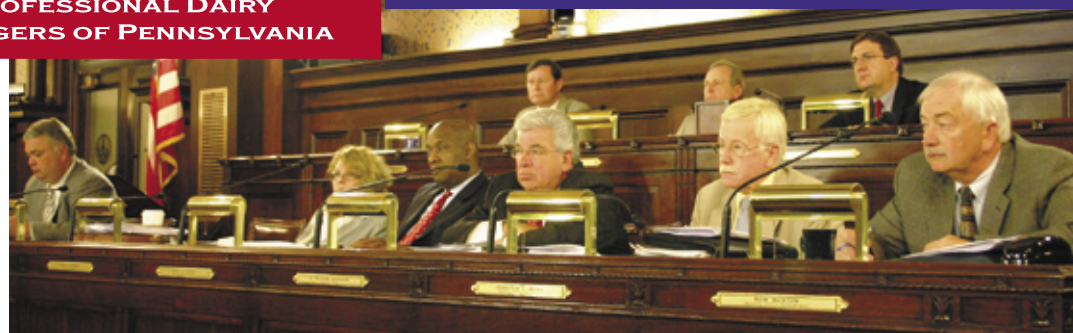


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PDMP

PROFESSIONAL DAIRY
MANAGERS OF PENNSYLVANIA

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(Above left) PDMP president Rod Hissong (right) urges PA House Appropriations Committee to restore funding for Ag Excellence. (Above right) Appropriations Committee Chairs Rep. Dwight Evans (third from left) and Rep. Mario Civera (third

from right) and ten other Committee members hear testimony about the state budget and Senate Bill 850, which cuts all funding to vital resources for dairymen like the Center for Dairy Excellence and PAgrows. Photos by Paige Eshelman

Speaking out to restore Center for Dairy Excellence funding

By SHERRY BUNTING
Special for Farmshine

HARRISBURG, Pa.—When the PA Senate passed its version of the state budget (SB 850) May 6, the drastic cuts to agriculture sent shockwaves through the dairy community.

PDMP moved swiftly to alert its members about the Senate's bill, which zeroes-out the Ag Excellence line in the state budget threatening the loss of valuable dairy resources, including the Center for Dairy Excellence, PAgrows and the Center for Farm Transitions.

PDMP leadership also met by conference call to plan a response, placing the backing of the entire organization behind efforts to restore essential funding for the Center for Dairy Excellence, which has become a stabilizing force for the industry and individual producers.

"This is our time to lead a grassroots effort in support of the work the Center does for our industry," said PDMP president Rod Hissong about the organization's stand to ensure dairy's future in Pennsylvania.

In addition to drafting a letter sent to the PA House and Senate, PDMP producer board members Rod Hissong (Franklin County), Dale Hoffman (Potter County), Dina Zug (Mifflin County), Gary Kline and Glenn Gorrell (Bradford County), Duane Hershey (Chester County), and Logan Bower (Perry County) set out to schedule individual meetings with their hometown Senators and Representatives.

Executive Director Alan Novak also secured time to present testimony during PA House Appropriations Committee hearings on



Testifying before the PA House Appropriations Committee on May 22 were (l-r) Dennis Milhoan, president of Lancaster Dairy Farm Automation, a PDMP premier partner; PDMP president Rod Hissong, Mercer Vu Farms milking 1600 cows in Franklin County; PDMP member Lolly Leshler, Way-Har Farms and dairy store, milking 100 cows in Berks County; Erick Coolidge, representing the PA Dairy Task Force and milking 120 cows in Tioga County.

the 2009-10 state budget May 22.

Hissong joined producers Lolly Leshler (Berks County) and Erick Coolidge (Tioga County) in presenting testimony at the hearing in support of restoring the Governor's proposed funding of \$600,000 for Ag Excellence.

Dennis Milhoan, Lancaster Dairy Farm Automation president, also testified from the allied industry perspective on the broader scope of what the Center means for the state's jobs and economic stimulus provided by dairy.

Hissong stressed that the essential funding for the Center is "seed money" that is returned many times over by providing dairymen with the tools to compete and keep the Common-

wealth's dairy industry strong and viable to the region. (See excerpts in sidebar story below. Full testimony is posted online at pdmp.org.)

Milhoan testified that the Center "sets the groundwork to have a sustained dairy industry in Pennsylvania: A dairy industry that is stable and growing instead of declining. Never has it been more important for dairy producers to have this resource than today with low milk prices and high cost of production."

He gave examples of how the Center's Profit Teams and Target Teams have directly benefited dairy farms, helping them strengthen their financial positions to weather tough times.

"A fully-funded Center gives the constant

message to dairy farmers and allied industries that Pennsylvania is very committed to maintaining dairy as a large contributor to our state's economy," Milhoan testified.

"The Center brings a level of confidence to our young people who want to take over the family farm and dairy in Pennsylvania, instead of leaving to dairy in another state," he stated. "The Center shows young people that there is an opportunity for dairy here and that a network of support that has been funded over the past five years is still available to them.

Leshler, a PDMP member, testified about how her family used the Center's business and strategic planning for their farm operation and dairy retail store, stressing the importance of the modernization and business development grants the Center pursues and oversees.

"Restoring this funding will enable the Center to continue helping dairy farms grow milk production, modernize facilities, demonstrate animal care standards, improve business and herd management, transition businesses to the next generation and manage risks to ultimately be more profitable," she said.

Coolidge, a fourth generation dairyman, talked about how important resources like the Center's Profit Teams and Dairy Succession Teams are to the state's dairy producers today.

To further support restoration of the Center's funds, PDMP is urging producers to speak out by sharing their concern with their legislators.

PDMP board members Gorrell and Kline have already met with northern tier Senator, Gene Yaw. "It was my first time speaking to a legislator," Gorrell said. "Gary and I had our industry facts, but we mainly just went in and talked about our area and about PDMP as a progressive organization. Sen. Yaw was easy to talk to. We had 45 minutes of good dialogue."

Gorrell said it's important to talk about the things that Pennsylvania legislators can actually help with. "They can't do anything about the milk price, so we didn't spend a lot of time focusing on that. We spent maybe two minutes out of the 45 on the economics, just to give him the context of the situation," he said. "The Senator wanted to know our thoughts on government programs, and we mentioned the Center for Dairy Excellence because this is one we should all be proud of."

Gorrell emphasized that, "It's more important than ever for us, as dairy farmers, to be talking to everyone we can, to keep this valuable resource. The Center does a lot of things that every dairyman can use to get better and to keep our number one industry going here."

Time is of the essence for dairymen to participate in this groundswell of support for restoring the funding for the Center for Dairy Excellence through emails, phone calls and personal visits to legislators.

The PA House will be crafting its budget in the coming weeks, and industry sources expect the budget negotiations to end up in conference committee between the House and Senate before a final budget bill comes back to both houses for passage by June 30.

For more information about how to participate in this grassroots effort, and for industry facts to help as you share your concern with legislators, contact PDMP at 877.326.5993.

Excerpts of testimony presented by PDMP president Rod Hissong

I appreciate the opportunity to visit with you about the Center for Dairy Excellence. I hope my testimony will give insight on the importance of fully funding the Ag Excellence line in the state budget.

While I am here to speak on behalf of my own dairy operation and the value of the Center, I am also here to speak to you as the president of the Professional Dairy Managers of Pennsylvania (PDMP).

PDMP is a professional dairy producer organization of over 100 dairy businesses representing over 50,000 cows and over 10% of the milk produced in Pennsylvania. It is a producer-led organization that is also supported by allied industry. Our membership has a positive, can-do attitude about the dairy industry in Pennsylvania. We like to talk about what is right about our industry instead of what is wrong. While these are tough times, we focus on what things we can change and improve instead of complaining about the things we can't.

One of the things we see that is right about the Pennsylvania dairy industry is the Center for Dairy Excellence. The Center has worked to bring all sectors of Pennsylvania's dairy industry together to achieve the common goal of making our industry stronger—coordinating all sectors to work together so this industry not only survives but thrives.

The Center is the collaboration of an entire industry. It is responsible for bringing the dairy industry together to decide what it needs and then has worked to develop the programs to meet those needs: A whole toolbox full of resources that dairy farm families can use to compete in today's difficult dairy climate. There is a saying in our industry that dairying as a way of life is bad business but dairying as a business is a great way of life. This is the transition the Center has helped our industry's producers to realize.

Along with the rest of the economy, dairy farmers are struggling. We are seeing unprecedented losses in Pennsylvania's dairy industry. Without the Center and its tools, those losses could be much greater. Using these tools, producers have positioned themselves to minimize their losses, weather the storm and wait for a sunnier day. Some dairies will fail, but thanks to the Center and the work it has done over the past couple of years, many more have been given a fighting chance.

If the Center for Dairy Excellence did not exist and producers did not have access to the tools for success, it would be only a matter of time before the whole industry collapses and none of us could compete. In Pennsylvania we are fortunate to have an outstanding dairy infrastructure. Many producers in other states are envious of the infra-

structure we have. It is a competitive advantage for us. It is in all of our best interests to support this infrastructure. We all rely on each other, and the Center is there to support all of us. It is not there for one group or another, but to support the entire Pennsylvania dairy industry.

Why is the Center for Dairy Excellence important to Pennsylvania? I can regurgitate all the facts and figures about the importance of the dairy industry to the Commonwealth. I'm sure you are well aware of the economic importance, but for me it's much more than facts and figures. It's about supporting an industry that provides a service that none of us can live without.

In this Commonwealth, we are fortunate to be blessed with fertile soil, a climate that cows acclimate well to, and more importantly, good hard working people who have the talents and ambition to provide a fresh wholesome product to the inhabitants of this state. In a day and age where people want to know where their food comes from they are fortunate, if they know it or not, that most of their dairy products are produced right past their backyards on their neighbor's dairy farm.

One thing I'm sure you hear from constituents is that they are tired of supporting hand outs for farmers. The Center for Dairy Excellence is the farthest thing from a government handout. It is money that supports an organization that fills a gap in an industry that is a backbone of this Commonwealth.

You have heard the old adage about giving someone a pole and teaching them how to fish instead of just giving them a fish? The Ag Excellence line and the Center for Dairy Excellence is giving this state's dairymen the pole and teaching them to fish. It is not handing out fish. It bridges the gap between the feel-good nostalgia of dairy farms past and the economic realities of today's dairy marketplace by giving the next generation of dairymen the tools they need to compete.

I appreciate this opportunity to support the work of the Center for Dairy Excellence and your willingness to take the time to hear our opinions on this important matter. As a dairy producer and as president of PDMP, the Center for Dairy Excellence has my full support. I urge you to consider fully funding the Ag Excellence line at \$600,000.

We hope to continue to work together to feed the people of this state and nation. This investment in our dairy industry will be returned many times over. It is just a seed that will grow and allow the Center for Dairy Excellence to go about the business of providing tools to keep dairying viable in Pennsylvania.

PDMP Issue – Forum June 4 – Lancaster
Morning Program: Family Relationships on the
Farm with the Reverend Dr. Carl T. Clarke.
Afternoon Tour: Rohrer Dairy Farms
Details and registration: 877.326.5993 www.pdmp.org