

'It was a no-brainer; we're in this for the long haul'

By SHERRY BUNTING
Special for Farmshine

NEW HOLLAND, Pa.—
“There is a lot of uncertainty out there, and with the way the futures markets look, it's a little scary. Dairy farmers don't know what to believe or what the future holds, especially the young guys,” notes Karl Sensenig. He and his brothers Mike and Scott and their father Ken are the second and third generations to operate Sensenig's Feed Mill based in New Holland, Lancaster County, Pa. Mike's sons Kyle and Kurt are the fourth generation, and they are part of the team of 28 employees with a customer base that is 80% dairy farms. In December, they were the first company (after Morrissey Insurance) to make a cream-of-the-crop \$5000 donation to the Dairy Policy Action Coalition (DPAC).

“We were coming off the worst year ever for dairy farmers, and we saw what DPAC was about and felt it was the best thing going to try to fix the milk pricing system that has been broken for a long time,” adds Mike Sensenig. “I would think anyone who is involved in the dairy industry would certainly step up to support this effort. It's the best thing to come out in a long time.”

Mike and Karl say they appreciate DPAC's focus and follow up, and the fact that they aren't asking for a government handout, but instead, are focusing on market transparency. As Mike is quick to point out: Having meetings is one thing, but following through is another.

To that end, DPAC has been working with members of Congress on daily electronic reporting with quarterly auditing and other aspects of market transparency. On June 3, the coalition's vice-chair Rob Barley and government relations consultant Dennis Wolff will give a presentation and answer questions during the second meeting of U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack's Dairy Industry Advisory Committee in Washington, D.C.

“There are great people volunteering their time on the DPAC board, and they have good people working for them,” Mike relates. “To us it was



(Above) The team at Sensenig's Feed Mill, New Holland, Pa.: Front row (from left) - Nelson Weaver, Dwayne Weaver, Kurt Sensenig, Kyle Sensenig, Todd Morris, TJ Spring, Bruce Horning, Randall Martin. Middle row (from left) - Connie Weaver, Greg Hill, Tim Hall, Gerald Martin, Steve Morris, Calvin Buckwalter, Tom Weaver, Lawrence Martin, David Burkhart, Dawn Wright. Back row (from left) - Steve Oberholtzer, John Weaver, Eugene Musser, Scott Sensenig, Karl Sensenig, Ken Sensenig, Mike Sensenig, Dale Clymer, Jack Weaver, Dave Stauffer. Absent - Elmer Weaver and Terry Tshudy.
(Below) The second, third and fourth generations at Sensenig's Feed Mill, from left: Mike, Kurt, Karl, Kyle, Ken, and Scott.

a no-brainer. We feel we owe it to the dairy farmers to help support this because the hard work is more than ideas. It's having people put in the time to follow through. There is a cost for that.”

Sensenig's Feed Mill is family owned and operated. Many of their customers have been with them through generations. “We enjoy the people we work with—their work ethic and honesty. They aren't just customers. It's about the relationships, the sense of community. We're in this for the long haul. That's why we did not hesitate to donate to this effort,” says Mike.

“It also has a direct impact on us. Without the dairy farmers, we're not here,” adds Karl. “They are our future. It's unbelievable when you start to think about all the lives that are impacted... all the businesses that are tied to dairy and all the employees and their families.”

The feed mill's attention to the problem really began early last year. In May of 2009, they invited Pennsylvania State Senator Mike Brubaker to a meeting for their dairy customers. “High retail prices and low farm milk prices were the biggest concern, and it's still what we hear,” some of the mill's employees recall. “Everybody's buying dairy products and wondering why the price is what it is at the store while dairy farmers are hurting like this. It doesn't seem fair.”

“We've always seen ups and downs, but this time is more serious,” adds Ken Sensenig. “We saw optimism at the beginning of the year, but now there is uncertainty again. We have to keep working together through the road blocks.”

In its first five months, DPAC received donations from 178 producers in 11 states and 45 agribusinesses and associations in four states. Look for a June Dairy Month thank you ad listing the businesses supporting this effort. Donations can be mailed to DPAC at 890 N. Reading Rd., Ephrata, PA 17522. To learn more, call Bernie at 800.422.8335 or visit www.dpac.net.

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