

*From dairy farm families to agribusinesses to rank-and-file employees*

# ‘We’re in this together’

By **SHERRY BUNTING**  
Special for Farmshine

EPHRATA, Pa.—When you’re building a grassroots effort that is action-based with a narrow focus and communicates a clear message about an issue that is important to the livelihood of a broader community, people naturally begin to see where they fit in and how they can help. A grassroots coalition isn’t just about the dollars that are donated or how much each person or company gives. Rather, it’s the sum-total of support—large and small—that gives strength, momentum, and sustenance.



**CAPTION:** Alan Graves and Brian Boyd, employees of Mark Hershey Farms, Lebanon, Pa., read about DPAC in Farmshine and posted a fundraising sign at the company time clock. Within one week, the employee workforce had come through with an envelope of checks totaling \$510 in support of the grassroots coalition of dairy farmers focused on milk pricing and market transparency.

That’s because literally every drop counts—in dollars, in human capital, and in political capital. That’s how a grassroots movement develops into a voice that has clout. And that’s how it is for the Dairy Policy Action Coalition (DPAC), a grassroots coalition of dairy producers actively participating, with a unified voice, on policies and issues affecting milk pricing.

Mid-April marks the fifth month of operation for DPAC, and in those five months, nearly \$50,000 has been received in donations from individual producers and the agribusinesses that serve the dairy farms as well as a few associations that have provided financial support. DPAC has a budget of \$10,000 a month, which covers the services and expenses of Dennis Wolff and Versant Strategies as the coalition’s government relations consultant (a.k.a. “lobbyist”) as well as the services of the journalist they hired (Sherry Bunting) as their correspondence secretary and the cost of frequent conference calls, website, surveys, printing, attorney fees, and other aspects associated with forming a group focused on constant and continuing action in the political realm of dairy policy.

According to Merriam-Webster's dictionary: "grassroots" means "the very foundation or source; the basic level of a community or organization, especially as viewed in relation to higher or more centralized positions of power."

According to Wikipedia, "a grassroots movement is one driven by the politics of a community. This term implies that the creation of the movement, and the group supporting it, are natural and spontaneous, highlighting the differences between this and a movement that is orchestrated by traditional power structures. Grassroots movements are often at the local level, as many volunteers in the community give their time to support it, and this then leads to a national movement."

These definition accurately describe how DPAC was started and how it has progressed. The coalition formed naturally and spontaneously as the outgrowth of dairy farmers coming together in their local communities all across Pennsylvania and Ohio last year. The farmers who organized those meetings sent two or three people to the table at the invitation of Bernie Morrissey last November to put their heads together and see what kind of vehicle they could create to give dairy farmers their own voice in the political process – with the idea of "controlling your own destiny."

The \$47,880 received in donations as of April 6, has come from 155 dairy producers in nine states and 37 agribusinesses in four states. True: The lion's share of financial support has come from Pennsylvania and Ohio, which is the "local dairy community" from which this grassroots effort sprouted. But as DPAC is quickly establishing a national presence, and bringing in adhoc members from other states and regions, donations are also coming in from producers and agribusinesses in New York, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee, Massachusetts, Indiana, even Idaho.

That path is a two-way street as DPAC corresponds with dairy producers in at least 23 states via weekly updates in Farmshine, an E-newsletter, online and printed surveys, and updates at [www.dpac.net](http://www.dpac.net).

Individual producers have donated from \$25 to \$1000, with the average around \$100. Some are donating roughly \$2 per cow, and a few have chosen to do smaller amounts on a monthly basis instead of one lump-sum check. Some have gone to their dairies or co-ops and asked to have a monthly amount sent into DPAC from their milk check.

"I prefer to do it that way because \$60 a month comes out to 15 cents a cow or a penny per hundredweight each month," explains Alan Kozak, a dairy farmer milking 400 cows in Holmes County, Ohio and one of DPAC's 20 charter board members. "But each dairyman can do whatever they are comfortable with."

"The point is that if we don't stand up and do this as producers, we can't expect anyone else to do it for us," says Jon Jenkins, a dairy farmer from Bradford County, Pennsylvania and one of DPAC's 20 charter board members. "The agribusinesses who are interested in helping us want to see us funding this effort too. The combined investment makes a strong statement. I tell people to support DPAC at whatever level you can because just as important is your name on the list, so when we go to Washington, you're behind us."

Agribusinesses, too, have stepped up with donations from \$100 to \$6000. And recently, the Pennsylvania Dairywomen's Association also gave its show of support in the form of a \$5000 grant.

These donations sustain the work DPAC is doing and send a clear message to policymakers that businesses large and small are indirectly affected by the dairy crisis, even as their customers—the dairy farmers—are directly affected.

This train would not be rolling if not for the commitment of Morrissey Insurance. They put up the \$6000 in starter funds back in November, and have provided their office resources, toll-free phone number, and staff assistance free of charge. Bernie Morrissey serves as DPAC's appointed recording treasurer under the oversight of vice-chairs Rob Barley of Star Rock Farms, Conestoga, Pa. and Daniel Brandt of Brandt-View Farms, Annville, Pa.

Sensenig's Feed Mill of New Holland, Pa. and Lancaster Dairy Farm Automation, based in Lititz, Pa. and Hagerstown, Md. were two business that gave substantial donations right away. Sensenig's employs 28 people and Lancaster Dairy 35.

"I tell businesses to please give us the number of people you employ when you send a donation," Jenkins says. "Our legislators need to know how deep this thing goes."

A perfect example of "how deep this thing goes" is the fund drive among 37 employees at Mark Hershey Farms, a feed mill in Lebanon, Pa. Sure, they are pictured in this week's Farmshine, but they are quick to point out they didn't do it for a picture in the paper.

"If we can encourage other businesses to do this exact same thing, that's super. That's what it's all about," says Alan Graves, who purchases ingredients and works with customers at the mill.

"These guys are up against it," he says about the dairy farm families. "The economics of this are so disheartening to us. The way dairy goes is the way we go. I wish 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. 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.'"

When Graves read about DPAC in the pages of Farmshine last winter, he immediately recognized DPAC as a group that can get something done. When he saw the invitation for companies to give, he went to the mill manager, Brian Boyd, with his idea.

"I figured it didn't matter what the company decided to give, we employees wanted to do something from our end to support our friends and customers," said Graves, who has worked in customer service at Mark Hershey Farms (MHF) for more than 10 years.

Graves and Boyd posted a sign at the time clock, and within one week, they had collected personal checks totaling \$510, which they mailed to DPAC in a large envelope on February 17. The company's owner, Darryl Alger, doubled what his employees gave, sending \$1000 on the same day. And on March 12, the company's controller, David Bates, contacted DPAC with the news that MHF would "keep giving \$1000 a month as long as it's needed."

"This is everything to myself and the employees here," says Boyd. "Dairy is a large percentage of our business, and a lot of us are connected to dairy farms through our families. Some of us raise calves on our own. We're not only very connected to dairy, we realize this is our life and livelihood at stake also."

At MHF, the Farmshine can always be found in the lunchroom, and Graves prints off the DPAC minutes and updates from the website ([www.dpac.net](http://www.dpac.net)) to pass around.

“We were thinking of asking someone from DPAC to come out and update us on what’s going on,” said Graves. “But it’s all in print, so we have all been reading about it on our own time. People go to the lunchroom looking for it. We can see what a difference we can make and that DPAC can make. This isn’t something where you give your money and never hear about it again. The minutes and updates are really good and very informative. We like that DPAC has three or four things, and they are hammering those thoughts and sending one message.”

DPAC’s charter board is organized by action groups, and they are bringing in producers from other regions of the country to form a second tier of adhoc members. While DPAC hears regional concerns with milk pricing, the main groundswell of support is for market transparency and price discovery as the key components of national dairy policy.

“I was at REB Consulting’s annual banquet for their customers in March, and one of the speakers was Bernie Morrissey,” said Bates from MHF. “He talked about what DPAC is doing, and what they are all about. It touched me personally. So the next morning I went to my boss, Darryl Alger, and said: ‘Hey. This is the real deal. We should think about giving monthly.’ Darryl agreed, and so we went with \$1000 a month. We’re right in it with our customers because 85% of our business is dairy feed. We appreciate all that DPAC is doing to get the farmer a fair price for his milk. It’s very obvious someone else is out there stuffing their pockets.”

For Mike Sensenig at Sensenig’s Feed Mill, the decision to give \$5000 to support DPAC was prompt. Within the first two weeks of reading about the formation of DPAC in November, Mike contacted two board members Jake Esh, Gordonville, and Dan Stoltzfus, Honey Brook, and invited them to breakfast to talk about the coalition.

“Karl, Scott and I talked it over and we felt we owed it to our customers to support DPAC in their efforts,” Sensenig relates. “We have 28 employees here, and we serve a lot of dairy farms. Without the dairy farmers, we wouldn’t have many employees. We’re in this for the long haul. Our feeling is that DPAC’s action for the future is something we wanted to do all we can to help it get going. We were ecstatic to see a group like this that will follow through and keep things going, even when the price of milk goes up.”

For Dennis Milhoan, president of Lancaster Dairy Farm Automation, the decision to give \$5000 in the form of monthly installments over five months was also made promptly within six weeks of DPAC’s formation.

“This is an organization completely directed by dairymen, and we could see that the direction they are going is to focus on the transparency of the milk pricing,” said Milhoan. “I didn’t see any other organization concentrating in that direction.”

Milhoan decided to donate to DPAC because “Dairymen need an organization run by dairymen with no outside influence. They need to have their own voice,” he explained. “I also like the fact that they are taking this effort beyond the borders of Pennsylvania because dairy policy is so much at the national level. From what I see, they have a thoughtful board of dairymen that are educating themselves and listening to the ideas of other sectors, but the bottom line is they make their own decisions as a board of dairymen. That’s what is needed in this situation today.”

For DPAC charter board member Doug Martin, a dairy farmer in Franklin County, Pa., it comes down to dairymen, themselves, stepping up to the plate with their support. “If we don’t contribute and control our own destiny someone else is going to,” he says. “We have an opportunity here in DPAC. I think we want to be in this ball game, and we as farmers need to step up to the plate and support this thing or someone else is going to make decisions, and we might not like what they decide.”

“We’re not asking people to hook up a manure tanker and drive to D.C. or to take their time away from their farms,” adds Ohio dairyman Alan Kozak, stressing that the steady flow of donations needs to continue. “I tell my friends back home that this board is made up of good dairymen who are working hard, spending their own time, energy and their own money supporting a positive agenda for dairy farmers and doing the things that the average dairy farmer doesn’t have time to do so we can push this agenda forward. I ask them to look at who we are and what we’re doing and then decide for yourself whether to give your support and add your name to the steadily growing list.”

The Dairy Policy Action Coalition is focused on market transparency and price discovery. Past and future updates in Farmshine describe the ongoing work of this coalition and its goals. This week, in fact, four board members—Duane Hertzler, Perry County, Pa.; Dan Stoltzfus, Chester County, Pa.; Alan Kozak, Holmes County, Ohio; and Cliff Hawbaker, Franklin County, Pa.—will accompany government relations consultant Dennis Wolff to Washington D.C. for meetings with Congress and USDA on legislation to fund and implement electronic reporting as authorized in the current Farm Bill. This is the cornerstone for improving dairy market transparency.

For more information about DPAC and how to help, visit [www.dpac.net](http://www.dpac.net) or call 800-422-8335 and ask for Bernie. While DPAC has received emails and letters from more than 500 dairy producers and has a correspondence list of nearly 1000, DPAC thanks the 155 individual dairy producers who have stepped forward with their financial support so far.

The coalition also gives special thanks to the following agribusinesses and associations for their donations from November 19, 2009 through April 6, 2010.

**Cream of the Crop Sponsors (\$5000 and above):** Morrissey Insurance, Ephrata, Pa.; Sensenig’s Feed Mill, New Holland, Pa.; Lancaster Dairy Farm Automation, Lititz, Pa.-Hagerstown, Md.; The Pennsylvania Dairymen’s Association; and Mark Hershey Farms, Lebanon, Pa. (Mark Hershey Farms has expanded their commitment to \$1000 a month ongoing.)

**Whole Milk Sponsors (\$2500):** Farmshine Newspaper, Brownstown, Pa.; and Fulton Bank, Lancaster-Lebanon, Pa.

**Fortified Skim Sponsors (\$1000):** Farmer Boy Ag, Myerstown, Pa.; Judsons, Inc., Columbia Crossroads, Pa.; C.B. Hooper, Inc., Intercourse, Pa.; Town & Country Cooperative, Ashland, Ohio; MM Weaver & Sons, Leola, Pa.; Cargill Nutrition Solutions.

**“Friend of DPAC” contributors (\$500):** King’s AgriSeeds 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.; Keystone Concrete Products, New Holland, Pa.

**Other donations ranging from \$50 to \$300:** Ruhl Insurance, Manheim, Pa.; Bradford County Holstein Association, New Albany, Pa.; Douglas Wallick Agency, Camp Hill, Pa.; Balsbaugh Insurance Agency, Schaefferstown, Pa.; Matt Davis Custom Harvesting, Troy, Pa.; Dairy Facts LLC, Kimberly, Idaho; Fulton Bank Ag, Lebanon, Pa.; Metzler Bros. Inc., Martinsburg, Pa.; Metzler Bros. Tank, Truck, Trailer, Martinsburg, Pa.; W.L. Zimmerman & Sons, Intercourse, Pa.; Taurus Service Inc., Mehoopany, Pa.; Richard Mellinger, Select Sires, Lancaster, Pa.; J&J Silo, Gordonville, Pa.; Middletown Grange #684, Penns Park, Pa.

\*\*\*\*\*