



CENTER FOR
DairyEXCELLENCE

For Immediate Release

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GRANT FUNDING AVAILABLE TO HELP PA DAIRY FARMS WORK WITH EXPERIENCED CONSULTANTS AND FORM ADVISORY TEAMS

The Dairy Decisions Consultants (DDC) and Transition/Transformation Team Grants Are Now Open

Harrisburg, Pa. – The Center for Dairy Excellence is now accepting applications for both the Dairy Decisions Consultants (DDC) Grant Program and the Transition/Transformation Team Grant Program for the 2026-27 year. Dairy producers can utilize the grants to work one-on-one with professional consultants in one of seven strategic areas of business or form an advisory team to help create a transition plan or major business transformation plan. Leveraging funds provided through the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and PA Dairymen's Association, the grant program opened in September of 2026. Limited grants are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

“By working with respected consultants who have firsthand experience in different sectors of the dairy industry, dairy producers don’t have to make decisions alone. That’s one of the biggest things we hear from dairy farm families who have utilized these grants. The grants give them a sounding board and an outside perspective to help them make major business decisions,” said Melissa Anderson, Programs and Operations Manager at the Center for Dairy Excellence. “These teams and consultants can help farms navigate everything from permitting and regulations to communication between family members and the legal process for setting up an LLC.”

The Dairy Decisions Consultant (DDC) Grants pair dairy farm families with professional consultants who offer one-on-one support to make strategic business decisions. The Center for Dairy Excellence has a list of more than 16 Dairy Decisions Consultants with extensive expertise in different business sectors. Farms can receive up to \$5,000 to work with a consultant who can help enhance business performance, reach financial benchmarks, and explore new opportunities.

Consultants can work with farms in one of seven strategic areas:

- Employee Management & Communication
- Business Planning & Structure
- Product Marketing & Labeling
- Direct Marketing
- Animal Welfare
- Financial Management
- Pre-Farm Transition

“My consultant sat down with us and drew up a plan for [me and my landlord]. It’s a neutral party sitting down with you. Especially on a rental agreement, it works really well to have him sit between you and the landlord as you’re putting things on paper, just so both parties can speak what they want,” shared Lonnie Horst, a dairy farmer from Berks County, Pa. who utilized the DDC grant. “Even for a family transition, a consultant brings such a neutralizing presence to the table. You have somebody sitting there saying yes or no, having a conversation with the dad, or having a conversation with the son. I will always recommend getting someone to crunch the numbers and be an added set of eyes.”

If a farm already has a consultant in mind they would like to work with, that person can be named within the application for approval by the Center. Farms are eligible to receive the DDC grant once every three years. Farms that have 35 or more lactating cows or dairy heifer raising operations with more than 100 dairy heifers are eligible to apply.

“When my wife and I made the decision that we were both going to be on the farm full time, we knew the finances had to work. The DDC grant helped us get a new accounting program set up so we could get reports that are functional without us spending a lot of time on them. Our consultants also sat down with us and told us what was and wasn’t working. That’s the kind of accountability you need. We’re driven to do better because of it,” shared Zach Kreger of Kreger Farms in Tioga County, Pa.

The Transition and Transformation Team Grants allow dairy producers to establish on-farm advisory teams with industry experts and trusted advisors. The Dairy Transition Team grants focus on transition in the farm business such as succession, change in business structure, or partnership. Farms can apply to receive up to \$4,000 in funding, which could cover the cost of paid team members, discovery-related costs and lawyer expenses.

“While the days probably will not be shorter, these grants are helping to provide our farm with flexibility, resilience, and room to actually breathe. The tasks that help the farm actually make a profit can be done, instead of just doing enough to scrape by. Transition planning and feasibility studies through these grants clarified and supported the farm and our families in ways I can’t describe,” shared Emily Heffner of Jersey Acres Farms in Schuylkill County, Pa.

The Dairy Transformation Team grant focuses on modernizing facilities and pursuing a business transformation or additional enterprise within the dairy operation. The Transformation Team allows producers considering a major business transformation to apply to receive up to \$4,000 to establish a team to help plan and work through that transformation. Manure storage facility improvements do not qualify as eligible Transformation Team projects.

“We definitely found out where our edge is. I would have hated to start this robotics project and then realized all of a sudden we needed to cut out [certain aspects]. Thanks to the grant, we knew how far we could go and how many extra things we could add to this barn,” shared Donny Barch of Merrimart Farms in Perry County, Pa. who utilized a Transformation Team Grant. “Especially for a farm our size, it was invaluable just how far the grant money went and the information we got out of it. It helped jumpstart everything. It gave me the confidence I needed to move forward with a project like this. It went from a pipe dream to a reality.”

On-farm teams consist of the farm's most trusted advisors, with a facilitator designated to coordinate meetings and workflow. The Center partners with the Penn State Extension Dairy Team, University of Pennsylvania, and private industry to provide resources and expertise to farms involved in the program.

Limited grants are available for the 2026-27 year, and funds are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Farms must complete an application and submit the required \$100 application fee to participate in each program. Visit www.centerfordairyexcellence.org/grants to learn more and apply online.

Contact Melissa Anderson at 717-788-0296 or manderson@centerfordairyexcellence.org with questions about which grant might be the best fit for your operation.

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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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