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## DPAC's funders explain their mission

### 'Our futures are tied with those of dairy farmers'

By Sherry Bunting  
Special for Farmshine

EPHRATA, Pa.— “We know this is not a sprint to the finish line. It is a marathon,” said Alan Graves of Mark Hershey Farms, Lebanon, Pa., about the work of the Dairy Policy Action Coalition (DPAC). “We know it’s going to take time, and it’s something we can’t give up halfway through.”

Last winter, Graves read about the formation of DPAC—a grassroots coalition of dairy producers actively participating in policies and issues affecting milk pricing. He and his co-workers raised \$500 for the cause. Shortly thereafter, the Mark Hershey Farms feed mill gave a substantial donation, and in March, they decided to continue as a monthly “cream of the crop” contributor.

They are not alone. Morrissey Insurance, based in Ephrata, Pa., provided the original seed money to get the coalition started. Sensenig’s Feed Mill, New Holland, Pa., and Lancaster Dairy Farm Automation, based in Lititz, Pa. and Hagerstown, Md., were the first companies last winter to follow Morrissey’s lead with substantial “cream of the crop” donations to DPAC. In June, both companies decided to keep their commitment going as monthly cash flow contributors.

More recently, two farm equipment companies—Hooper Inc., based in Intercourse, Pa., and Binkley & Hurst, based in Lititz, Pa.—signed



Seven companies have stepped forward in a big way to help fund the efforts of the Dairy Policy Action Coalition (DPAC), which was formed last November as a grassroots coalition of dairy producers actively participating in the policies and issues affecting milk pricing. Standing from left are Alan Graves, representing Mark Hershey Farms, Lebanon, Pa.; brothers Scott, Karl and Mike Sensenig of Sensenig’s Feed Mill, New Holland, Pa. Seated (from left) are Chad Burkholder of Binkley & Hurst, based in Lititz, Pa.; Bernie Morrissey, of Morrissey Insurance, based in Ephrata, Pa.; and Dennis Milhoan, of Lancaster Dairy Farm Automation, based in Lititz, Pa. and Hagerstown, Md. Not pictured are Charlie Hooper, of Hooper Inc., Intercourse, Pa. and Amos Stoltzfoos of E-ZEE Milking Equipment based in Gordonville, Pa. DPAC is a national organization that got its start in Pennsylvania. More than 40 other agribusinesses and producer organizations have also provided one-time donations ranging from \$50 to \$5000, and individual dairy producers from 11 states have also contributed. DPAC’s 20-member board of directors includes dairy producers from Pennsylvania, Ohio and New York, with adhoc members on action groups from other states in the Southeast and Midwest. Photo by Dieter Krieg

is made up of all dairy-men; a professional team that is experienced and competent; and with Dennis

Wolff and Bernie Morrissey involved, there is a lot of political savvy and connections for DPAC to get the dairy producers’ voice heard with decision makers. The only thing missing was the money, and that’s where we were more than willing to help.”

“They are asking good questions and persistently moving forward on the issues,” said Mike Sensenig. “We looked at this as our opportunity to give back to our customers by staying with DPAC for the long haul because the dairy farmers’ future is our future.”

Sensenig also points to the leadership of DPAC as “a great group of farmers, who are doing this professionally. By hiring the

former state ag secretary, Dennis Wolff, and with Morrissey’s understanding of politics, DPAC can see it though. I’m actually amazed there hasn’t been a larger number of agribusinesses supporting this because it is something that could positively change the future for the next generation.”

For Chad Burkholder of Binkley & Hurst, the decision to support DPAC arose out of the desire “to support the hardest working families in Pennsylvania and America,” he said.

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“We are honored to be a part of an effort to support this coalition because the dairy sector is absolutely vital to our business and our existence.”

For Charlie Hooper, of Hooper Inc., the bottom line is the culture of dairy farming, which brings more than milk to the table. “I believe DPAC is getting started in the right place trying to get this straightened out,” said Hooper. “For us here in eastern Lancaster County, the dairy cow is the culture. Our Plain Community in that business needs to be able to survive. We have to figure out how to keep these family farms going because the future is going to depend on that.”

Amos Stoltzfoos of E-ZEE Milking Equipment agrees. “Our company depends on dairy farmers for our livelihood,” he said. “I’m really impressed and intrigued by what DPAC has the potential to do for the dairy industry.”

As the milk price creeps higher, Sensenig observes that, “People stop talking about the issues here. We’re committed to helping DPAC continue its work, because we see this as an organization that is committed to really following this through... to the finish line. That takes funding, and that’s why we thought we should step up.”

“A lot of people have been skeptical because so many attempts to fix this problem have come and gone in the past,” adds Karl Sensenig. “With DPAC, we can see who is involved, and the persistence to keep after it.”

As DPAC Board members and the professional team have traveled and connected with dairy producers across the country, the story is the same. “For dairy producers in the North, South, East and West, much of DPAC’s efforts in dairy policy really comes down to the concern about losing our culture, about losing the opportunities for our young people to continue in dairy farming,” observes Bernie Morrissey, who is semi-retired from Morrissey Insurance and volunteers his time as DPAC’s recording treasurer and is the driving force behind the fundraising efforts.

It was Morrissey’s vision that led to the formation of DPAC after he attended a small group meeting of dairy farmers last November at the farm of Jake Esh, Gordonville, Pa., as a follow up to the big pasture meeting at Levi Fisher’s farm last August. He had previously attended a meeting of dairy farmers in Lebanon, Pa., and he just kept thinking something needs to be done at the grassroots level. He came up with an idea.

He thought: “What if we brought together the dairy farmers who were having meetings throughout Pennsylvania and in Ohio to put something together and then hire former Pa.

Secretary of Agriculture Dennis Wolff as government relations consultant?” Wolff is a partner in Versant Strategies, based in Harrisburg, Pa. and he serves as the government relations consultant for DPAC.

Morrissey’s idea set the wheels in motion, and after contacting all the regions where small groups or large groups were already meeting and connecting with their legislators, DPAC had 20 dairy farmers at the table, with herd sizes ranging from 30 to 2500 cows. The 20-member board of directors now includes producers

from Pennsylvania, Ohio and New York. Over the past eight months, this board has been busy building relationships and connecting with a network of fellow dairy producers throughout the United States.

In addition to board leadership from Pennsylvania, Ohio, and New York, DPAC has ad hoc members from Kentucky, Tennessee, and Indiana serving on action groups (committees).

Ad hoc members from other southern, mid-western, and western states also participate in board conference calls and email discussions.

There are regional issues to confront, but the future of the dairy industry is deeply rooted in the direction of national dairy policy.

“We are at a time in history where the grassroots dairy farmers are becoming more actively involved in dairy policy,” says DPAC’s chairman Cliff Hawbaker, a producer from Franklin County, Pa.

“We saw this when we testified in Wisconsin last month at the joint hearing by the Department of Justice and USDA, and we also saw it in Chicago last week where groups convened to look at the economic models on the various supply management and dairy policy proposals,” adds DPAC Board member Duane Hertzler, a producer from Perry County, Pa. who traveled to both meetings.

August will mark the 20th month of milk prices below cost of production. “Dairy producers across the country agree the system is broken,” adds Holmes County, Ohio dairyman and DPAC Board member Alan Kozak, who also represented DPAC at the Wisconsin hearing and Chicago meeting as well as meetings in Washington D.C. in April.

“Right now, the bottom line is we don’t trust the tools we have. We need to make the tools better,” notes DPAC Vice-Chairman Rob Barley, who joined Dennis Wolff in presenting DPAC’s positions to USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack’s Dairy Industry Advisory Committee in Washington, D.C. last month. “If the milk price goes to \$20 tomorrow, we will still be working on this because it is obvious that the pricing system needs an overhaul.”

“We really appreciate the businesses that donate because it is the combined effort of producers and agribusinesses that keep this moving forward. I ask the business owners who donate: Please tell us the number of people you employ when you send a donation,” says DPAC Board member Jon Jenkins. “Our legislators need to know how deep this thing really goes.”

The value of dairy farms to their local communities is two-fold. “It’s the contribution of the culture in bringing up young people in a way that teaches a lot of responsibility,” Charlie Hooper relates. “And our communities see the value of the dairy farms coming through the businesses and the local economies.”

“I wish our legislators could fully comprehend this. They think in numbers of dairy farmers. I don’t think they totally grasp that people like me, and other employees at companies like ours, rely on the dairy farmers for our livelihood,” said Graves of Mark Hershey Farms. “This has been so far reaching. I’ve said it for years: ‘Give a dairyman \$20 milk, and they don’t sit on that. They circulate it back into the local economy and make such a difference to everyone.’”

“We’re struggling along with the dairy farmers,” adds Milhoan. “For a business our size, it’s not easy to make this type of donation, but the reason we are doing it is because we need a long term solution in the dairy industry. We need to get to the bottom of what is going on with the pricing system. I see DPAC as the best opportunity producers have to get something done that is a long term solution.”

For Morrissey: “It’s purely the right thing to do, and this is the time to pay back the farmers for what they have done for us,” he explains.

“The challenge I have is simple: We need to help the dairy farmers get through these tough times. Our infrastructure will dissolve without the dairy farmer.”

For more information about DPAC, contact 800-422-8335 or visit [www.dpac.net](http://www.dpac.net).

Donations can be sent to The Dairy Policy Action Coalition, 890 North Reading Road, Ephrata, PA 17522.

In addition to the seven businesses that have so far stepped forward with “cream of the crop” monthly donations, DPAC has received contributions from 200 hundred dairy farmers and producer organizations from 11 states and 40 agribusinesses. DPAC board members give of their time and also provide monthly donations, and several other dairymen have chosen to send contributions on a monthly basis.

In addition to the substantial monthly cash flow donations of the seven businesses named in this article—Morrissey Insurance, Sensenig’s Feed Mill, Lancaster Dairy Farm Automation, Mark Hershey Farms, Hooper Inc., Binkley & Hurst, and E-ZEE Milking Equipment—other business that have given one-time donations, are as follows:

**Cream of the Crop sponsors:** The Pennsylvania Dairymen’s Association, Farmshine Newspaper (in kind services), Acuity Advisors and CPAs (in kind services).

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**Other “Friend of DPAC” contributors:** King’s Agri-Seeds Inc., Ronks, Pa.; White Horse Machine, Gap, Pa.; Petersheim Cow Mattresses, Quarryville, Pa.; Kissling Dairy Consulting, Sinking Spring, Pa.; Prevent Distributors, Peach Bottom, Pa.; Gehman Feed Mill, Inc., Denver, Pa.; Martin’s Elevators Inc., Hagerstown, Md.; The Employees of Mark Hershey Farms, Lebanon, Pa.; LOFCO, Narvon, Pa.; FM Brown’s Sons Inc., Birdsboro, Pa.; Udder Comfort, Ontario; Lanco-Pennland Quality Milk Producers, Hagerstown, Md.; Jefferson County Holstein Club, Reynoldsville, Pa.; Kentucky Dairy Development Council, Lexington, Ky.; Keystone Concrete Products, New Holland, Pa.; Douglas Wallick Agency, Camp Hill, Pa.; Ruhl Insurance, Manheim, Pa.; Bradford County Holstein Club, New Albany, Pa.; Balsbaugh Insurance Agency, Schaefferstown, Pa.; Countryway Insurance Company, Syracuse, N.Y.; Lowville Dairy Producers, Lowville, N.Y.; Matt Davis Custom Harvesting, Troy, Pa.; Barclay Transportation, Inc., Canton, Pa.; Dairy Facts, LLC, Kimberly, Idaho; Metzler Bros. Inc., Martinsburg, Pa.; Metzler Bros. Tank, Truck, Trailer, Martinsburg, Pa.; W.L. Zimmerman & Sons, Intercourse, Pa.; Taurus Service Inc., Mehoopany, Pa.; Richard Melling, Select Sires, Lancaster, Pa.; J&J Silo, Gordonville, Pa.; Middletown Grange #684, Penns Park, Pa.; Cotter & Sons Milk Transport, Inc., Berlin, Pa.