



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 2024-25 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 2024. 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. They have a sounding board and an outside perspective to help them make significant, strategically-sound business decisions that shape the future of their dairy farms,” said Melissa Anderson, Programs and Operations Manager at the Center for Dairy Excellence.

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 \$4,500 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

“Material like an employee handbook is a very valuable asset for us as dairy farmers. Working with someone who is an expert in that area through the DDC grant was helpful because they know all the rules and regulations that needed to be included. This grant was a really good resource for us,” said Renee Kenny of Kenny Jersey Farm in Lawrence 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. 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 teams can help dairy farm families create succession plans for transitioning the business between generations or feasibility studies to determine how to proceed with a transformation project.

“By forming an advisory team, dairy farm families can get a variety of partners and consultants around the table. These teams help farms navigate everything from permitting and regulations to communication between family members and the legal process for setting up an LLC,” said Anderson. “These teams have guided other PA dairy farm families through the decision-making process for robotic milking technology, new types of barns, detailed succession plans between generations, and so much more.”

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 \$3,500 in funding, which could cover the cost of paid team members, discovery-related costs and lawyer expenses.

“Without the grant, we wouldn’t be where we are. Some of us didn’t want to talk about [the transition process] or face reality, but the meetings made us stop and talk about it. It would be hard to spend that money upfront for an advisor without the grant. But I wouldn’t do it without a third party consultant walking alongside us. It’s so valuable,” said Kerry Zeiset, a dairy producer from Lancaster 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 \$3,500 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 are looking at building a dry cow barn. We’re still in the decision-making process, and we like the help we have gotten so far through the Transformation Team Grant. I would recommend it to other farmers,” said Glendon Bennetch of Bennetch Holsteins in Berks County, Pa.

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 2024-25 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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