

PA Milk Marketing Board
Carol A. Hardbarger and Steven Zalman

PMMB Response to COVID-19

Correction: In my recent article, “*Dairy Farm Losses – How Does PA Stack Up with Others in the Top 10,*” there is a typographical error. Several comparisons in the text should read, “2010 – 2019” instead of “2015-2019.” I apologize for any confusion this error may have caused.

The Milk Marketing Board and staff began working at home on March 16 following the orders of Governor Wolf to all state agencies. Several of the things that we do – publication of monthly prices, as one example, are done by deadline and are dependent on a working internet and the ability of staff to communicate either by phone or electronically. We experienced a few connection issues, but for the most part we are conducting “business as usual.” Some of our staff have made trips to the office to work alone to handle bulk printing tasks and process invoice payments.

Most of our field auditors are based from home, so for them nothing changed other than audits that used to be conducted on-site must now be performed remotely. Those dealers previously receiving on site audits were asked to submit their paperwork electronically. Staff auditors based in the Harrisburg office began conducting audits remotely at home. The entire audit staff already had Network laptops and were able to connect to state networks using Virtual Private Network (VPN) technology.

The first major issue related to COVID-19 faced by the Board was to address school closings and the impact on the dairy industry. We realized that milk dealers might have excess inventory of half-pints of milk as a result of the closings. A decision was made to not enforce minimum prices on half-pints through March 31 so dealers could rid themselves of inventory in storage and switch their production lines to meet the increased demand for half-gallons and gallons of milk at the retail level.

A similar decision was made regarding milk products such as sour cream. With the closing of restaurants and certain other institutions, some dealers and subdealers had excess inventory of those products. PMMB responded with relaxation of the minimum pricing on those products.

The industry continues to adjust to the changes created by COVID-19 and it may be possible that school and office closings will extend well into April or May. We anticipate that the Board will be addressing inventory and price issues created by those closings for their duration. We want all Pennsylvanians to know that the Board and staff are working hard to ensure that issues are dealt with in a timely fashion and that decisions provide the best possible solution for them. We are committed to making sure that Pennsylvania consumers continue to have a safe and adequate supply of fresh milk.

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

