

MSU Dairy Farmer of the Year

Harold Cnossen

MMPA board member and Falmouth area dairy farmer Harold Cnossen was officially honored on February 9 as Michigan State University's Dairy Farmer of the Year during the Great Lakes Regional Dairy Conference held in Frankenmuth.

"This is such a tremendous honor – one that I did not expect," Harold comments. "I was surprised and feel very honored."

The award was bestowed on Harold based on the significant leadership roles he has played during his lifetime as a dairy farmer.

"The Dairy Farmer of the Year Award recognizes leaders in the dairy industry that have had a real impact in the dairy industry as a whole – people involved in off-farm activities that have contributed to the dairy industry," says Dr. Karen Plaut, chair of the MSU Department of Animal Science.

"This honor shows appreciation for the time I have taken off the farm," Harold says. "It is not just my award, because I could be away from home because my wife and family were here to take care of the farm, or I never could have left."

Harold is a third generation dairy producer, farming on the same land as his grandparents did.

He takes pride knowing that his grandchildren also plan to operate the family's Centennial farm in the future.

Three generations of the Cnossen family are currently involved in the day-to-day operation of Prosperous Dairy Farm, including Harold and his wife Karen, their son Bob and daughter-in-law Daralee, and grandchildren, Mike and wife, Nikki, Matt, RaeMarie and Robert Jr. The couple also has three other children, Bill, Darwin (deceased) and Kris.

As a child, Harold always knew he wanted to follow in his father's dairy farming footsteps. Even as a youth, Harold excelled as a leader, taking part in FFA forensic competitions and served as one of the first state FFA farm forum contest chairmen. He was also involved in 4-H, and served as a member of the local youth fair board.

"My FFA experience started me on the road to leadership," Harold says. "I participated in public speaking while I was in FFA and those experiences showed me that I could get up in front of people and speak."

Following high school, he spent 2 years as a DHIA Supervisor (now called technician), going to other farms in the area and taking milk samples.

During his



2007 MSU Dairy Farmer Harold Cnossen leans against the newer manure scraper he spends quite a bit of time in. Harold says the job has to be done and it works as a good way to keep an eye on the cows shown in the freestall barn on the facing page.

time as a milk tester, Harold was able to observe good and bad points of other dairy farms, and later utilize what he observed on his own farm. When he joined his father, Will, on the farm, the pair were milking about 20 cows. Over the years, Harold continued to grow the herd and farming operation. Today, he and his family have 400 registered Holstein cows plus replacements and grow all of their own feed on about 1,300 acres they farm.

Harold farmed with his father for several years before meeting his wife, Karen. Soon after they were married, the couple got involved in the Missaukee County Farm Bureau, where Harold served several years on the board. The couple has also been active members of the Falmouth Farm Bureau Community Group for 45 years.

Most of Harold's leadership experiences have revolved around the dairy industry. His first taste of leadership came when he was chosen as an officer for the MMPA Evert Local and was sent as a delegate to the MMPA Annual Meeting.



Harold received the award during the Great Lakes Regional Dairy Conference presented by Dr. Karen Plaut.

“MMPA has really been Harold’s emphasis,” Karen says. “His leadership has always been on the dairy side.”

The Cnossens were selected as MMPA’s Outstanding Young Dairy Couple in 1973. Their exposure to the dairy industry as OYDCs served as a springboard for Harold’s leadership experiences with MMPA. Soon after, he was elected the Evert Local President and was elected to serve on the MMPA Market Committee. He served as the very first secretary of the then newly formed MMPA Advisory Committee and also served as secretary of the MMPA

Resolutions Committee for many years.

“I was elected to the MMPA Board of Directors 19 years ago this March,” Harold says. He was first elected to a 1-year term as MMPA’s District 5 Director, taking the place of former MMPA board member Joel Chapin who passed away.

Harold has since been elected to 6 consecutive 3-year terms as MMPA’s District 5 Director. He announced his retirement from the MMPA board late last year and was honored for his commitment

to the dairy industry during the recent MMPA Evert Local Meeting.

In addition to MMPA, Harold has served as a National Milk Producers Federation Delegate and has been a member of the United Dairy Industry of Michigan board for the past 11 years, taking part in state and regional planning sessions. He also serves on the UDIM Finance Committee. Harold is the current chairman of the Michigan Dairy Market Program Committee and has held that position for the past 7 years, helping to decide where the dairy checkoff dollars are spent.

