



CENTER FOR
DairyEXCELLENCE

For Immediate Release

Media Contact: Emily Barge, 717-346-0849; ebarge@centerfordairyexcellence.org

October 9, 2024

WESTMORELAND COUNTY DAIRY FARMER OPENS UP ABOUT FARM ACCIDENT, RECOVERY, AND BUILDING A POSITIVE TEAM IN NEW PODCAST EPISODE

Matt Carr Was Interviewed in the “Cow-Side Conversations” Podcast

Harrisburg, Pa. – In the Center for Dairy Excellence’s latest episode of the [“Cow-Side Conversations” podcast](#), Matt Carr, a third-generation dairy farmer from Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania, opens up about a farm safety accident where he lost the fingers on his left hand. He describes how quickly the incident happened, what the physical and mental recovery process was like, and the lessons he learned through the incident. Their dairy operation is a true family business with some additional Spanish-speaking employees. Matt shares how developing clear protocols for their workforce, while always remembering to have fun, is one of their top priorities. He also compares running a dairy business to the years he spent running marathons – and shares how keeping your mind in the right spot is key to working toward your goals.

Matt opens the podcast by describing the size and scale of his family’s dairy operation. With their recent transition to an LLC, Matt is now in partnership with his parents. Together, they milk 260 head of Holstein cows and farm 850 acres of corn, soybeans, alfalfa and wheat. It is primarily a family-run operation with a few Spanish-speaking employees. In terms of their management philosophies and production goals, Matt says they have started focusing on strong components over the years.

With their family-oriented culture, they also spend a lot of time outlining their goals and ensuring everyone is working together cohesively. They have worked closely with Penn State Extension on some of their workforce development efforts.

“We milk twice a day and aim for six pounds of components between butterfat and protein. That has really become the priority within the last two years. Everyone can strive for a number of pounds [in milk volume], but if you don’t have good components, sometimes you’re just pushing a lot of water and not necessarily getting the return you’re looking for,” Matt shares in the podcast. “If everyone doesn’t know what the goals are, it’s impossible to work towards them. I’m with my family all the time, so it’s easy to talk to them about what we want to be achieving. With our Spanish-speaking labor, sometimes that can be difficult. We have used outside resources to come in and educate them. That has really paid dividends in terms of informing them of our goals.”

Another one of their management goals involves making the most of what they have and redefining what growth looks like.

“Growth doesn’t necessarily have to be in total number of cows. Can we grow to a 30 percent pregnancy rate? Can we get our heifer completion rate below 10 percent? Can we grow our corn silage yield average to 28 tons an acre?” Matt explains. “We’re in an area where land is rather tight. Doing the best with what you have and getting the most out of what you have is our goal.”

During the podcast interview, Matt opens up about his near-miss with a farm accident that happened on July 5, 2023. He was chopping hay in the late afternoon and was trying to troubleshoot and unplug a wad of hay from the harvester. He quickly found himself caught in the machine, losing four fingers on his left hand and spending the next 20 days in the hospital. While he took a few days off when he finally returned home, Matt says getting right back into his daily tasks on the farm helped with the physical side of his recovery.

“The machine that took my hand was my medicine to get better. A lot of people wouldn’t want to ever get back in the chopper, but I got right back into it and was able to use my left hand to steer. It was my therapy in a sense,” Matt shares. “The doctors were amazed at how fast my therapy and recovering was going, because I had to do a lot of physical therapy after the hospital. It was because I didn’t just sit around. I was out moving.”

However, the mental recovery was a bit more challenging. Matt says he has learned how important being patient, slowing down, and taking a few seconds to clear his mind can be.

“I’m still learning every day. This has taught me a lot of patience. You can’t just come back and do everything the same way you used to without fingers on your left hand. There are still a lot of days where I have to take an extra minute and process how I’m going to do something,” Matt adds. “Some days I can’t figure out how I’m going to do it, so I have to walk away for a minute and clear my head. You can’t let yourself get too frustrated or you’ll give up.”

As a former marathon runner, Matt compares the mental fatigue that many dairy farmers experience with the process of running a marathon and taking small steps each day.

“Your body is stronger than you think. It’s the mind that will wear out first. If you get your mind in the right spot, you can achieve way more than you think you can. I think running a dairy business is very similar to running a marathon,” Matt says in the podcast. “When you’re training, you have to remember that this is a small step toward the goal. The next day is another small step. Each day, you can wake up and think ‘I have to feed calves again. I do this every day.’ But keep your head in the right spot and remember that it’s all working toward your goal. There is a reward and joy in all of it.”

Throughout the podcast, Matt also shares farm safety tips he has learned through his accident:

- **Don’t just stop and think – take the extra second to listen and follow directions.** “When you’re young, you feel invincible at times. But it can happen to you, and it happens way faster than you think it could. When this accident happened, I was thinking. But take a half a second and *listen* to the instructions of the machine. There are warning signs on the harvester, and it’s easy to wonder if you really have to follow them. But this was an instance where if the engine wouldn’t have been running, I would have been able to hear better and possibly not have gotten caught in the machine.”
- **Don’t overlook everyday tasks.** “It can sometimes be the simple things that you’ve done over and over again. You get caught up in the moment, you’re rushing around, it’s late in the day, you want to get done, and you’re hungry. But take the extra second and turn the key off. It could possibly save your life and your hand. It could make a big difference.”
- **Educate youth in particular.** “I have a lot of younger workers and family members. Take that extra second to not only change what you’re doing, but go the extra step to teach

someone else. I say to them, ‘I noticed you were doing this, but maybe you should try this.’”

- **Stay on top of your protocols.** “Dairies come in all shapes and sizes, and you could have an employee who has worked for 20 years or an employee where it’s their first day. Their knowledge base on how to work with machinery or move cattle can all vary. Protocols can drift. Continuous education is key. Stay on top of it.”

While his farm safety accident could have been a moment that negatively defined him, Matt tries to remain positive, patient, and focused on moving forward. One of the ways he does that is by remembering that farming alongside his family is fun and full of connection. Matt works to find personal ways to honor that and unite his team.

“My mother and father have worked all their life, and my grandfather worked all his life. I don’t want to seem like I’m not grateful for what they have done. So, this year, we had a theme night for harvesting to unite everyone and make it fun. My grandfather, who has passed now, always wore red suspenders, a red ball hat, and a white t-shirt. I went out and bought everybody who was helping with harvest that same outfit,” Matt reflects. “I really wanted to show my respect to them. You can do fun and unique things to connect everyone. It doesn’t always have to be a boring, sit-down meeting.”

To listen to the full podcast interview with Matt, visit www.centerfordairyexcellence.org/podcast. The podcast is also available on [Spotify](#), [Apple Podcasts](#), and [Amazon Music](#). With a new episode released each month, this interview is the eleventh episode in the fourth season. The podcast was designed to share real-time farmer insight, tricks of the trade, and inspiring stories from dairies across Pennsylvania.

###

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.

Center for Dairy Excellence ▼ 2301 North Cameron St., Harrisburg, PA 17110 ▼ 717-346-0849 ▼

www.centerfordairyexcellence.org