

Rod Hisson, President, Professional Dairy Managers of Pennsylvania
Testimony before the PA House Appropriations Committee—May 22, 2009

Good morning my name is Rod Hisson. I appreciate the opportunity to visit with you this morning about the Center for Dairy Excellence. I hope my testimony will give you some insight on the importance of fully funding the Ag Excellence line in his year's budget.

Along with my family I own and operate Mercer Vu Farms Inc. in Mercersburg. On our dairy in Franklin County we milk 1600 cows, raise 1400 heifers, farm 1800 acres and haul over 42 million pounds of milk a year from the dairy with our own trucks to Land O Lakes. We have 26 full time employees that are dedicated to producing high quality milk, efficiently, safely, and profitably as to benefit management, employees, cows, the environment and the community in which we live. Based on those numbers our dairy supports over 170 agricultural jobs and provides over 22 million dollars of economic stimulus to our region.

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 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 producer ran and led and is 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 in the dairy industry 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 hard to bring all sectors of Pennsylvania's dairy industry together to achieve the common goal of making our industry stronger. They have coordinated all sectors to work together so this industry not only survives but thrives. The Center in not one person or one group of individuals, it 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 things 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. That is that transition that the Center has helped this industry's producers realize. Dairying is a business and they need to have the right tools in their toolbox to compete.

Along with the rest of the economy dairy farmers are struggling right now. We are seeing unprecedented losses in Pennsylvania's dairy industry. Thanks to the Center and tools it provides those losses could be much greater. For those producers who have used the Center's resources they have positioned themselves to minimize their losses, weather the storm and wait for a sunnier day. This storm will pass and these producers will thrive when things improve. 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 but rather were allowed to fail one at a time it is only a matter of time before the whole industry collapses and none of us can compete. In Pennsylvania we are fortunate to have an outstanding dairy infrastructure. Many producers in other states are envious of the infrastructure that we have. It is a competitive advantage for us. It is in all of our best interests to support that 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. It has no hidden agenda 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 have seen them and 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 to well and more importantly, good hard working people that 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 or welfare 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 on the national and international marketplace.

I appreciate this opportunity to support the work of the Center for Dairy Excellence. I appreciate your willingness to take the time and hear our opinions on this important matter. As a dairy producer and as President of the Professional Dairy Managers of Pennsylvania the Center for Dairy Excellence has my full support and I urge you to consider fully funding the Ag Excellence line at \$600,000. I have talked about many benefits of dairying in Pennsylvania but none as important as the support we receive from state government. We have and hope to continue to work together to provide and 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. Thank you for your time.