

Pennsylvania Milk Marketing Board
Carol A. Hardbarger

History is Like an Iceberg – You Can Only See Part of It!

When we think about the history of the dairy industry in Pennsylvania, the tendency is to compartmentalize it—separate it from other commodity areas, so to speak. In reality, Pennsylvania’s dairy industry is shaped by a diversity that sometimes makes understanding all its needs very difficult. How do we make sense of that diversity?

Pennsylvania has 93 major soil series, 10 topographical regions and a growing season that ranges from about 117 to over 200 days. Add to those social, economic and cultural factors, market conditions and transportation. Cultural differences and long-held notions about farming evolved from the various ethnic groups that settled in the state, usually in different regions.

Settlers in southeastern and southcentral Pennsylvania came primarily from the British Isles and German-speaking Europe. The northern tier was initially settled by migrants from New England and New York and the southwest area of the state by people from West Virginia, Maryland and Virginia along with some from eastern PA. The cultural and ethnic differences of these groups shaped development of farming systems such as the types of barns, role of women and choice of products, and continue to shape ideas and attitudes today.

When I first came to the Milk Marketing Board, I brought with me a frame of reference that included my German grandparents. It seemed as if there was a “hard way” to do something, that is how it would be done. They were slow to adopt innovations, but I now realize that they wanted to be sure their financial investment in something new would not be a waste of their carefully guarded resources. When the state forced the addition of an electric bulk milk tank (to supplant the previously used spring house for cooling), the addition included a new barn, silos and equipment. Well thought out purchases and construction.

The diversity of Pennsylvania dairy operations and my own experiences have begun to shape how PMMB views its role. While we must and do enforce the Milk Marketing Law, corresponding regulations and orders, we also are evolving to a more individualized approach to working with persons and businesses we serve. Our intent is that email messages, phone calls, and other communications will be responded to in a highly personalized way.

We understand that our farmers each live and work in unique situations and that our processing plants operate in similarly unique markets, with culturally different customers and workforces. There is no “one size fits all” solution to some of the problems they encounter and, to the extent that PMMB can, under the law, we are committed to approaching the current issues in the dairy industry with a heart to help. Helping sometimes means listening to a farmer who calls me on Saturday morning, sometimes there is more that we can do.

Our agricultural diversity is our strength and will continue to be so as long as we recognize and embrace it. For your part, you can help support Pennsylvania’s unique agricultural heritage and

its dairy industry through buying locally sourced products. And if you have the opportunity, you will find that each area of the state offers some unique products based on its history.

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