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**Dairy**EXCELLENCE

## For Immediate Release

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### **FAYETTE COUNTY DAIRY PRODUCER SHARES JOURNEY WITH VALUE-ADDED BUSINESS IN NEW PODCAST EPISODE**

*Jennifer Orr Was Interviewed in the New Episode of “Cow-Side Conversations”*

**Harrisburg, Pa.** – In the Center for Dairy Excellence’s latest episode of the “Cow-Side Conversations” podcast, Jennifer Orr, a dairy producer from Harmony Acres in Fayette County, Pennsylvania, shared what sparked her family to enter the value-added space and begin bottling milk from their 170-cow herd. She reflected on their community’s strong desire for a local food source, pandemic-related challenges, creative partnerships and products that were born along the way, and the memories she has built with her family.

Jennifer opened the podcast by describing their dairy farm, which she and her husband, Jeff, have owned and operated for about 10 years. They currently milk approximately 170 cows and have a sheep flock as well. They have two to three groups of cows that calve in the March and August/September timeframes to take advantage of the grazing season, but they continue to milk the herd year-round so they can bottle milk for their farm store, Harmony Acres.

“Grazing has been a huge part of what my husband is trying to do with the farm. We’re not all grazing. We do some conventional as well, but we’re utilizing as much as we can at the home farm in the pasture-based system: grazing cover crops and really centering the dairy around all those crop decisions,” Jennifer shared in the podcast. “We try to shorten up those calving intervals, so we can manage it a bit better and utilize the grasses that we have.”

While Jennifer studied animal science in college and has always enjoyed helping on her husband’s family dairy farm, she worked full-time off the farm for many years, educating consumers on beef and nutrition and working on behalf of farmers to tell their stories. It was not until about a year ago that Jennifer made the decision to focus her full attention on their bottling facility and farm store.

“By owning Harmony Acres, I get the best of both worlds. I still get to do the education and consumer piece at our farm store by directly selling our milk, which I love. I’m also excited to have my hands back in the dairy bottling milk,” she said.

To get their bottling facility off the ground, her husband made the initial moves and they purchased a pasteurizer in April of 2020. With shutdowns and supply chain delays from the pandemic, it did not arrive until February of 2021. In May of 2021, a few months later, they finally opened their farm store. The farm store and processing facility, Harmony Acres, is separate from the dairy operation. Jennifer now manages the processing side of the business, and her husband manages the herd and overall dairy operation. They work alongside each other to ensure both businesses are moving harmoniously.

Throughout the podcast, Jennifer described how they decided to take the first steps into the value-added space. She offered several pieces of advice:

- **Learn from others in the industry.** “Early on, we made it a point to talk to people who were already doing this who were micro-dairies themselves. They were all so kind and willing to give us tours and answer our questions. We’ve found such great friendship in some of our local dairy friends who have helped us out along the way.”
- **Get experience and see what works for you.** “I think we learned the most by just jumping in and seeing what worked for our set-up, because everything is different.”
- **Understand the needs of your community and potential customers.** “What really helped us was seeing the need and want for a more local food source in our area. It helped confirm our decision. During the pandemic, before we even thought about opening a store, people would always stop by wanting meat and milk because they saw cows in the field. We had to explain the process of how everything has to happen. That kind of opened our eyes to the fact that we have this great product and we want to share it with our community. It was something they were asking for.”
- **Know your skillset.** “I always want to spend more time on the business side of things. That doesn’t come as second hand to me as sharing our story does. If you can get any of those business skills under your belt, that would be super beneficial to help you run numbers or bring someone who [has those skills] alongside you.”
- **Have a desire to work with family.** “We’re still very new at this and learning every day, so there’s a lot of growth still happening. We had our third child about eight months into opening our processing facility, so that’s been a crazy ride. This journey has ultimately solidified the need for me to be a bigger part of the farming operation, and be more home-based for the farm and my family.”

With Harmony Acres up and running, and located about 35 miles from Pittsburgh, they still enjoy having a larger market and ship most of their milk to Schneider’s Dairy and United. However, 15 percent of their milk is now sold in their farm store. According to Jennifer, they sell about 350-375 gallons of milk a week through a few different markets and have a prime location on a main road that customers travel.

She offers regular milk and chocolate milk every week but rotates through seasonal flavors, including eggnog and chocolate peanut butter, to generate excitement within her community.

“The products we’re producing, including creamline milk, folks aren’t finding in the grocery store. It’s something they remember. It’s that nostalgia feeling of, ‘I had this as a kid. I’m so glad to get back to it,’” Jennifer shared. “It’s fun to give the community something they had in their childhood. With our cows being mostly on pasture, the cream is just really rich so it adds a lot of flavor. People can taste the difference I think.”

Getting their processing facility up and running, and building their product line-up, was not without challenges, though. Throughout the podcast, Jennifer shared how they learned about the regulatory requirements, figured out the different licenses they needed, determined their process for testing milk, and navigated supply chain issues.

“The costs of all the upgrades have just kind of skyrocketed since we’ve opened, and supply chain issues have kept us up at night... but it has been a fun challenge figuring out what we need. The

Department of Agriculture has helped us a lot in getting what we need set up so everything is up to code. We worked really closely with our inspector. When it came time to do our final inspection, everything was pretty seamless,” Jennifer explained. “If you’re interested in getting into this, get help straight from them. They can share what has worked in other facilities and what hasn’t worked. They can give you guidance on what could possibly work with your set-up.”

Jennifer has also been focusing on building community partnerships and collaborating with other businesses to help share the local food story with consumers. She has partnered with a local maple syrup producer to make maple-flavored milk. She has also hosted several events at Harmony Acres, including a tea party where she partnered with a farmer who grows their own herbs and teas to create a farm-to-table spread. Jennifer and her family even hosted a milk chugging contest during June Dairy Month to raise funds for their local food bank and give back to their community.

“We don’t aim to be all things to all people. We know we specialize in milk. It’s what we know we can do, and we do it well. We just want to bring partners and other farmers alongside us who are doing some really great things and also showcase what they’re doing for the community,” Jennifer added. “Harmony Acres is a community-based store... it’s full of a lot of great, local products to help us share that local food story.”

In the future, Jennifer hopes to continue hosting events to grow the agritourism piece of their business and connect with their community. She is planning to make butter in the near future and is exploring the possibility of additional value-added products like yogurt. Owning her own business has also given her a stronger appreciation for the value of family.

“Through this journey, I’ve truly had the chance to appreciate my family a lot more. It really takes a village. My in-laws have helped out tremendously, my parents have shown up for every single event we’ve held, and my dad and I built the farm store together. Those are memories I’ll cherish forever,” she shared. “With the kids getting a little bit older, they’re able to enjoy the farm more and work alongside us. I couldn’t be more thankful for my family throughout this season.”

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

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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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