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## **For Immediate Release**

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### **MERCER COUNTY SIBLINGS TALK ABOUT DIVERSIFYING THEIR FIFTH-GENERATION FAMILY DAIRY FARM IN NEW PODCAST EPISODE**

*Trenton Canon and Josie Offerdahl Were Interviewed in the “Cow-Side Conversations” Podcast*

**Harrisburg, Pa.** – In the Center for Dairy Excellence’s latest episode of the [“Cow-Side Conversations” podcast](#), Trenton Canon and Josie Offerdahl – the fifth generation on Canon Dairy in Mercer County, Pennsylvania – share how they are focusing on diversity as a way to grow. Throughout the podcast interview with the siblings, Trent talks about some of their cropping strategies and farm management practices, including robotic milking technology, cover cropping and direct marketing with beef. Josie describes the creamery side of their business and how processing their own milk is helping secure their farm’s future. As the next generation, the siblings describe how their personal goals both play a role in diversifying Canon Dairy.

Trent and Josie open the podcast by describing the size and scale of their family’s dairy operation. The siblings farm with their parents, Mark and Marie Canon, in West Middlesex, Pennsylvania, where they milk approximately 100 cows and farm about 350 acres. As the fifth generation on the farm, Trent and Josie both share what brought them back to their family farm in a full-time capacity.

“When I was in high school, I didn’t want to be a dairy farmer. When I was in college, I didn’t want to be a dairy farmer. But now, I’m a dairy farmer,” Trent shares. “I have a love for agronomy and crops. On a dairy farm, you have hay, corn, beans, small grains, and cow manure. It really seems like the best way to do it – integrating animals into a cropping operation. That’s what drove me back. We’ve implemented a lot of cover crops for erosion control and nutrient cycling.”

For Josie, it was the ability to be involved with the dairy, but on the customer-facing, dairy processing side.

“I went to college for a year and found out it wasn’t for me. I care about dairy promotion, so I thought maybe I should come back. I knew I didn’t want to be a hands-on farmer. That’s just not the road for me, but I knew I wanted to be on the farm,” Josie explains. “My dad always wanted to do the creamery, so we made the decision. I went back to school for a little, we got a business plan ready, and then we applied for a state value-added grant that we received.”

Josie and her mother manage the creamery side of the business where they process 250 gallons of milk and ice cream each week. The family has 16 beef cows and is starting to do more direct marketing with beef through their on-farm store. On the dairy side of the operation, Trent and his father decided to invest in Lely robots in 2016. After getting the robots, they have found that 110-115 cows is their sweet spot for herd size. In the winter, Trent says they average 90 pounds of milk, but in the summer, they average about 86 or 87 pounds.

“Our philosophy is, if you take care of the animals, they’ll take care of you. They are our livelihood. If you’re on top of things with them and you can keep them healthy, then they will provide for you as well,” Trent says in the podcast.

The decision to install robotic milking technology was spurred by the Dairy Master swing parlor they had reaching the end of its life. Instead of rebuilding, they decided to try a different route with the robots and cut their labor needs in half. Currently, it’s just Trent and his dad working on the dairy.

“There are a lot of upfront costs [with robots] because you’re essentially pre-paying for your labor,” Trent shares. “You have to do a lot of research. Make sure you evaluate your barn set-up. Visit other farms and see if they had to retrofit their facility. See which operating systems you like better.”

During the podcast interview, Trent shares how the robots have helped them be proactive about managing their herd’s health.

“With the amount of data the robots provide for us, we can check rumination, heat, temperatures, and conductivity for mastitis. Our management in terms of catching health issues has increased drastically. We’re catching stuff within 12 hours of cows showing any symptoms,” he adds.

With their service provider being an hour and a half away, there was a learning curve with troubleshooting and navigating the maintenance requirements.

“There was a big learning curve in the first two years for the animals and for us. As far as the computer system, it took a good bit of time to figure that out. Now, we can diagnose it better and know what we need to fix it,” Trent says. “We keep a lot of parts on hand, but our service provider is very good with interfacing with us virtually to see if they can diagnose it from there.”

In late 2018, the Canon family decided to take another step toward diversification and growth. They applied for a value-added grant through the PA Department of Agriculture and used the funds to buy processing equipment to get their on-farm creamery off the ground. Josie spent time visiting other on-farm processing facilities in their area and collaborating with individuals across the industry such as their milk inspector.

“We talked to a lot of other people. We still use a little bit of everyone’s knowledge to this day. Every single person told us to talk to our inspector when you’re building. Show them your plans and what you’re thinking. Walk them through it so they can give you feedback,” Josie says. “Our inspector even helped us figure out the direction for our milk flow, so it was entering one end and going out the other pretty quickly.”

Today, Josie and her family are bottling their own non-homogenized milk. They have white and chocolate milk along with one rotating flavor. They also make cheese curds, six different flavors of hard ice cream, and use their Wagyu Holstein crosses to sell different cuts of meat in the creamery. As they grow their customer base, Josie says they have found a local market of customers who care about their health and the environment.

“We market to people who are starting to care where their food comes from. While we do have plastic, we also have glass bottles. A lot of people are looking for that now if they’re worried about microplastics. People love our re-usable bottles,” she explains. “We also share how non-

homogenized milk is a good option when it comes to shelf life. We reach out to the market where people are conscious about what they're consuming and throwing away.”

As they look to the future, the siblings are always looking for ways to add value to their dairy operation without having to expand. Right now, Trent says they can cash crop 20-30 acres but are hoping to expand to 200 acres when the opportunity arises. He is also hoping to add a regenerative label to their cropping practices in the future.

“We don't have any plans to expand the dairy side. We plan to do more of the beef direct marketing, get into cash cropping, and start diversifying rather than put all our eggs in one basket. With our set-up right now, if we did decide to expand, it would be really hard to fit anymore robots,” he adds.

On the creamery side, Josie hopes to invest in a cream separator to begin making cream and butter so they can use a bigger percentage of their farm's milk in their own products. They also see potential in marketing to people with dairy allergies by adjusting their breeding strategies so their milk can be A2.

“Our goal is to diversify and then scale back the dairy side so we're not milking as many cows. One of the reasons we went into value-added is to secure our farm for the future. In 2020, some farms were dumping milk and it was kind of a scary time for farmers,” Josie shares. “It's nice to think that we have the ability to process our milk and process as much as we can.”

To listen to the full podcast interview with Trent and Josie, visit [www.centerfordairyexcellence.org/podcast](http://www.centerfordairyexcellence.org/podcast). The podcast is also available on [Spotify](#), [Apple Podcasts](#), and [Amazon Music](#). With a new episode released each month, this interview is the tenth episode in the fourth season. The podcast was designed to share real-time farmer insight, tricks of the trade, and inspiring stories from dairies across Pennsylvania.

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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).

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