



CENTER FOR
DairyEXCELLENCE

For Immediate Release

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Photo caption: Darcy Heltzel (left) completed an internship at Vale Wood Farms and learned about dairy processing. Simon Itle, her supervisor, is pictured on the right.

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DAIRY FARMS ENCOURAGED TO HOST INTERNS AND APPRENTICES ON THEIR OPERATIONS

Producers and Processors Who Might Be Looking for Employees Can Apply for Interns or Apprentices

Harrisburg, Pa. – Dairy producers from Pennsylvania and beyond are encouraged to apply to be a host farm in the 2025 On-Farm Internship Program. The program was designed to provide 10- to 12-week on-farm internships and create opportunities for Pennsylvania students to gain practical knowledge, information, and skills on progressive dairy operations. The Professional Dairy Managers of Pennsylvania (PDMP), Pennsylvania Dairymen’s Association, and Dairy Excellence Foundation partner each year to support this program. Host farm applications must be submitted by November 15, 2024.

For dairy producers who are looking for an employee beyond the summer months, the Center for Dairy Excellence is also seeking host farms in Pennsylvania to serve as employers for the Dairy Herd Manager Apprenticeship Program. The program is registered through the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry and requires apprentices to master various competencies over 18 months of employment on a dairy farm. A dairy herd manager requires training beyond a high school education but does not necessarily need a college degree. Dairy farms continue to express challenges in filling this important leadership role within their team, so the Center created this Apprenticeship Program to give Pennsylvania dairy producers the opportunity to develop beginner-level employees into well-qualified candidates to serve in herd management roles. Applications for employer farms are accepted on a rolling basis.

In the dairy processing sector, the Center for Dairy Excellence also has a Dairy Processing Internship opportunity for students. Dairy processors who are interested in hosting a student for the summer of 2025 must apply by November 15, 2024.

“If you’re looking for an employee who has experience in dairy production and an interest in advancing their skills, all three of these programs allow you to help mentor and share your experience with a young professional,” said Michelle Shearer, Workforce Development Manager at the Center for Dairy Excellence. “Interns and apprentices benefit from gaining hands-on experience and being exposed to all aspects of your operation while many host farms benefit from getting an outside perspective from a young person who is motivated to work hard, learn a lot, and pay attention to detail.”

For the On-Farm Internship Program, host farms will be expected to create goals and areas of focus for the student's 10-12 week experience. As part of these goals, interns will participate in discussion groups and work closely with their host farm to complete an in-depth research project that benefits the dairy operation.

For the Dairy Herd Manager Apprenticeship Program, employer farms 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.

For the Dairy Processing Internship Program, dairy processors that host an intern must have a progressive, well-managed, dairy business with a positive outlook on the industry. They must be willing to expose the intern to all aspects of a successful, progressive dairy processing operation including financial information and management team meetings with adequate training and consultation to achieve learning objectives.

See how other dairy producers have benefited from serving as a host farm for the On-Farm Internship Program:

- **Enhance the labor pool and provide learning opportunities.** “When the internship program started over 15 years ago, we saw the need to have students get out onto progressive dairy farms and apply the classroom skills they were acquiring. We also thought it would be a great way to enhance the labor pool for future employees we would need on our farms. Through the program, the interns infuse a sense of enthusiasm to their host farms, and they bring their own unique interests and skills as well.” – Walt Moore, Walmoore Holsteins, West Grove, Pa.
- **Work with someone who pays attention to detail.** “We enjoyed being a host farm because everyone [on our team] not only taught someone interested in dairy, but we also learned from our intern as well. She focused on helping improve our feeding program, and we have seen great improvements to the program. She was dedicated, determined, and paid attention to even the smallest details.” –Kiersten Foster of Table Rock Farm in New York
- **Lighten the workload of other team members.** “Hosting an intern directly benefited our farm in one way by lightening the workload of other team members, giving more opportunity for time off. We also saw the benefits of giving an individual who is seeking a career in agriculture some real-world experience before entering their career.” –Josh Brubaker of Brubaker Farms in Mount Joy, Pa.
- **Gain an outside perspective.** “The on-farm internship program is a great way for us to bring someone new into our operation who can help provide a fresh perspective in areas of our farm. We can also help the interns gain valuable skills and knowledge they can use in the future.” –Jared Kurtz of Kurtland Farms in Elverson, Pa.

See how students have benefited from the Dairy Processing Internship and Dairy Herd Manager Apprenticeship Program and how important the host farm and/or dairy processing operation is to their success:

- **Learn by doing.** “I thought the apprenticeship could give me a better overview of what I want to do. If I decide to go to college, hopefully this will give me a better idea of what I want to go for. I’m a lot more hands-on and I learn better by doing versus just reading a book or going through it in a classroom. My host farm is a big part of it. If I didn’t have them helping me through it and encouraging me, the experience probably wouldn’t be as nice as it is. Once I have something down, they just let me do it.” – Kristina Quinn, apprentice at Zahncroft Dairy in Berks County, Pennsylvania
- **Get a firsthand look at food science and dairy processing regulations.** “I’ve known that I really like dairy, but this [internship] has really solidified that. I think dairy foods are one of the most interesting aspects of food science. There are a lot of regulations around it, but it’s really neat that the milk that we get and the dairy products we buy are some of the safest foods out there. That has been cool to see firsthand.” –Darcy Heltzel, a 2024 intern within dairy processing

On-Farm Internship and Dairy Processing Internship host farm/processor applications are due by November 15, 2024 and can be submitted online. Applications for the Apprenticeship Program are reviewed on an ongoing basis.

For more information about the expectations and requirements for farms and businesses that are accepted into either the On-Farm Internship, Dairy Processing Internship, or Dairy Herd Manager Apprenticeship program, visit:

- www.centerfordairyexcellence.org/internship
- www.centerfordairyexcellence.org/dairy-processing-internship
- 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 Foundation of Pennsylvania is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, tax deductible organization that is Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) approved. Established in 2010, the foundation’s mission is to build and invest in programs that cultivate and empower the next generation of producers, consumers, and advocates for the Pennsylvania dairy industry. Learn more at centerfordairyexcellence.org/our-foundation/.

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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