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PENNSYLVANIA DAIRY TASK FORCE REVIEWS STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES OF INDUSTRY

Comprehensive Review Will Guide Center for Dairy Excellence in 2010

HARRISBURG – More than 65 dairy industry leaders of the Pennsylvania Dairy Task Force – both dairy producers and agribusiness representatives – gathered in Harrisburg recently. The group was tasked to identify the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities that exist in the Pennsylvania dairy industry, its support structure, and how it is positioned to recover from the past 12 months of below breakeven milk prices.

"The task force is a group of industry leaders representing all aspects of the dairy industry who help shape the direction of the Center for Dairy Excellence," said John Frey, executive director for the center. "We depend on this group to identify the programs and resources needed to help Pennsylvania's dairy industry and its dairy farmers thrive."

The task force was organized in 2004 by Governor Edward G. Rendell and the Department of Agriculture to identify and coordinate the leadership and resources necessary to ensure a competitive and profitable dairy industry in Pennsylvania. At the recommendation of the task force, the Center for Dairy Excellence was created.

The task force meets twice a year, with each member belonging to one of five committees that meet quarterly. The task force committees are business management, communications and information, economic development, education, and government relations.

In six years, the Pennsylvania Dairy Task Force has become a driving force behind many of the programs and resources now supporting Pennsylvania's dairy industry, specifically through the work of the Center for Dairy Excellence.



"With Pennsylvania's dairy industry clearly threatened from historically low margins, it was important that this group come together. Our goal is to have a focused plan of support for all dairy farms as they work to recover from a very difficult year." Frey said.

During the meeting, the group was divided to focus on four areas – Pennsylvania's dairy industry, systems supporting the industry, Pennsylvania's ability to recover from the low milk prices, and the Pennsylvania Dairy Task Force itself.

From the list of strengths and weaknesses the group identified, a list of five overarching themes were identified to be addressed in 2010. They include:

1. **Speaking with a unified voice:** "Pennsylvania's dairy industry is very diverse, but the group felt it was important we work together to represent one unified voice with consumers - our customers - and with policy makers," Frey said.
2. **Encouraging youth in the industry:** "We need to eliminate the barriers preventing young farmers from getting started and work on assuring this vital sector that good business opportunities exist in our industry," Frey said.
3. **Focusing on the business side of the family farm:** "In today's business environment, dairy farmers must look at their operations as family farm businesses," Frey said. "They need to use finance and capital management planning, look at their risk management options, and do comprehensive business plans to prepare for the unexpected."
4. **Representation of dairy producers on dairy pricing, animal welfare and environmental wellness regulations:** "Dairy producers will need to continue increasing their level of involvement in the formation of policies and recommendations that affect our businesses," Frey said.
5. **Producers taking advantage of available resources:** "There are a vast number of educational opportunities and resources available to help Pennsylvania's dairy producers thrive," said Frey. "We need to find new ways to help more people to take advantage of them."



The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats identified by each of the groups were collected and will be used to identify programs and resources developed by the Center for Dairy Excellence and collaborating organizations in 2010.

Copies of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis can be obtained by calling the Center for Dairy Excellence at 717-346-0849 or by e-mailing info@centerfordairyexcellence.org.

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The Center for Dairy Excellence is an initiative of the Department of Agriculture and was launched in January 2004 by Governor Edward G. Rendell. Bringing together people from more than 40 different dairy organizations in Pennsylvania, the Center's mission is to enhance the profitability of the dairy industry by empowering people, creating partnerships, and increasing the availability and use of resources. Learn more about the Center at www.centerfordairyexcellence.org.