

www.pdmp.org

PDMP

PROFESSIONAL DAIRY
MANAGERS OF PENNSYLVANIA

Toll Free: 877-326-5993

PDMP wants producers to know: 'We are your voice'

By SHERRY BUNTING
Special for Farmshine

HARRISBURG, Pa.—“Everybody does it, and if we don't do it, then we're the only part of the ag world that doesn't,” says Alan Novak, executive director of the Professional Dairy Managers of Pennsylvania (PDMP).

By “it,” Novak is referring to “advocacy.” He's referring to developing the network of relationships with policymakers to give producers a voice in the decisions that affect their futures.

There are plenty of farm organizations providing “advocacy” on agriculture issues, but they are often general in scope and encumbered by size and decision-making processes that can't turn on a dime.

“What we're talking about, with PDMP, is a very specific dairy producer-focused effort,” says Novak. “There is a table out there where decisions are being made, and we want dairy producers to have a seat at that table with an effective voice.”

For example, the PDMP producer-led board recently developed and published their “position paper” on The Long-Term Viability of the Dairy Industry, which appeared on this page in the October 9, 2009 issue of Farmshine.

PDMP has disseminated this paper to Pennsylvania's two U.S. Senators, and to members of the ag committee in the House as well as to state legislators. Since the release of their position paper, the PDMP board has been conducting biweekly conference calls to flesh out the details and actions that would be consistent with the positions they have articulated.

But this process really began almost two years ago, when PDMP emerged from an educational organization (where producers meet up with each other to learn) and began to embrace the idea of becoming “the voice” of dairy producers.

“Now, more than ever, what dairy producers need is a unifying voice,” Novak declares, noting the dairy industry has multiple groups that are disjointed and lack a unifying message. In fact, PDMP got its start when various groups of producers throughout the state found out about each other and joined together to provide a statewide forum.

“PDMP—as a truly producer-led organization—is stepping into the lead to provide a unifying message,” adds Novak.

He reports on a recent “brainstorming” session involving the PDMP board, the Center for Dairy Excellence, the PA Dairy Stakeholders, and the PA Dairymen's Association, where the importance of coordination was discussed. From that meeting, it became clear that PDMP naturally fills the role as the voice of producers.

With so much discussion on milk pricing reform these days, PDMP wants producers to know: This is an organization that is engaged with a simple focus of advocacy for producers. Of PDMP's nine-member board, seven are producers.

“This makes PDMP a truly producer-led organization,” Novak stresses. “Other boards are mixed boards representing all sectors of the dairy industry. PDMP, on the other hand, is both producer-oriented and producer-led. Advocacy has become part of our mission, and that means advocacy on behalf of Pennsylvania's dairy producers. Frankly, if dairy producers do not have a voice—a vehicle for expressing their interests—then the advocacy is not going to get done. That's where PDMP comes in.”

He observes that the industry is in a time when, “There's a lot of talk going on about what the problems are, and there are also a lot of mixed messages being sent to policymakers,” Novak explains. “PDMP has refined its message to be very focused on the perspective of progressive dairy producers.”

Having laid out that message in its position paper, PDMP is now progressing toward deciding: What are the next steps?

“We made people aware of our positions, and now we are moving toward what we are going to do about them,” Novak explains. “We're saying: ‘Here's what we think good long-term policy is,’ but we are also commit-



Alan Novak
executive director

ted to being a source of producer perspective on anything that impacts dairy. The fact that we have not proposed or endorsed a specific action puts us in a favorable position with legislators who can come to us for a wider viewpoint.”

This means that when a group of producers has a burning issue, they can funnel that issue through PDMP to have a louder voice.

“We want producers to understand that we are ready to do this, to be the vehicle and the voice,” he adds. “The PDMP board would love to hear from folks who want to get engaged and bring their issues to PDMP to see how we can get engaged in it. Because of the things we've already done, our voice is credible.”

PDMP has been the producers' vehicle and voice in the past on issues like CAFO permitting, milk labeling, and technology. In fact, on technology issues, Novak asserts that, “PDMP will rush to the head of the line every time. Progressive farming practices are something this board feels strongly about.”

“We're in an era where government—particularly the federal government—is in our lives more than ever before,” Novak observes. This is why PDMP has taken on the important work of forming relationships and educating policymakers to become a credible source of information on issues.

Building and maintaining these relationships takes time. There is a vertical progression of groups already doing this: The cooperatives, processors, and retailers are in the Capitol every day. Through PDMP, dairy producers now have that opportunity as well. The organization is set up to provide the voice of producers, so that it does not get drowned out.

“If dairy producers do not define themselves, someone else will,” says Novak. “And we might not like that definition. We saw this in the collaboration PDMP provided on state budget issues. We responded with a grassroots effort to get engaged in building relationships with our legislators—at district offices and at the Capitol—around the theme of educating them at a time when they were interested in learning. They were like sponges. They wanted to hear what's happening at the farm level.”

As government moves in the same direc-

tion as the population, the key to advocacy, says Novak, is in reaching the more urban and suburban legislators. PDMP has active members in counties that have a growing urban and suburban population, and thus an opportunity to build those bridges.

Not only are the current milk marketing issues at the forefront, continued policy changes are happening in many areas that affect the ability of dairy producers to conduct their businesses. Case in point are the environmental issues, which continually bring the threat of costly new regulations to dairy farms.

“The recent Presidential Order on the Chesapeake Bay will have a huge impact on the heartland of dairy producers in the Susquehanna River basin,” Novak reports. “Then there are the threats down the road, where animal care standards could be set—without the input of dairy producers. PDMP has been involved on both fronts, providing that producer voice with credible information to educate policymakers about the on-farm realities and how to consider those realities when forming policies on these issues.”

PDMP is targeting its approach. Not only is Novak—as the organization's executive director—interacting with legislators and policymakers, individual members have also met with their legislators to explain: ‘Here's what I'm living through. Here are the challenges. Here is the impact.’

“We stay in touch with the House and Senate ag committees all the time,” Novak explains. “We talk about technology and the right and freedom to use technology. We start with the people who really need to know our positions—the representatives on the ag committees where bills are discussed. We are working to become engaged with senior staff and committee leaders on the House and Senate side. This is the kind of advocacy we are encouraging—the relationships that matter over the long term.”

Novak noted that PDMP members and board members have met with their legislators to develop these relationships, so they can pick up the phone and know they will be heard when an issue arises and fast communication is needed. Without the upfront groundwork, getting that message of advocacy heard is much more difficult.

“When fast communication is needed, that's not the time to build the network,” says Novak. “We have been working to make sure the network is there and functioning and has the credibility to be heard so we can mobilize the message.”

Novak also notes that PDMP has been talking about getting together a “dairy caucus” of core Representatives from the PA House and Senate with strong constituencies of dairy farms. “That's the ‘next wave,’” he says. “To get them connected with dairy and to personally meet with them.”

Like planting a garden, those relationships with policymakers must be tilled and tended. Amid a constantly changing economic and political landscape, the value of PDMP as an organization is enhanced by its infrastructure to ‘till and tend’ those relationships. This gives even more reason for producers of all sizes to consider membership.

“It can be difficult for producers to get time off the farm for lots of meetings with policymakers, but they can join PDMP and be part of a group that can do that,” says Novak. “Our producer-oriented culture and the flexibility of our producer-led board make PDMP the organization for collaboration, outreach and education with the purpose of advocating on behalf of producers so their voice is heard and their presence is known. From advocacy with policymakers to keeping our members in touch through communications, we have the infrastructure in place to do this.”

Let Pioneer be your resource to help work through the maze of high-quality corn silage production.

Pioneer® brand corn silage hybrids and inoculants, including 11CFT corn fiber technology...
Leading the way to more nutritious feed

From planting through feedout, your Pioneer sales professional can help you monitor all the variables of corn silage production with informative inputs for your growing decisions — from hybrid selection and agronomic management in the field to harvest and storage management at the silo or bunker. Your Pioneer sales professional will provide a combination of experience, agronomic and nutritional knowledge and support to help you achieve nutritious feed for maximum milk production with your corn silage program.



PIONEER
A DUPONT COMPANY

Science with Service
Delivering Success™

®, ™, SM Trademarks and service marks of Pioneer Hi-Bred.
All purchases are subject to the terms of labeling and purchase documents.
© 2008 PH11 08FORAGO10868_R3