

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE HEARING

STATE CAPITOL
MAJORITY CAUCUS ROOM
ROOM 140
HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

FRIDAY, MAY 22, 2009
11:02 A.M.

PRESENTATION ON SENATE BILL 850

VOLUME IV OF IX

BEFORE:

HONORABLE DWIGHT EVANS, MAJORITY CHAIRMAN
HONORABLE WILLIAM C. KORTZ III
HONORABLE DEBERAH KULA
HONORABLE TIM MAHONEY
HONORABLE JOSH SHAPIRO
HONORABLE MATTHEW SMITH
HONORABLE MARIO J. CIVERA, JR., MINORITY CHAIRMAN
HONORABLE GORDON DENLINGER
HONORABLE JOHN R. EVANS
HONORABLE MAUREE GINGRICH
HONORABLE DAVID R. MILLARD
HONORABLE RON MILLER
HONORABLE DOUGLAS G. REICHLEY
HONORABLE RICHARD R. STEVENSON

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

HONORABLE KEVIN P. MURPHY

JEAN DAVIS REPORTING

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ALSO PRESENT:
MIRIAM A. FOX
MAJORITY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
EDWARD J. NOLAN
MINORITY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

HEATHER L. ARTZ, RMR, CRR
REPORTER

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2 * * *

3 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN EVANS: I want to
4 reconvene the House Appropriations Committee meeting.
5 Again, this has been a conversation. You've been
6 observing what's been taking place. One, you can
7 introduce yourself for the purpose of the record and
8 then however you want to start.

9 MR. FREY: Good morning, Chairman Evans,
10 Republican Chairman Civera, other members of the
11 Appropriations Committee. My name is John Frey and
12 I'm the executive director of the Center For Dairy
13 Excellence. The Center has been providing leadership
14 to the state's dairy industry for over six years,
15 thanks in large part to past appropriations for this
16 committee.

17 Dairy is a key economic driver in the
18 Commonwealth, representing over 50,000 jobs, four and
19 a half billion dollars in revenue, and totals over
20 42 percent of all agriculture receipts in the
21 Commonwealth. Pennsylvania is number two in the
22 United States for number of dairy farms second only
23 to Wisconsin.

24 I'm very pleased to introduce and present
25 four individuals who will be speaking on behalf of

1 the dairy industry. All four are profoundly affected
2 by decisions that impact the support given to dairy,
3 and in particular decisions which would threaten the
4 work of the Center. The Center has been the catalyst
5 that has reversed to 15-year steep decline in dairy
6 and placed the industry back on the path of strength
7 and growth.

8 In their request -- it is their request that
9 this committee consider the positive impact of the
10 restoration of funding for the ag excellence line.
11 This line includes funding for the Center For Dairy
12 Excellence and other important ag initiatives.

13 These individuals will introduce themselves
14 and testify in the following order: Lolly Leshner,
15 president of the board of directors of the Center For
16 Dairy Excellence; Erick Coolidge, a member of the
17 economic development committee of the Pennsylvania
18 Dairy Task Force, a collection of over 80 individuals
19 representing many farms and organizations and serving
20 as a resource board to the Center; Rod Hissong,
21 president of the Professional Dairy Managers of
22 Pennsylvania, an organization led by dairy producers,
23 many of whom are active in the Dairy Task Force and
24 an organization which collaborates with the Center on
25 many initiatives; lastly, Dennis Milhoan, owner of a

1 commercial dairy support and supply business. Lolly.

2 MS. LESHER: Good morning. And thank you
3 for the opportunity to share with you some serious
4 concerns I have as a dairy farmer regarding Senate
5 Bill 850. My name is Lolly Leshner. My husband and I
6 own and operate a dairy farm in Berks County.

7 Our family milks about a hundred cows and we
8 direct market our milk through our own dairy store.
9 Working as a team with our four children, our farm
10 generates \$1.5 million annually, 93 percent of our --
11 of our expenses are paid to businesses in Berks and
12 Lancaster County. Our family farm truly is an
13 economic driver within our local, rural community.

14 And like hundreds of other dairy farm
15 families, we too have the advantage of participating
16 in numerous educational programs and training
17 activities sponsored by the Center For Dairy
18 Excellence. We participate in a program structuring
19 business and strategic planning. As a result of the
20 \$3,500 investment made by the Center through our
21 farm, we have grown and we've hired additional
22 employees. We now manufacture our own ice cream and
23 service over 70 restaurants and convenience stores.
24 We have over 31 full-time and part-time employees.

25 We look to additional growth as we continue

1 to implement this business plan and bring our
2 children into this very important family farm.

3 The Center For Dairy Excellence is the envy
4 of the entire East Coast and has become a prototype
5 for other states trying to start similar programs.
6 The Center For Dairy Excellence has three basic
7 fundamentals that keep this group functioning at a
8 high rate of return while utilizing this state's
9 investments.

10 First of all, our initiatives are based on
11 needs and our programs are geared with the explicit
12 goal of making dairy farmers more profitable.

13 Two, by collaborating, cooperating, and
14 pulling the resources available, the CDE stretches
15 its investment dollars to the max. It uses
16 partnerships to get a positive end result.

17 And thirdly, we have the support from the
18 hundreds of members of Dairy Task Force and
19 grassroots individuals. But unfortunately, currently
20 milk prices dropped to an all-time low, reduced by
21 almost 50 percent in the past six months. This has
22 caused many dairy farms in Pennsylvania to have very
23 serious financial concerns. If Pennsylvania loses
24 25 percent of its dairy farms, as some analysts have
25 predicted, state will lose almost \$2 billion -- 2

1 billion pounds of milk, 16,000 jobs, and almost
2 \$2 billion in revenue. This is very serious times.

3 So this is why it is critical for us to
4 restore the funding for the Center For Dairy
5 Excellence. The Center is the only dedicated
6 resource the Pennsylvania dairy industry has. This
7 investment has a revenue generating and a job
8 creating payoff. Restoring the funding for the
9 Center For Dairy Excellence will enable it to
10 continue to work with dairy farmers to help us grow
11 our milk production, modernize our facility, improve
12 our business and herd management, and transition our
13 businesses from older generations to younger
14 generations, ultimately making all of us in the
15 Commonwealth more profitable.

16 Secondly, as a dairy producer I'm asking you
17 to look at the budget for animal health. The budget
18 for the Animal Health Commission was cut by
19 10 percent last year, and the proposed cuts from 6
20 million down to 4.8 will result in even deeper cuts.
21 As you know, currently we are facing a very public
22 health concern with the H1N1 virus. Now is not the
23 time to be cutting animal health concerns. We are --
24 as we are currently building a new state-of-the-art
25 high-level lab, we need to make sure we have the

1 funds to staff it. Keeping the labs accredited
2 depends directly upon being fully staffed with
3 qualified personnel. We're talking about public
4 health and maintaining a very healthy and safe food
5 supply.

6 This lab is our first line of defense for
7 human health against animal transmissible diseases.
8 Brucellosis, swine flu, rabies are all constant
9 threats to our industry, and the public must be
10 protected. The Animal Health Commission will help
11 ensure that all herds in Pennsylvania and our flocks
12 are healthy and provide safe and nutritious foods for
13 our consumers within the Commonwealth.

14 And finally, something near and dear to my
15 heart as well, is the mention of the Farm Show line
16 item budget. I'll remind you that the All-American
17 Dairy Show, the Keystone Livestock Show, the State
18 Junior Dairy Show, and horse shows are cash positive
19 events. They generate more revenue for the
20 Commonwealth and the Harrisburg area than is invested
21 by the state. Their economic impact exceeds
22 \$14 million.

23 But most importantly many youth live for
24 competing at these national level shows. For them it
25 is their national championship or their high school

1 football games, the culmination of years of work. It
2 is the foundation for their future in farming. The
3 activity of such as the judging schools, the
4 scholarships and livestock programs bring together
5 not only classroom but barn chores that provide a
6 cohesive and comprehensive educational experience.
7 We need our future leaders here in Pennsylvania, like
8 my four children, and they love these types of
9 activities. But loss of funding would permanently
10 cripple our youth programs.

11 As a dairy farmer and as a business owner, I
12 recognize we must invest in the areas that will reap
13 the most economic growth now and in the future.
14 Enabling the dairy industry to remain profitable is
15 very critical to the economic health of the entire
16 Commonwealth.

17 With over 50,000 jobs at stake, the safety
18 of our food supply in question, and allow -- and
19 numerous other things, we need to allow the Center
20 For Dairy Excellence, the Animal Health Commission,
21 and the Farm Show Complex to continue to do their
22 tasks. They will bring stability and they will bring
23 economic growth to a highly valuable commodity, our
24 Pennsylvania dairy industry. And I thank you for
25 your consideration.

1 MR. COOLIDGE: Good morning. I want to
2 thank you. I do not envy you for your efforts here.
3 It is a challenging time.

4 I'm Erick Coolidge and I've been before some
5 of you over the past 14 years as an elected county
6 commissioner and past state president. I want to
7 compliment first Secretary Wolff for his willingness
8 to seek out programming and to be a leader across
9 this nation, respected in many areas of growth and
10 development in seeking ways to encourage
11 participation by, as was mentioned, future
12 generations; more importantly, identifying areas that
13 needed to be enhanced, programs that will make a
14 difference in terms of surviving -- farms surviving
15 going into the future.

16 Our farm is located in Tioga County.
17 It's -- my last name is Coolidge. We're located in
18 Coolidge Hollow. It was established in the mid 1800.
19 We currently represent the fourth generation. And
20 our son, with all things considered, is desiring to
21 be the fifth generation.

22 It's not necessarily about the Coolidges or
23 Coolidge Hollow or our son. It's about an industry
24 and its growth and its future.

25 Currently we're seeing challenges

1 unprecedented across the board. You're seeing that.
2 You're hearing it here today. Many needs need to be
3 met. But this is an industry that is and has been
4 identified as a number one industry in this
5 Commonwealth and in this nation. It's agriculture.
6 If we err at this time not to invest and continually
7 reinvest in agriculture, we make a grave error. We
8 miss an opportunity not only to secure the future of
9 the current operations that exist today and all those
10 jobs and businesses and industries tied to it, but we
11 also miss an opportunity to invest in the future.

12 A future without being viewed as valued or
13 important may otherwise miss the opportunity to take
14 the family farm, or invest in large operations,
15 because they don't see the value or the purpose for
16 getting involved and pursuing an agricultural career.

17 We can't afford, I believe, to overlook that
18 opportunity. And more importantly, every business
19 tied to it is hoping that we will see that. We touch
20 every facet of business and growth and development in
21 this Commonwealth at one time or another. Our mere
22 farm, just based on the animals that we produce on
23 our farm, 120 head we milk, we create and sustain 13
24 jobs. And they sustain other jobs beyond.

25 There are reasons why the ag industry has

1 been successful. It's because we've kept up with
2 technology. We've embraced it. Programs such as the
3 Profit Teams, our farm participated in that. We
4 invested over \$60,000 in purchasing of equipment.
5 That has generated efficiencies. We brought in the
6 Profit Team. We brought veterinarians, the feed
7 analyst. We brought in our accountant. We brought
8 in all the various needs to be met. And out of that
9 we grew in efficiencies both economically and with
10 our food source.

11 When we look at all the values of that, we
12 also looked at the consumer. We produce a quality
13 product. A product if the consumer comes to your
14 particular operation there needs to be a confidence
15 that you are ensuring them with a future of a quality
16 product. They can trust it.

17 These are all the aspects, I believe, would
18 justify reviewing and considering reinvesting and
19 supporting the Center For Dairy Excellence with its
20 funding.

21 You're not just supporting the Coolidge
22 farm. You're not supporting just the industry.
23 You're supporting the consumer. And you're giving
24 them the benefit of a product that they can trust of
25 an industry that we all need. And more importantly,

1 we're investing in the future.

2 Thank you for your time.

3 MR. HISSONG: Good morning. My name is Rod
4 Hissong. I appreciate the opportunity to visit with
5 you this morning about the Center for Dairy
6 Excellence. I hope my testimony will give you some
7 insight or importance of fully funding the ag
8 excellence line in this year's budget.

9 Along with my family, I own and operate
10 Mercer Vu Farms in Mercersburg. On our Frankly
11 County dairy, we milk 1,600 cows, raise 1,400
12 heifers, farm 1,800 acres, and haul over 42 million
13 pounds of milk a year from our dairy with our own
14 trucks to Land-O-Lakes. We have 26 full-time
15 employees that are dedicated to producing high
16 quality milk efficiently, safely, and profitably as
17 to benefit the management, employees, cows, the
18 environment and the community in which we live.

19 Based on those numbers, our dairy supports
20 over 170 agricultural jobs and provides over
21 \$22 million of economic stimulus to our region.
22 While I'm here to speak on behalf of my own dairy
23 operation and the value of the Center, I am also here
24 to speak to you as president of the Professional
25 Dairy Mangers of Pennsylvania.

1 PDMP is a professional dairy producer
2 organization of over a hundred dairy businesses
3 representing over 50,000 cows and over 10 percent of
4 the milk produced in Pennsylvania. It is a producer
5 ran and led organization supported by allied
6 industry.

7 Our membership has a positive can-do
8 attitude about the dairy industry in Pennsylvania.
9 We like to talk about what is right about the
10 industry instead of what is wrong.

11 While these are tough times in the dairy
12 industry, we focus on things that we can change
13 instead of complaining about the things we can't.
14 One of the things that we see that is right about the
15 Pennsylvania dairy industry is the Center for Dairy
16 Excellence.

17 The Center has worked hard to bring all
18 sectors of Pennsylvania dairy industry together to
19 achieve the common goal of making our industry
20 stronger. They have coordinated all sectors to work
21 together so this industry not only survives but
22 thrives. The Center is not one person or one group
23 of individuals; it is the collaboration of an entire
24 industry. It is responsible for bringing the dairy
25 industry together to decide what it needs and then

1 has worked to develop the programs to meet those
2 needs, a whole toolbox full of things that dairy farm
3 families can use to compete in todays difficult dairy
4 climate.

5 There's a saying in our industry that
6 dairying as a way of life is bad business, but
7 dairying as a business is a great way of life. That
8 is the transition that the Center has helped this
9 industry's producers realize. Dairying is a business
10 and they need to have the right tools in their
11 toolbox to compete.

12 Along with the rest of the economy, dairy
13 farmers are struggling right now. We are seeing
14 unprecedented -- unprecedented losses in
15 Pennsylvania's dairy industry. Thanks to the Center
16 and the tools they provide, those losses could be
17 much greater. Those producers who have used the
18 Center's resources, they have positioned themselves
19 to minimize losses, weather the storm, and wait for a
20 sunnier day. This storm will pass and these
21 producers will thrive when things improve. Some
22 dairies will fail, but thanks to the Center and the
23 work it has done over the last couple of years many
24 more have been given a fighting chance.

25 If the Center for Dairy Excellence did not

1 exist and producers did not have access to the tools
2 for success but, rather, were allowed to fail one at
3 a time, it is only a matter of time before the whole
4 industry collapses and none of us can compete.

5 In Pennsylvania, we are fortunate to have an
6 outstanding dairy infrastructure. Many producers and
7 other states are envious of the infrastructure that
8 we have. It is a competitive advantage for us. It
9 is in all of our best interest to support that
10 infrastructure. We all rely on each other, and the
11 Center is there to support all of us. It is not
12 there for one group or another. It has no hidden
13 agenda but to support the entire Pennsylvania dairy
14 industry.

15 Why is the Center of Dairy Excellence
16 important to Pennsylvania? I can regurgitate all the
17 facts and figures about the importance of the dairy
18 industry to the Commonwealth. I'm sure you have them
19 and are well aware of the economic importance. But
20 to me it's more about fact -- more than just facts
21 and figures.

22 It's about supporting an industry that
23 provides a service that none of us can live without.
24 In this Commonwealth, we are fortunate to be blessed
25 with fertile soil, a climate that cows acclimate to

1 well, and more importantly good, hard working people
2 that have the talents and ambition to provide a
3 fresh, wholesome product to the inhabitants of this
4 state.

5 In a day and age when people want to know
6 where their food comes, they are fortunate if they
7 know it or not that most of the dairy products they
8 produce right past their backyards in their
9 neighbor's dairy farm.

10 One thing I'm sure you hear from your
11 constituents is that they are tired of supporting
12 handouts for farmers or welfare for farmers. The
13 Center for Dairy Excellence is the farthest thing
14 from a government handout. It is money that's
15 supports an organization that fills the gap in an
16 industry that is the backbone of this Commonwealth.

17 You have heard the old adage about giving
18 someone a pole and teaching them to fish instead of
19 just giving them the fish. The ag excellence line in
20 the Center for Dairy Excellence is giving the
21 dairyman -- this state's dairy the pole and teaching
22 them to fish. It is not handing out fish. It
23 bridges the gap between the feel good nostalgia of
24 dairy farms past and the economic realities of
25 today's dairy marketplace by giving the next

1 generation of dairymen the tools they need to compete
2 on a national and international marketplace.

3 I appreciate the opportunity to support the
4 work of the Center for Dairy Excellence. I
5 appreciate your willingness to take the time and hear
6 our opinions on this very important matter. As a
7 dairy producer, and as the president of the
8 Professional Dairy Managers in Pennsylvania, the
9 Center of Dairy Excellence has my full support and I
10 urge you to continue fully funding the ago excellence
11 line.

12 I've talked about many benefits of dairying
13 in Pennsylvania, but none as important as the support
14 we receive from state government. We have and hope
15 to continue to work together to provide and feed the
16 people of this state and the nation. This investment
17 in our industry will return many times over. This is
18 just a seed that will grow. Allow the Center for
19 Dairy Excellence to go about the business of
20 providing tools of keeping dairy viable in
21 Pennsylvania. Thank you for your time.

22 MR. MILHOAN: Good morning, Chairman and
23 members of the appropriations committee. Thank you
24 for this opportunity to testify about the importance
25 of the dairy industry to our state's economy and the

1 role of the Center for Dairy Excellence in securing
2 its future.

3 My name's Dennis Milhoan. I am president of
4 Lancaster Dairy Farm Automation based in Lititz,
5 Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, with divisions in
6 Belleville, Rebersburg, Martinsburg, and Oxford. Our
7 company provides equipment, supplies, and services to
8 over 2,000 dairy farms milking over 200,000 cows.

9 I started my company in 1985 and before that
10 was employed as a high school agriculture teacher.
11 For the past five years I have served on the Economic
12 Development Committee of the Pennsylvania Dairy Task
13 Force. My company and its employees are an example
14 of the many allied industries that are dependent upon
15 a good, strong dairy economy.

16 Five years ago when the Dairy Task Force was
17 first formed, Pennsylvania was losing at an alarming
18 rate not only dairy farms but also cow numbers and
19 pounds of milk production, and we were losing
20 infrastructure and the jobs and revenue that are
21 provided by allied industries. In the past
22 five years our state's dairy industry has been able
23 to turn around that decline and stabilize milk
24 production. The Center for Dairy Excellence has a
25 key role in this turnaround because it sets the

1 groundwork to have a sustained dairy industry in
2 Pennsylvania, a dairy industry that is stable and
3 growing instead of declining.

4 Never has it been more important for dairy
5 producers to have this resource than today. With low
6 milk prices and high costs of production, farm
7 milking income has fallen 50 percent and the nation
8 is at risk of losing one-fourth of its dairy farms.
9 If Pennsylvania were to lose 25 percent of its dairy
10 farms, the cost to the state would be 16,000 jobs and
11 1.9 billion in economic revenue.

12 Our company alone has worked with over 12
13 dairy farms that have directly benefited from the
14 Center's Profit Team and Target Team Programs. An
15 example, dairy of 500 cows was having high milk
16 bacteria counts and they were losing their bonuses
17 and losing milk production. A Center For Dairy
18 Excellence Profit Team Program provided seed funding
19 to pull professional resources together and turn this
20 around and bring \$52,000 in additional income to the
21 business.

22 The Center measures the dairy industry
23 performance, productivity, and profitability on a
24 monthly scorecard. The most recent report indicates
25 that we have improved the quality of Pennsylvania

1 milk by 6 percent over the past year. This comes in
2 part from a high level of emphasis placed on milk
3 quality by the Dairy Task Force and the Center For
4 Dairy Excellence. A 6 percent increase in milk
5 quality in this case means over 2 million additional
6 dollars in farmers' pockets that would be spent
7 locally.

8 You have before you many facts and figures
9 about the work of the Center and how critical dairy
10 is to our state's economy. What I want to focus on
11 goes beyond the numbers and goes to the heart of the
12 matter. When dairy producers have the resources and
13 confidence to remain in business and to grow, many
14 dairy supports industries in our Commonwealth are
15 sustained and will grow also. This means jobs for
16 Pennsylvanians and revenue for our rural and
17 statewide economies. As dairy production stabilizes
18 and grows, this also sends a message to processors.
19 They can be confident in the sustained fluid milk
20 production. They need to keep or build their dairy
21 food processing plants here.

22 This means keeping jobs or adding jobs for
23 Pennsylvanians. Before the recent decline in milk
24 prices, our small dairy services supplied business
25 alone had grown 32 percent from 25 to 33 employees in

1 the past five years. This is partly due to the
2 confidence the Center For Dairy Excellence has
3 instilled in the dairy industry by serving as a
4 resource with tools that help dairy farm families
5 improve their economic position and plan for the
6 future.

7 A fully funded Center gives constant
8 messages to dairy farmers and allied industries that
9 Pennsylvania is very committed to maintaining dairy
10 as a large contributor to our state's economy. The
11 \$600,000 in state funding for ag excellence is seed
12 money for a short and, more importantly, a long-term
13 harvest. It pays back annually to the state's
14 economy revenue that is 7,000 times greater than this
15 annual investment.

16 I leave you with this thought. The single
17 most important contribution to the Center For Dairy
18 Excellence to our state's economy is to bring a level
19 of confidence to our young people who want to take
20 over the dairy, the family farm, and dairy in
21 Pennsylvania instead of leaving to dairy in another
22 state. The Center provides its support for young
23 people to have more confidence in the dairy industry
24 here in Pennsylvania is sustainable. Probably more
25 than anything else, this function is crucial to the

1 future of dairy in Pennsylvania. The Center shows
2 young people graduating from college or buying a
3 family farm that there is an opportunity to dairy
4 here and that a network of support that has been
5 funded over the past five years is still available to
6 them.

7 This is where the chain reaction of jobs all
8 the way from the dairy farm to the supermarket shelf
9 really begins. It begins with confidence on the
10 farm. That is our very future, and the future of the
11 jobs and dollars the dairy industry brings to our
12 Commonwealth. When dairy producers have confidence
13 in the sustainability of their farms, this brings
14 more confidence to allied industries. Confidence on
15 the farm breeds confidence among processors that need
16 to see that we are very committed to us keeping a
17 strong and sustainable dairy industry.

18 Again, thank you for this opportunity to
19 testify before you today about the importance of the
20 dairy industry to our state's economy and the role of
21 the Center For Dairy Excellence in securing its
22 future.

23 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN EVANS: One quick
24 question. Where would you say you think Pennsylvania
25 is relating to the other states in ranking from a

1 dairy perspective?

2 MR. FREY: We're number two state in the
3 country in terms of number of dairy farms. We're the
4 number five state in the country for total milk
5 production.

6 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN EVANS: Who's number one?

7 MR. FREY: Number one is California. Number
8 two's Wisconsin. Idaho is number three. New York's
9 number four. So New York and Pennsylvania really
10 feed the east coast.

11 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN EVANS: Again, I'd like to
12 thank you for coming before us, making your
13 presentation. We appreciate your information and
14 your insight. It helps us. Again, thank you very
15 much.

16 (The panel concluded at 11:28 a.m.)

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1 I hereby certify that the proceedings and
2 evidence are contained fully and accurately in the
3 notes taken by me on the within proceedings and that
4 this is a correct transcript of the same.

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Heather L. Artz, RMR, CRR
Reporter

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