

Elwood Kirkpatrick Reflects on his Presidency at MMPA



As his presidency with MMPA comes to a close, Elwood Kirkpatrick takes time out from his busy schedule to talk about the cooperative and the future of the dairy industry.

What has been most rewarding to you during your time as MMPA's President?

The loyalty of our members. We went through some pretty tough times, particularly when we owned McDonald Dairy and we were not outpaying our competition, but our members stayed loyal to the cooperative.

In what ways has MMPA changed since you first became President?

When I became president in 1981, we had about 8,700 members producing 3.1 billion pounds of milk. Today, we have about 2,400 members producing 3.6 billion pounds of milk. Membership continues to decline and our member farms are getting larger.

What are your proudest accomplishments as MMPA's President?

Probably when we were able to merge with Michigan Producers Dairy. It allowed us to control a larger amount of milk, which eventually led to our joint venture with Leprino Foods. That move has been very good for our members.

What suggestions would you give to young dairy farmers regarding their role in the cooperative?

I would advise young dairy farmers to be involved in their cooperative. From the grassroots level to leadership, it is the responsibility of all members to stay involved. We are each owners of the cooperative and we need to pay attention to management and cooperative finances.

What will you miss most about MMPA?

The people. Both the members and the staff. Over the years I have enjoyed meeting with members to talk about the industry and where we are going, I have enjoyed the support of the MMPA board of directors. We also have a very dedicated staff who all seem to have the attitude that MMPA is owned by dairy farmers and they operate accordingly and are very loyal to the organization.

What do you see as the biggest challenge for the dairy industry going forward?

Certainly as farms get larger we will face increasing demands in the area of the environment. We are also facing an increasing demand for corn and other feed grains so our feed costs will be higher. We will have to see prices for milk increase to cover these higher input costs.

