

Pennsylvania New and Beginning Dairy Producer Transition Initiative

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The objective was to identify educational needs in order to develop customized extension educational programs for new and beginning dairy producers. Through a series of focus groups attended by both beginning dairy producers and senior dairy producers, researchers gathered data specifically related to: (1) business characteristics and strategies for successful transitions, (2) limitations in the current business climate, (3) key resources that were utilized in successful transitions and (4) resources or educational programs that were needed by transitioning dairies. The focus groups' participants utilized specialized software to enter responses in a group setting with anonymous data collection. This computerized method allowed for rapid collection of data in a short timeframe and resulted in identifying key areas necessary for successful transitions. Those key areas, along with gaps in knowledge or resources that were identified, were used to develop interactive webinars for new and beginning dairy producers. The monthly webinars gave new and beginning dairy producers access to experts and information at their businesses, or a nearby location where local industry collaborators hosted the training. Topics for subsequent sessions were chosen by participants. A final survey showed that participants found the webinars convenient, easy, and effective. Topics like risk management, decision making, and business strategies were well received when participants could learn new information and interact with experts to have their questions answered. Short, regular web-based education that allowed for participant interaction was effective in meeting educational needs and providing useful information to new and beginning dairy producers.