

MMPA Welcomes Two New Board Members

Some of the faces of MMPA's leadership changed during the cooperative's meeting season earlier this year. New MMPA Director Brent Wilson of Carson City is the new District 5 director and MMPA Director Mark Halbert, of Battle Creek, is the cooperative's newest at-large director. Both bring unique backgrounds and a vast knowledge of the dairy industry to MMPA's leadership.

Mark Halbert

Just a year after returning from college Mark Halbert and his family experienced an event that would be catalogued in Michigan history – their Battle Creek area dairy farm was one of 12 in Michigan to receive feed highly tainted with PBB, a fire retardant.

The farm eventually recovered and a few years later, Mark became a partner in the dairy farm, along with his father, Frederick, and his brother, Frederic. Today, he and Frederic farm in an LLC where they milk 1,500 cows and farm 3,100 acres.

Coming from what the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) terms as a Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) gives Mark an inside perspective and knowledge about permits and environmental compliance.

"I think it is important that we protect all farms – the small and the large farms," Mark says. "I grew up on what would be considered a small farm today, so I can empathize with farms of all sizes. It is important for our cooperative to maintain its diversity and farm size is part of the equation."

Mark was elected as one of three at-large directors to the MMPA board during the cooperative's annual meeting in March. Prior to his election to the board, Mark served on the MMPA Advisory Committee, as



The Halbert family: (back row l to r) Sarah, Jennifer and Allison, (front) Christy and Mark

the District 4 secretary and as a delegate. He formerly served on the United Dairy Industry of Michigan board of directors. As a representative of the MMPA's 13-member board, Mark will help guide the direction of MMPA and help to ensure a bright future for dairy farming.

"I like the science part of farming and want to keep moving forward and being more productive – I think most farmers are like that," Mark says. "We have to be because we are taking a smaller share of the food dollar than dairy farmers have in the past."

Mark says he is concerned with the way some organizations within the dairy industry represent their milk, claiming it is "healthier" – something that could create public doubt about conventionally produced milk, when there is no scientific evidence to prove that their product is better.

"Milk is milk, no matter how it is produced," Mark says. "What's important is for people to know that milk is a part of a healthy diet."

Mark and his wife, Christy have three daughters: Sarah, Allison and Jennifer.

Brent Wilson

MMPA's District 5 director Brent Wilson has experienced many facets of our dairy cooperative. He grew up on a MMPA member dairy farm, worked as a Member Representative for several years, became a member of MMPA and is now one of the cooperative's 13-member board that will help guide the direction of MMPA.

While Brent was in college, MMPA's then-General Manager, Jack Barnes, spoke to the Michigan State University Dairy Club when Brent was president of the club. Afterward, the two spoke about Brent's future in the dairy industry and possible opportunities with MMPA.

"He said, 'If you're going to go back to the farm, that's fine, but if not, I'd like to talk to you,'" Brent recalls.

For the next 5 1/2 years, Brent worked as an MMPA Member Representative in Grand Rapids. MSU Extension then recruited him to be the Gratiot County Extension Agent for the next 13 years.

While he was working full time, Brent continued

to purchase farmland and worked nights and weekends with his father on the Wilson family dairy farm. In 1981, Brent took over management of the dairy farm from his father and continued to run the farm and work full time as an extension agent. In 1990, at age 40, Brent chose to leave his tenured extension position to farm full time.

“I was actually running the farm and doing extension work for a number of years,” Brent says. “I decided I had to farm full time if I ever wanted to spend any time with my family. That was my mid-life career choice.”

Brent is the sole proprietor of Wilson Centennial Farm, a 390 cow, 2,700 acre dairy farm that has been in the Wilson family for more than 150 years.

“I really believe in the future of the dairy business in Michigan,” Brent says. “I think we have a competitive advantage with our temperate climate and the ability to grow our own feed for the cows. Cows are very productive here in Michigan compared to the rest of the nation.”

Part of the dairy industry’s future depends on sustainability and promoting the message that farmers are indeed good stewards of the land, according to Brent.

“I’m recycling more nutrients and using less chemicals than I was 5 or 10 years ago,” Brent says. “Every farmer who has a manure management plan is a good steward of the land. We need to be more proactive in



Brent and his wife, Nancy, on their dairy farm, Wilson Centennial Farms.

presenting that to the public.”

As a member of the GreenStone Farm Credit Services board of directors, Brent has experience in promoting agriculture’s agenda to Washington D.C. legislators. While serving on MMPA’s Advisory Committee, he also met with Michigan legislators to promote dairy friendly legislation.

As the District 5 director, Brent represents MMPA members in Gratiot, Montcalm, Mecosta, Missaukee, Wexford and Osceola Counties. He and his wife, Nancy, have three children: Tyler, Ben and Tara.

2007 MMPA District Outstanding Young Dairy Cooperators

Congratulations to the following individuals who have been selected to represent their MMPA District at the 2007 Outstanding Young Dairy Cooperator Conference in Novi on August 15-17.

District 1

No Nominee

District 2

Steve Post and Pam Shenk

Constantine Local
White Pigeon, MI

District 4

Brad and Monica Crandall

Battle Creek-Homer Local
Battle Creek, MI

District 5

Mike and Sonja Rasmussen

Alma Local
Edmore, MI

District 6

Aaron and Andrea Gasper

Saranac Local
Lowell, MI

District 7

Robert and Cheryl Rowley

St. Clair-Macomb Local
Richmond, MI

District 8

Dennis and Sara Lee

Deckerville Local
Deckerville, MI

District 10

Laura Daniels

Sunrise Local
Whittemore, MI

District 11

Jim and Tara Good

Grand Rapids Local
Caledonia, MI

District 12

Laura Rivard

Menominee-Vacationland Local
Daggett, MI