Plain Talk

By Elwood Kirkpatrick
President

Strong MDA Leadership Critical to Overall Industry Success

The announcement of Dan Wyant's resignation from the Michigan Department of Agriculture is met with mixed emotions. We can understand his desire to move closer to family and pursue other industries, however the agriculture industry will miss his contributions to our business.

The dairy industry has always maintained a tight working relationship with the Michigan Department of Agriculture to adhere to the many regulatory aspects of our industry. Traditionally, the MDA had been perceived as the watchdog over the industry. However, in recent years under the leadership of Dan Wyant, our relationship with the MDA has grown to be more of a partnership between the agriculture industry and the department.

I believe part of this change was by design. Dan Wyant came to the department with a strong first-hand knowledge of the industry, and had a firm grasp on the realities of farming. And part of the relationship change was thrust upon us with the Bovine TB crisis, which took place early in Dan's tenure. Under Dan's leadership all concerned parties were brought together to address the situation and open communication was established between the department and the industry. It was this working relationship, with Dan's determination, that saw us through the crisis and eventually led to Michigan receiving its split-state status. His determination in securing federal split-state TB status has helped most of Michigan's dairy and cattle industry save millions of dollars in testing costs.

I believe Dan's successful tenure at the department was rooted in his compassion for the industry and his willingness to discuss issues and ideas with varying groups of concerned people.

The strong working relationship between the department and the industry also led to the creation and implementation of the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program, a truly unique, proactive program that gives participating farmers environmental assurance in lieu of being permitted by the state. The MAEAP program has become a template for other states looking to address environmental concerns.

I believe Dan's successful tenure at the department was rooted in his compassion for the industry and his willingness to discuss issues and ideas with varying groups of concerned people. Dan's background and knowledge also made him an outstanding spokesperson for the industry.

Dan's practical and open approach to his position was appreciated by those that worked with him. We hope to continue the working relationship established under Dan's leadership with the new director of Agriculture, Mitch Irwin. It appears that Dan has established an effective infrastructure within the department that reflects his leadership style which may hopefully keep the partnership arrangement in tack.

On behalf of MMPA members, I want to thank Dan for a job well done and wish him all the best in his new role. We also look forward to continuing our working relationship with Mitch Irwin, the newly appointed MDA director.