



## What Are the Critical Points to Success of Your Family Business?

By John Frey, Executive Director,  
Center for Dairy Excellence

**Editor's Note:** This is a special feature from the Center for Dairy Excellence exclusively for the Farmshine newspaper.

Ninety-nine percent of dairy farms in Pennsylvania are family owned, and many have been owned by the same family for multiple generations. That is a statistic we use a lot at the Center because it speaks to the uniqueness of Pennsylvania's industry and the passion families have for their farms.

While working side by side with your parents, siblings, and children can offer many benefits and rewards, it also comes with challenges. Maintaining open, two-way communications is critical to the success of any family business.

Next month's Pennsylvania Dairy Profitability Forum will focus on the health of the business, farm, and family. Held in two locations on Nov.

16 and 17, the forum offers low-cost solutions to enhance on-farm performance and profitability.

This year we are pleased to have Mike McGrann, executive director of the S. Dale High Center for Family Business in Elizabethtown, there to share "Critical Points for Long-term Success in a Family-owned Business."

Working with many of the family businesses that make up the backbone of central Pennsylvania's economy, the Center for Family Business's mission is to serve and strengthen families in business through succession planning, leadership training and legacy building. The organization is recognized as one of the oldest and largest centers in the country.

In preparation for this discussion, we have invited three farm families to share what they believe are critical to the success of their family-owned business. We hope you will find their insight useful as you enhance your own processes to maintain

open, two-way communications in your business.

Please plan to join us at one of the Dairy Profit Forums next month. The event will be held at the Farm Show Complex in Harrisburg on Tuesday, Nov. 16. On Nov. 17, it will be held again at the Clarks Mill United Methodist Church near Sandy Lake.

To register or learn more about the forum, visit [www.centerfordairyexcellence.org](http://www.centerfordairyexcellence.org). Click on "Dairy Profitability Forum" under the News and Events section of the homepage. Or call 717-346-0849 for more details.



Mike McGrann



### THE RISSER FAMILY *Meadow Vista Farms* Bainbridge, Lancaster Co.

Brothers Gerald and Don Risser and Don's son Eric are partners at Meadow Vista Dairy. Gerald's three sons, Jason, Justin and Jordan also work on the farm, which includes 750 milking cows and 800 acres of cropland.

#### How do you maintain open communication?

"First of all, there is a high level of respect for each on a couple of different levels," said Don. "We respect the individuals involved in the dairy, both personally and for their knowledge base, skill level, and talents."

"Each person has their area of responsibility, and all six of us try to get together once a week to check schedules and put our heads together. We ask questions and expect honest answers, and we expect each other to ask for help when we need it."

**What is critical to your success?** "Maintaining a positive attitude ranks high," said Don. "Each of us make decisions and make mistakes, and it goes a long way if you're not jumping down each other's throats all of the time."

"The business also needs to be adequate size to support business partners and interests. You need to let each person develop their skills in their area of expertise and not force people to work in areas where they don't feel comfortable."

"We encourage each other, keep things challenging and share in recognition."



### THE HOFFMAN FAMILY *Kar-Dale-Acres/Hoffman Farms* Shinglehouse, Potter Co.

Dale and Carol Hoffman are the sole proprietors in a 700-cow dairy operation, where they farm 1,500 acres and raise 100 dairy beef steers each year. All four of their children are involved in the dairy. Keith serves as the herdsman, while Brad oversees crops and heifers. Tricia and Josh work part time on the dairy.

#### How do you maintain open communication?

"The main office in the barn is where everyone gravitates to get messages and meet informally in the morning," said Tricia. "We stick to our individual schedules, but as something new comes along, we discuss it with everyone as they pass through."

"We give each other the courtesy and room to get the job done and listen to each other for new ideas and options."

**What is critical to your success?** "Critical to our business success are trust and respect," Tricia said. "We need to trust each other to do the best job they can."

"Along with the four of us, there are eleven grandchildren who have an interest in the farm and who help out in the summer. Change is inevitable, and having each other to listen to and to come up with ideas together has helped us all adapt to the future."

"Our common goal is to be financially successful. We want to have something to pass along to future generations."



### THE KLINE FAMILY *Klinedale Farms* Myerstown, Lebanon Co.

John and Sharon Kline milk 130 cows and farm 340 acres, with the help of their five sons — Jason (21), Joshua (18), Jared (17), Jessie (14) and Jacob (12). Jason works full time on the farm and manages the genetic aspects of the business. All of the other four boys also have responsibilities on the farm.

#### How do you maintain open communication?

"At age 47, I've learned to use texting," John said. "I text quite a bit with my boys, and it works. If Jason is up late doing the evening milking, he will leave me a text rather than a note, and it works for us."

"We also force ourselves to sit down and talk about things at the table. We talk about what the day will look like and what tasks need accomplished."

**What is critical to your success?** "When I think of success, I think of keeping our boys interested in the farm," said John. "One of the things we did early on is let our children make decisions on cattle purchases. I allowed them to take risks and be involved in the genetic selection of our herd, and that has really sparked their interest."

"The boys are involved in 4-H and enjoy showing, which they enjoy. As a family, we all work together to get tasks done. If one of the boys has activity at school or another obligation, we all pitch in so they can do that."