



For Immediate Release

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Photo caption: Kristina Quinn (right) completed a Dairy Herd Manager Registered Apprenticeship (DHM RA) at Zahncroft Dairy in Berks County, and Rylee Fuller (left) completed a DHM RA at Laurel Grove Farm in Perry County.

NATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP WEEK STARTS APRIL 26, DAIRY FARMS ENCOURAGED TO HOST APPRENTICES ON THEIR OPERATIONS

Dairy Producers Who Are Looking for Herd Managers Can Apply for the Apprenticeship Program

Harrisburg, Pa. – National Apprenticeship Week is happening on April 26 through May 2, 2026. With many Pennsylvania dairy producers looking for a more skilled workforce in farm-level management, the Center for Dairy Excellence’s Dairy Herd Manager Registered Apprenticeship (RA) program creates opportunities for employees to gain practical knowledge, information, and skills about progressive dairy operations that stretch beyond their past dairy experiences. Two young dairy professionals recently completed the Dairy Herd Manager RA on Pennsylvania dairy farms: Kristina Quinn, Zahncroft Dairy in Berks County, and Rylee Fuller, Laurel Grove Farm in Perry County.

“We’ve heard from dairy producers about their need for a more skilled workforce in management on Pennsylvania farms and the challenges they face in filling this important leadership role,” said Michelle Shearer, Workforce Development Manager at the Center for Dairy Excellence. “Our Dairy Herd Manager Registered Apprenticeship can help dairy farmers develop a new employee or an existing employee or family member into a full-time, herd management role at the farm level. Rylee and Kristina are the first two individuals to complete the DHM RA, and they both developed a wide range of skills in herd health, reproduction, calf care, data analysis, and more.”

Pennsylvania dairy producers who are looking to develop an existing employee or family member into a herd management role are encouraged to apply for the Dairy Herd Manager Apprenticeship Program. Also, the Center for Dairy Excellence is looking for dairy producers who want to hire an apprentice on their dairy farm. Because the program is registered with the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry, the DHM RA requires apprentices to master various competencies over 18 months of employment on a dairy farm. Applications for employer farms are accepted on a rolling basis.

"I knew the day Rylee walked in the door, she was going to stay. She really wanted to work and learn. Eventually, she [started the apprenticeship] and started taking over things that I did which was big because then I could do other things. We are proud of Rylee. We were so glad to have her. She is like a daughter that we never had," shared Cindy Comp of Laurel Grove Farm who served as an employer farm and hosted an apprentice on her operation.

Employer farms who are accepted into the Dairy Herd Manager RA 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," added Katie Sattazahn of Zahncroft Dairy, another employer farm in the program.

Apprentices must be at least 18 years of age or older and have a high school diploma or GED. Throughout the apprenticeship, they must complete at least 3,000 hours of paid, on-the-job training and 216 hours of unpaid related technical instruction on a Pennsylvania dairy farm.

"I enjoyed being able to learn on the farm and have people around me who also gave me opportunities to go to different workshops, so I could continue to further my education that way. This apprenticeship was a great experience and I feel like I furthered my education without going to college," said Rylee Fuller who completed her DHM RA at Laurel Grove Farm in Perry County, Pennsylvania. "We may not have the sit-down class instruction, but we gained really important hands-on skills."

Applications for the Dairy Herd Manager RA Program are reviewed on an ongoing basis. For more information about the expectations for farms that are accepted into the Dairy Herd Manager RA, visit www.centerfordairyexcellence.org/apprenticeship.

Contact Michelle Shearer at mshearer@centerfordairyexcellence.org or 570-768-8316 with questions about the programs.

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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.

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www.centerfordairyexcellence.org/our-foundation/