



CENTER FOR  
**Dairy** EXCELLENCE

**For Immediate Release**

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**Photo caption:** Jessica Fleisher (left) completed an on-farm internship at M.W. Smith Farms in Perry County, Pennsylvania and gained farm-level experience. Sam Crockett, her supervisor, is pictured on the right.

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### **DAIRY FARMS ENCOURAGED TO HOST INTERNS AND APPRENTICES ON THEIR OPERATIONS**

*Producers Who Might Be Looking for Employees Can Apply for Interns or Apprentices*

**Harrisburg, Pa.** – Dairy producers from Pennsylvania and beyond are encouraged to apply to be a host farm in the 2026 On-Farm Internship Program. The program was designed to provide 10- to 12-week on-farm internships and create opportunities for Pennsylvania students to gain practical knowledge, information, and skills on progressive dairy operations. The Professional Dairy Managers of Pennsylvania (PDMP), Pennsylvania Dairywomen's Association, and Dairy Excellence Foundation partner each year to support this program. Host farm applications must be submitted by November 15, 2025.

For dairy producers who are looking for an employee beyond the summer months, the Center for Dairy Excellence is also seeking employer farms in Pennsylvania to hire apprentices in the Dairy Herd Manager Apprenticeship Program. The program is registered through the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry and requires apprentices to master various competencies over 18 months of employment on a dairy farm. A dairy herd manager requires training beyond a high school education but does not necessarily need a college degree. The Center created this Apprenticeship Program to give Pennsylvania dairy producers the opportunity to develop beginner-level employees into well-qualified candidates to serve in herd management roles. Applications for employer farms are accepted on a rolling basis.

"If you're looking for an employee who has experience in dairy production and an interest in advancing their skills, these programs allow you to help mentor and share your experience with a young professional," said Michelle Shearer, Workforce Development Manager at the Center for Dairy Excellence. "Interns and apprentices benefit from gaining hands-on experience and being exposed to all aspects of your operation while many host farms benefit from getting an outside perspective from a young person who is motivated to work hard, learn a lot, and pay attention to detail."

For the On-Farm Internship Program, host farms will be expected to create goals and areas of focus for the student's 10-12 week experience. As part of these goals, interns will participate in discussion groups and work closely with their host farm to complete an in-depth research project that benefits the dairy operation.

"The On-Farm Internship program has been a great way for us to bring someone new into our operation who can help provide a fresh perspective in areas of our farm. We can also help the interns gain valuable skills and knowledge they can use in the future," said Jared Kurtz of Kurtland Farms in Elverson, Pa.

For the Dairy Herd Manager Apprenticeship Program, employer farms must be willing to expose the apprentice to all aspects of a successful, progressive dairy operation with adequate training and consultation to master specific competencies in these areas. Farms must also be able to pay the employee a minimum starting wage of \$11.00 per hour with a progressive wage over 18 months that ends with \$16.00 per hour.

“The apprenticeship program was a great way to enhance our employee’s knowledge while growing her role on our farm. There are only so many hours in a day, so we cannot possibly expose her to everything she really needs to know about farming. Having the outside educational components [through the program] allowed her to expand her knowledge without taking any of our time,” said Katie Sattazahn of Zahncroft Dairy, one of the employer farms in the apprenticeship program. “We participated in this to help our part-time employee figure out her next steps after high school. Our farm benefited as she took over a lot of the reproduction work and excelled. She is also in charge of our evening milking, alleviating the need for an owner to be milking. Overall, the Apprenticeship Program has benefited both our apprentice and our farm.”

On-Farm Internship host farm applications are due by November 15, 2025 and can be submitted online. Applications for the Apprenticeship Program are reviewed on an ongoing basis.

“Growing up I always knew that I wanted to work with cows. Cows are what I love, and I decided that I want to go the herd management route. During the on-farm internship [last summer], one thing that I enjoyed was seeing the cows we have treated get better. There are all types of farms. Just having one experience on one size farm doesn’t really get you the whole experience of what everyone else is going through in the dairy industry,” said Jessica Fleisher, a previous on-farm intern, when asked about why she decided to do the internship.

For more information about the expectations and requirements for farms and businesses that are accepted into either the On-Farm Internship or Dairy Herd Manager Apprenticeship program, visit:

- [www.centerfordairyexcellence.org/internship](http://www.centerfordairyexcellence.org/internship)
- [www.centerfordairyexcellence.org/apprenticeship](http://www.centerfordairyexcellence.org/apprenticeship)

Contact Michelle Shearer at [mshearer@centerfordairyexcellence.org](mailto:mshearer@centerfordairyexcellence.org) or 570-768-8316 with questions about the programs.

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The Center for Dairy Excellence Foundation of Pennsylvania is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, tax deductible organization that is Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) approved. Established in 2010, the foundation’s mission is to build and invest in programs that cultivate and empower the next generation of producers, consumers, and advocates for the Pennsylvania dairy industry. Learn more at [centerfordairyexcellence.org/our-foundation/](http://centerfordairyexcellence.org/our-foundation/).

The Center for Dairy Excellence is a non-profit organization initiated by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture in 2004. 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 at [centerfordairyexcellence.org](http://centerfordairyexcellence.org).

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