

PA Milk Marketing Board
Carol A. Hardbarger

Milk is Nutritious, Not Political!

Each day, the Board and Board staff are confronted with confusing, sensitive and sometimes painful issues associated with the COVID-19 outbreak. Few of us know what to do, immediately and without research and thought; none of us have experienced anything like this in the past. One thing we know for sure, our approach to working with Pennsylvania's dairy industry stakeholders must be neutral.

In the true definition of a commonwealth (Oxford Dictionary of the English Language), the "common good" is at the forefront of decision-making and this is how we have been approaching decisions made at both the Board and staff levels during the pandemic. At times it seems as if one party must give a little more than the other but maintaining the health of the overall industry is our primary goal at this time.

Each decision we have made since March 16 has met with criticism, some severe. The Board is used to that to a certain extent because we deal with it during non-crisis times. It is okay. We listen to the criticisms to learn from them. We also approach with caution when we have reason to believe that personal and political agendas may be behind the criticisms. As I end each of my articles, PMMB is always available to respond to questions and concerns.

The COVID-19 outbreak has, unfortunately, taken our focus away from some of the initiatives we started before March 16. For instance, we are waiting to finish moving forward two important regulation changes. One will require cooperatives to have a line item on producers' monthly checks that shows the over-order premium paid. The other will extend the notice time that dealers must provide to producers when terminating their contracts.

We also have two new legislative initiatives that we hope to move forward in the very near future. One of those would enable us to collect sales data on packaged milk brought in from out-of-state. The other will permit us to work with the PA Department of Revenue to develop a direct-to-farmer revenue stream. Information about both may be found on our website at www.mmb.pa.gov under Board Initiatives. There are feedback forms if you wish to communicate with us about either or both of those concepts. At this time, Senators Vogel and Schwank are discussing co-sponsorship of a bill on the data collection regarding out-of-state milk. If passed, that bill would enable us to more accurately establish the over-order premium.

The message that PMMB wishes to convey is that our interest is in working to positively impact all of our constituent groups—retailers, processors, producers and consumers. Help us do that by communicating with us and by supporting our PA dairy farmers. Buy 42-plant code milk.

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