

PA Milk Marketing Board
Carol A. Hardbarger

Celebrating Dairy in June 2021, National Dairy Month!

There are many things to mention as reasons why we should celebrate Pennsylvania's dairy industry during National Dairy Month. As I have shared before, our dairy industry is the largest sector in Pennsylvania's agriculture industry, which just happens to be the largest industry in the commonwealth.

Our system of milk pricing helps ensure that small farms (85% of PA dairy farms have herds smaller than 100 cows) have a more even playing field when marketing their milk. We are 2nd in the US in ice cream production—and I say it is the best ice cream in the world—and are also in the top five in several types of cheese production.

The Pennsylvania Cheese Guild has over 30 members, small companies that provide the best of artisanal cheeses to local and online markets.

Just about every small town and village has a family-owned ice cream parlor where we can find the best milkshakes and sundaes. I live within 10 miles of two major farms that produce their own ice cream and sell to the public from both farm stores and other retail outlets.

All Pennsylvania consumers—when buying Plant Code #42 or PA Preferred-labeled milk—are assured that they are buying the freshest and safest product available for their families.

While all of the above would be enough to celebrate our dairy industry, it is important to cite the contribution made by the industry to help reduce food insecurity among our citizens. Milk is one of the most requested items at food banks, yet it is rarely donated. Through the Fill a Glass with Hope[®] program, industry has partnered with Feeding Pennsylvania to connect suppliers who may be able to donate milk with their local food banks. The industry partners include the American Dairy Association Northeast and the Pennsylvania Dairymen's Association.

Through a wide network of media communications, the partnership has also raised awareness of the problem of food insecurity in the commonwealth.

Fill a Glass with Hope is the first statewide charitable milk program. It raises funds for milk purchases through grants, and charitable donations from individuals and corporations. The funds are used by food banks to purchase milk directly from local processors. The board has approved a mechanism within its accounting system so that processors can donate and sell milk at below minimum prices to food banks, which can then distribute to families using their services.

The program began as a pilot program, introduced during the 2015 Pennsylvania Farm Show. Since then, 14 million servings of milk have been provided to families across the state. In addition to providing milk to clients, food banks in Pennsylvania serve approximately two million people per year and distribute more than 164 pounds of food.

Each member food bank is licensed by the board as a milk sub-dealer, allowing them to purchase milk at a discounted price; donations and sponsorships, as noted above, provide additional resources. Feeding Pennsylvania reports that each \$1 donation allows member food banks to purchase eight servings (or one-half gallon) of fresh milk.

Beyond the milk offered by Feeding Pennsylvania and its partners through Fill a Glass with Hope, other companies participate in charitable activities. Dairy Farmers of America has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars nationally and has donated large quantities of fresh milk to community food banks. Other companies such as Land O' Lakes and Danone have donated yogurt and cheese.

Good nutrition provides the best foundation for healthy individuals. There is no other food or food product that provides the nutritional value of dairy—high protein, calcium, potassium, and vitamin D. Persons who regularly consume dairy products have lower incidence of type 2 diabetes and heart diseases. Better bone health is another key benefit.

PMMB applauds all those in the dairy industry who provide our fresh, nutritional beverages, treats such as ice cream, and other healthy products such as yogurt and cheese. We particularly appreciate the efforts of Feeding Pennsylvania, its partners, and other dairy businesses that help provide milk and dairy products to those in need.

Celebrate Pennsylvania dairy along with us in June, National Dairy Month.

PMMB is always available to respond to questions and concerns. I can be reached at 717-210-8244 or by email at chardbarge@pa.gov.