



CENTER FOR
DairyEXCELLENCE

For Immediate Release

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

September 20, 2023

GRANTS AVAILABLE TO PAIR PA DAIRY FARMS WITH PROFESSIONAL CONSULTANTS IN SEVEN AREAS *The Center's Dairy Decisions Consultant (DDC) Program Is Now Open*

Harrisburg, Pa. – The Center for Dairy Excellence is now accepting applications for the Dairy Decisions Consultant (DDC) Grant Program for the 2023-24 year. Through the grant program, dairy farm families can work with a professional consultant with firsthand experience in the dairy industry to help make decisions in one of seven strategic areas. Leveraging funds provided through the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and PA Dairymen's Association, the grant program opened in September of 2023. Limited grants are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

“By working with respected consultants who have experience in different sectors of the dairy industry, dairy producers don't have to feel like they are making decisions alone,” said Melissa Anderson, Programs and Operations Manager at the Center for Dairy Excellence. “Having an outside set of eyes and a fresh perspective has allowed Pennsylvania dairy producers to make significant, strategically-sound business decisions that help shape the future of their dairy farms.”

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 22 Dairy Decisions Consultants with extensive expertise in different business sectors. Farms can receive up to \$4,000 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** – Employee management is more than just ensuring that your employees are doing their job. It consists of procedures and strategies that can help you measure, monitor, and interact with the workforce that plays a huge role in your business.

“We employ 26 employees. We decided to use the grant to employ a consultant to help plan for the future and create a management strategy for our business. We liked using the consultant because he was able to give his insight on what he has already seen and experienced from working with other dairy producers. A lot of time, the consultants may be able to help further your goals with less roadblocks.” –Milton Rotz, Cedar Pine Farm, Franklin and Adams County, PA

- **Business Planning & Structure** – Business planning is a necessity to help manage volatility and create a roadmap for decision-making in all aspects of the business.

“We have two separate operations, one milking 300 and one milking 800. We wanted to work with a consultant to understand areas for improvement as both operations were purchased in the last three years. Having the resources from the consultant to be in a benchmarking program allows us to compare several key data points and look for ways to improve. It is easy to see most of the problems that come up on a daily basis. It is much harder to take the time and go through all the books to decide what is cost-effective, efficient, and productive. It’s good to work with an experienced consultant for the knowledge and experience they have working with many farms.” –Cory Mellott, Molly Pitcher Milk LLC, Cumberland County, PA

- **Product Marketing & Labeling** – Effective marketing and labeling of your branded dairy products can create a more positive impact on your customers and their purchasing decisions.

“For my husband and father-in-law, [the DDC program] helped them see that change is a possibility for the future. They were feeling stuck and like they didn’t have options because the market was so bad. To hear our consultant’s perspective and his projections, they learned what to eliminate that’s losing money and how they can come out on top. The DDC program allowed us to have the support to seek some other funding and try to add a value-added portion to our farm. This program gave us the courage to say ‘yes, we can keep going.’”

–Jill Henry, Henry Farms of Knox LLC, Clarion County, PA

- **Direct Marketing** – Directly marketing products made from your milk to consumers can help a farm capture more revenue, but the processing and branded business can be complex.

“We’re focusing on regional growth first and then national growth. With our consultants’ help, we’ve figured out how to go into this retail industry that’s really hard to puncture. We’re working with distributors and brokers and learning how to deal with small and big wholesale accounts. It’s a whole other language, and without the consultants, we definitely wouldn’t know what we’re doing. Things are going really well right now. We’re optimistic and being strategic with the help of our consultants.”

–Stephanie Painter, The Painterland Sisters, Tioga County, PA

- **Animal Welfare** – Veterinarian consultants will help farms establish animal welfare protocols related to the FARM Program as well as help train employees in FARM compliance.

“Dairy farmers are continually evaluating best practices, how we can improve, what changes we can make, and going above and beyond to keep our cows safe and comfortable. There are consultants and continuing education opportunities for farmers that share the latest research and practices, demonstrating that U.S. dairy farmers are

committed to producing high quality, safe milk with integrity.” –Jennifer Orr, Harmony Acres Dairy, Fayette County, PA

- **Financial Management** – Financial management and planning can provide dairy farm families with professional consulting resources to help make decisions that will shape the future of their farm.

“It can be easy for farmers to [get depressed] or go into a downward spiral. I can see how it happens. I lost money last month, but now that I’ve talked to my consultant, I know that it’s the industry and not something huge that I can do. I always felt like such a failure when I couldn’t pay my bills or make money. I always wondered what I was doing wrong. He put it in perspective for me. It gave me peace of mind. Consultants help make everybody accountable. I never knew I was going to learn this much.” –Todd Benedict, Sunset Dairy, Warren County, PA

- **Pre-Farm Transition** – Business and financial feasibility is an important part of transitioning the farm and/or family issue projects to set the farm up for a future transition team.

“When you work with each other day in and day out, sometimes you don’t always hear things like someone else does. Our consultant just had a different perspective on listening to what we all had to say and then presenting it back to us. It was helpful. He encouraged us to take [the farm transition] slow and gave us real insight on how to keep things moving forward and some thoughts on which direction to go.” –Betsy Yoder, Heron Run Farms, Huntingdon County, PA

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. Limited grants are available for the 2023-24 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/ddc to learn more and apply online. Contact Melissa Anderson at 717-346-0849 or manderson@centerfordairyexcellence.org with questions.

###

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.

Center for Dairy Excellence ▼ 2301 North Cameron St., Harrisburg, PA 17110 ▼ 717-346-0849 ▼ www.centerfordairyexcellence.org