



# *Michigan's Dairy Fieldman of the Year*

## **Gerry Volz**

*Gerry reviews a milking system performance report with MMPA member Joe Vohwinkle.*

By Mindy Pratt

**M**MPPA members in northeastern Michigan were pleased to learn their MMPA Member Representative Gerry Volz, was named Michigan Dairy Fieldman of the Year.

During a day of routine stops at member farms to perform inspections, drop off reports and discuss various cow health issues, several members congratulated Gerry and noted he was very deserving of the accomplishment.

"Gerry always walks on the farm with a smile on his face," says MMPA member Anne Daniels. "He is very friendly, helpful and encouraging. It is easy to sit down at the table and talk to him about anything happening on the farm."

Gerry received the award during the Michigan Dairy Industry Conference held in Lansing on May 10. As a surprise, his wife Linda, and son, Ryan, were on hand to help him receive the award. The annual educational conference is held for all individuals working in Michigan's dairy industry as field representatives, dairy farm inspectors, and laboratory personnel. All MMPA member representatives and laboratory technicians attend the conference.

As a youngster, Gerry learned about the dairy business by milking cows and hauling manure on his family's MMPA dairy farm in Minden City. He attended Michigan State University, graduating from

the Ag Technologies program in 1973. Later that year, he began his career as a field representative for Borden's, serving farms in Michigan's thumb area. He became an MMPA Member Representative when MMPA took over Borden's farms in 1974.

"One day I was working for Borden's, the next day I was working for Michigan Milk," Gerry says. "I like working on farms, my grandpa really wanted me to stay on the family farm. But everybody back then thought you should get an education, so I did."

He moved to his current position serving MMPA farms in northeast Michigan in the early 1980's when the member representative in that area retired. He currently covers Ogemaw, Iosco, Oscoda, Alpena, Presque Isle, Alcona and Montmorency counties.

"I always liked it up north, so I took this chance to get there," Gerry says.

Gerry's dairy background coupled with the knowledge he gained at MSU and through continuing educational opportunities with MMPA gives him the right tools to help his farms when they are in need. His willingness to help and positive attitude is greatly appreciated by the members.

"We have worked with Gerry since the late 1980's when my husband, Charles, and I first signed our contract with MMPA," says MMPA member Julie Nelkie. "When we had some issues and wanted

to lower our somatic cell count, Gerry spent a day with us in the parlor. He is always readily available, congenial and willing to work with you."

Even when he has bad news to deliver, Gerry maintains his friendly demeanor about him and is eager to work on the problem with the members, according to Anne.

"He can present your faults in a constructive yet not demeaning way," agrees Julie. "If we disagree with something he has to say, he deals with it well."

On any given day, Gerry can be found assisting with a whole herd test, performing a milking system check, doing a Grade A inspection, meeting with members who want to improve their milk quality or a number of other duties. The range of responsibilities his job requires and variety of people and farms he comes into contact with keeps things enjoyable and interesting for Gerry.

"I like this job – there is something different happening every day," Gerry says. "I worked in a factory for a few months after college – everything was the same. I did not like that. I like working with the farmers, working together to help them make the quality of the milk they ship better. I also like seeing all of their operations. Every farm is different."

This year, Gerry took on a new responsibility as one of six MMPA member representatives conducting Milking Systems Performance Assurance Program (MSPAP) checks for members. As a MSPAP Specialist, Gerry performs vacuum checks,



*Gerry makes a quick stop at MMPA member Gallagher Dairy Farm to set up a milking system appraisal appointment with member Richard Beck.*

graphs pulsators, checks temperatures and other items to analyze the entire milking system of member farms that participate in the program.

"Gerry does not let his tenure of 30 plus years with MMPA stop him from growing and learning new ways to assist our members every day," says MMPA Director of Member Services Gary Trimner. "He has recently taken on the added responsibility and commitment to learn the highly technical information required to become one of our Milking Systems Performance Assurance Specialists."

*MMPA's MSPAP service is available for a fee to all members who wish to receive optimum performance from their dairy's milking system.*



*MMPA member Julie Nelkie discusses with Gerry the Johne's disease protocols she uses on the farm to keep the herd healthy.*



*Gerry stopped at a few farms before tracking down milk hauler Gilbert Hall in order to give him a member's well water sample to be delivered to MMPA for testing.*