



CENTER FOR
DairyEXCELLENCE

For Immediate Release

Media Contact:

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

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DAIRY PROFESSIONALS HONORED WITH 2020 DAIRY INDUSTRY AWARDS

Heckman, Trout and the Itle Family Were Recognized at the 2020 PA Dairy Summit

Harrisburg, Pa. – At this year’s Pennsylvania Dairy Summit in State College, Pa. on February 5-6, the Professional Dairy Managers of Pennsylvania, Center for Dairy Excellence, and Pennsylvania Dairymen’s Association awarded three dairy professionals with Dairy Industry Awards. The annual awards program recognizes dairy professionals who are reigniting Pennsylvania’s dairy industry through leadership, service and innovation.

All applications were reviewed by an awards committee of dairy producers and industry professionals. Nominees were evaluated for their contributions to the industry and letters of support from their peers and fellow dairy producers.

“This year’s award recipients have empowered all of us to commit to leadership and excellence across the industry,” said Dave Smith, Executive Director at the Pennsylvania Dairymen’s Association. “From mentoring young dairy professionals and assisting farmers in achieving economic stability to serving the community and adapting to meet changing consumer demands, these individuals are driving Pennsylvania’s dairy industry toward a brighter future.”

Congratulations to the following dairy professionals who were honored at the 2020 PA Dairy Summit:

Gary Heckman, Chief Business Services Officer at AgChoice Farm Credit received the Pennsylvania Dairy Service Award. Gary Heckman was recognized for serving the Pennsylvania dairy industry and leading organizations that make an impact at the local farm level. Gary has spent more than 40 years serving others and helping to develop young professionals.

He began his leadership journey as an active participant on the Dairy Task Force to help chart a course for the Pennsylvania dairy industry and build momentum and energy for growth. One of his biggest accomplishments was being appointed as the first executive director for the Center for Dairy Excellence. During his three-year tenure as executive director, Gary developed the Center's mission and Board of Directors and launched its initial farmer programs.

In 2007, Gary joined AgChoice Farm Credit and currently serves as the chief business services officer. He is responsible for leading AgChoice's business consulting, farm accounting, education initiatives, and crop insurance. Gary plays a key role in developing and expanding AgChoice's business services to help farmers establish and carry out financial management programs, risk management plans, business plans, and dairy benchmark programs to enhance the financial strength of their businesses. Through Gary's direction, AgChoice's programs now reach nearly 2,000 farms, many of which are dairy farms.

Jeff Trout of Trout Brothers Dairy in Blain, Pa. received the Pennsylvania Distinguished Dairy Producer Award. As a second-generation dairy producer who farms with his brother Mike in Perry County, Jeff Trout was recognized for his innovative mindset and his ability to enhance the profitability of his operation. For more than 40 years, Jeff has worked diligently to grow the herd from 80 to 650 head and build an operation that consistently produces high-quality milk.

Trout Brothers Dairy concentrates on forage characteristics and the health and well-being of their herd. They believe better feed builds better animals, and better animals allow his dairy to consistently produce the quantity and quality of milk to remain competitive in today's marketplace. The Trout brothers have also added a sand bedding system to increase cow comfort and utilizes the wastewater for an irrigation system.

In 2011, Jeff diversified his business by entering the value-added market and establishing Bootleg Creamery. Since then, his production has quadrupled and the ice cream business has increased significantly. Producing 24 flavors of ice cream, Jeff supplies five farm markets, several restaurants, a retail location, and two mobile units for community and sports events.

Jeff is a dedicated ambassador for the Pennsylvania dairy industry. He always makes time to participate in discussions and activities that benefit Perry County's agricultural community, including the Perry County Economic Development Authority. His insight and knowledge helps these organizations understand how they can assist farmers in achieving economic stability.

The Itle Family of Vale Wood Farms in Loretto, Pa. received the Pennsylvania Dairy Innovator Award. The Itle family was recognized for their innovative, value-added business model and ability to serve their local community. Vale Wood Farms has been processing its own brand of milk and dairy products since 1933. Today, Vale Wood Farms is a 200-cow, 500-acre dairy farm operated by the Itle family, representing the third and fourth generations. The Itles' milk processing facility bottles their fluid milk and creates other dairy products, including ice cream, cottage cheese, sour cream, yogurt, butter and buttermilk.

The Itle family supplies all of their local community's dairy needs and provides weekly home delivery to thousands of customers. They also supply 20 local school districts and businesses in their region with wholesome dairy products. As they serve their community, the Itle family is constantly innovating and adapting their business to meet changing consumer demands. Over four generations, they have evolved to provide their customers with online ordering capabilities

and emailed invoices. The Itle family frequently reviews their product mix and now offers iced coffee and yogurt smoothies in addition to a full line of traditional milk products.

The Itle family actively engages with their community through social media outreach, on-farm events, and widespread involvement in local civic organizations. As both dairy producers and dairy processors, the Itle family provides tremendous leadership, innovation, and understanding to help bridge the divide between these two industry segments.

The Dairy Industry Awards are offered annually to Pennsylvania residents. Qualified applicants stay in the nomination pool for three years after being submitted for consideration. Nominators can update the nomination each of the two years following their original submission. Once a candidate is honored as a winner in an award category, they or individuals representing them are not eligible to win in any other category for two subsequent years.

For more information about the awards program, visit centerfordairyexcellence.org/awards or call the Center at 717-346-0849.

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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.

The Pennsylvania Dairymen's Association is a non-profit organization with a focus on supporting Pennsylvania dairy farms, agricultural scholarships, youth programs and educational programs across the state. Learn more at padairymens.com.

PDMP is a not-for-profit organization of progressive, positive-minded dairy producers and agribusiness leaders working together to advance the dairy industry in Pennsylvania through improved productivity and profitability. Programs offered by PDMP are designed by dairy producers for dairy producers. For more information on PDMP, visit their website at pdmp.org.