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## **For Immediate Release**

**Media Contact:** Emily Barge, 717-346-0849; [ebarge@centerfordairyexcellence.org](mailto:ebarge@centerfordairyexcellence.org)

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### **DAIRY PRODUCERS LEARN STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING HIGH FEED COSTS**

*Dr. Jud Heinrichs Shared Ways to Manage Input Over Feed Cost in a Recent Webinar*

**Harrisburg, Pa.** – With Pennsylvania dairy producers experiencing unusually high feed costs this year, the Center for Dairy Excellence recently hosted a “Protecting Your Profits” webinar that offered strategies for maximizing milk production while input costs remain high. Zach Myers, risk education manager at the Center, hosted the webinar and welcomed Dr. Jud Heinrichs, Professor of Dairy Nutrition at The Pennsylvania State University, to share his expertise on managing high feed costs.

“Dairy producers have been faced with increasingly high input costs this year, so this was a very valuable discussion,” Myers said. “When you can’t control the cost of these commodities, the strategies that Dr. Heinrichs shared can help producers find other ways to manage input over feed cost on their operations.”

Heinrichs opened the discussion by highlighting the importance of income over feed cost, especially when milk prices are not keeping up with feed cost. From a Pennsylvania Northeast perspective, he shared that many dairy farms excel at forage production. According to Heinrichs, ensuring high-quality forages and maintaining digestible fiber are crucial steps dairy producers can take to reduce feed costs.

“The quality of your forages is going to have the biggest impact on your income over feed cost. It’s digestible fiber that makes energy, and it’s microbial protein that meets the other needs of the cow,” he said. “When we compare farms across Pennsylvania, the input costs are usually almost the same. It’s the output that’s very different on the farms that are good forage managers. In order to be a good dairy farmer, you have to be a good forage manager.”

Heinrichs went on to share that particle size and dry matter both impact the quality of forage production. He also advised attendees to pay attention to how the weather impacts fiber digestibility.

“In any year when we have hot, dry weather, physiologically, plants are going to put down more structural fiber and fiber digestibility is going to be down,” he explained. “If your corn silage has gone through hot, dry weather, you have to chop it finer. There’s a trade-off there.

The finer we get the forage chopped, the better it's going to be in terms of making up for a little bit of the digestibility issue."

Throughout the discussion, Heinrichs also talked about the importance of a consistent rumen environment and how diet consistency can help producers successfully manage input costs. He encouraged producers to avoid making major changes in starch levels that could affect the bacteria in the rumen. Heinrichs also mentioned the significance of chop size.

"The longer the chop, the more minutes it takes a cow to eat a pound of dry matter," he added. "That shows up in every study, so don't get it too long. If you do feed her long, dry hay, it has to be digestible or she's going to slow down intake."

In addition to forage quality and rumen environment, Heinrichs shared other strategies dairy producers can take to manage input over feed cost in today's market:

- **Avoid overprocessing corn.** "Don't overprocess your corn so much that you pulverize the corn grain that's in it. Good corn silage could have a pretty high percentage of grain in there."
- **Consider gradual progressions.** "Once or twice a year, think about your forage program. Are you still growing the right crops that are going to be the right interface of your soil, your manure management, your forage needs and your storage needs? Look at moving some of those around a little bit."
- **Ration balance for more than 65 pounds of milk.** "When we're looking at today's genetics, housing and management, a lot of us are still balancing rations for 65 pounds. Our genetics alone have changed dramatically that we should be getting more milk. We have to be aiming higher with the genetics, management and input we've got today."
- **Manage heifer costs.** "Heifers eat 15 percent or more of the feed on your farm, and heifer costs are going up all the time. It's common that I see farms with 70-75 percent less heifers than they have milking cows. Not raising them is saving forage on your farm for lactating cows and is cutting feed cost."
- **Evaluate your feed additives.** "There's nothing wrong with feed additives, but make sure you evaluate them. Every few months, and with different seasons, look at what you're feeding and have a discussion with your nutritionist. Why am I putting this in the ration? Is it something I still need?"
- **Check your TMR mixer management.** "In times of high feed costs, pay attention to if your TMR mixer is working well. Are the scales right? Is it mixing well?"

Dr. Jud Heinrichs is a Professor of Dairy Nutrition at Penn State. He has an extension and research appointment and has overseen the Penn State Dairy Nutrition Conference for 21 years. It is now the largest conference of its type in the United States. His work for the past 38 years has centered on dairy replacements and forage particle size as it relates to dairy cow rumen function.

To listen to the full recording of the “Protecting Your Profits” discussion related to high feed costs, visit [www.centerfordairyexcellence.org/pyp](http://www.centerfordairyexcellence.org/pyp) and click on “Webinars.” The June webinar recording is located on that page.

The Center for Dairy Excellence also offers a monthly “Protecting Your Profits” podcast with market updates as well as state and national dairy industry scorecard data. The Pennsylvania scorecard looks at key factors supporting the growth of Pennsylvania’s dairy industry and evaluates trends affecting PA dairy farms. The U.S. scorecard provides an overview of the national dairy industry, with consumption, marketing and production trends.

Visit [www.centerfordairyexcellence.org/pyp](http://www.centerfordairyexcellence.org/pyp) to view the interactive scorecards, listen to the podcast, and view additional markets and management resources. For more information about dairy markets and risk management, contact Zach Myers at [zmyers@centerfordairyexcellence.org](mailto:zmyers@centerfordairyexcellence.org) or call 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](http://centerfordairyexcellence.org).

**Center for Dairy Excellence ▼ 2301 North Cameron St., Harrisburg, PA 17110 ▼ 717-346-0849 ▼  
[www.centerfordairyexcellence.org](http://www.centerfordairyexcellence.org)**