

MMPA On-Farm Services Make the Difference for this year's Quality Award Winners

When Tom and Shirley Carson became MMPA members in 2000, the number of member services available on the farm impressed them. They were also impressed with the number of farms that earned awards for high quality milk and they assumed the two might go together. So they set out to improve their milk quality by enlisting the services offered by the MMPA field staff.

In a relatively short period of time, they cut their somatic cell counts in half from 200,000 to con-

sistently below 100,000. Achieving their goal to produce better quality milk gave them a great deal of personal satisfaction, and this spring it has given them some notoriety as well.

Earlier this year the Carsons were named MMPA's top quality milk award winners, and they were also recognized on the national level for their quality milk production by being one of five dairy farms to be named a Platinum winner in this year's National Dairy Quality Awards program.

"We saw other members getting quality awards at the MMPA local meeting and set the goal to one day earn an award. We received the Bronze Quality award in 2002 and then the Gold award the next three years," Tom says. They earned the MMPA Top Quality Award with an average somatic cell count of 55,417, raw bacteria count of 1,000 and PI bacteria count of 1,500. The Top Quality Award winner is given to the MMPA member farm that produces the highest quality milk throughout the year.

Turning their quality levels around was a partnership effort between the Carsons and their MMPA Member Representative Dean Letter. The first step they took was to have Dean do a mastitis-causing organism culture on all the cows. From those samples they identified a Staph aureus problem. Knowing which cows carried the Staph aureus organism allowed the Carsons to separate those cows out or to milk them last. Over the past few years they have culled all the Staph aureus positive cows.

After completing the culture screen they also had Dean do a milking system analysis check in their flat-barn parlor. His advice was to update the pipeline to a 3" system and to install automatic take-offs.

"I could see where the larger pipeline could make a difference by pulling the milk away quicker, but I was surprised at the difference the automatic take-offs made on the teat ends. We thought we were getting them off in time manually but after we installed the take-offs we saw how much better the teat ends could be." Tom says.

The Carsons milk 75-80 cows in



an 9-stall flat-barn parlor that is attached to a freestall barn. The tight set-up puts some limitations on the way they feed but it works well for giving the cows individual attention as they are milked. Either Tom or Shirley is at every milking along with one of their sons Ryan and Eric. When they have to be away for a milking Tom's brother will help out.

Even though Tom has been milking cows for nearly 30 years they attended a milker training school a couple years ago. They came away with some new ideas and changed the way they prepped the cows. They believe incorporating things they learned at milker trainer school help to increase their milk quality.

"We are not afraid to ask questions or learn something new," Shirley says. "Some people think they already know all there is to know, but we believe there is still a lot to learn. Once we knew what we needed to do to get better we couldn't make any excuses for not having better quality."

Tom adds, "I was surprised at the difference wearing gloves makes, they really proved to us at the milker training that it is impossible to keep your hands clean from germs while milking."

The Carsons prep the cows for milking with a sanitized dairy wipe and prestripping. They use an iodine-based post dip after milking.

"We brush the teat ends with a paper towel before using the dairy wipes and find that does a good job cleaning the teats," Tom says.

The Carsons take their time while milking, making sure the cows are properly prepped and the area is kept clean. At each cow rotation any manure around the milkers is scraped into the gutter, keeping the milking area clean. They also go out of their way to make sure the cows are comfortable in the milking stanchion. Tom believes that the cows need to be content while milking or they won't let their milk down properly.

"We do baby the cows," Tom says. "But it makes a difference if



Tom and Shirley Carson pictured above with their sons Ryan (left) and Eric.

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- Tom Carson

the cows are calm while they are milking."

Now that the Carsons have their quality levels where they want them, they are working to keep them steady. They use a California Mastitis Test (CMT) on any suspect cows to catch early signs of mastitis. They will treat a cow if needed, but chronic cases will be culled. They also rely on their DHI records to track individual cows.

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MMPA Member Representative Dean Letter works closely with Tom during a milking to CMT suspect animals and to do a milking systems analysis check.

Kirkpatrick Research Fund Established

At the MMPA Annual Delegate Meeting held March 20, 2007, Ken Nobis announced the establishment of the Elwood Kirkpatrick Dairy Science Research Fund in the Department of Animal Science at Michigan State University. This endowment fund recognizes Elwood's long-standing dedication and contributions to the dairy industry during his 26 years as MMPA President. It also provides a means for the dairy industry to fund research activities important to our industry.

The MMPA board of directors has established the endowment to help carry out the mission of the animal agriculture initiative. The specific purpose of the endowment is to fund research and educational programs that lead to scientific advancement in the dairy industry.

MMPA provided the seed money to establish the endowment fund and is now looking for support from others in the industry who

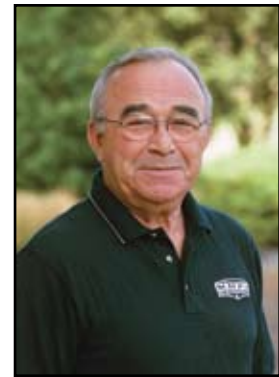
want to pay tribute to the years of service Elwood has provided the dairy industry.

"Elwood has made a tremendous impact on our industry," said MMPA President Ken Nobis. "One of the most notable and far-reaching impacts has been the establishment of the \$70 million Revitalization of Animal Agriculture Initiative. His work on this endeavor highlights his passion for equipping dairy farmers with the right research and education needed to make dairy farmers in this region competitive in the global market. This endowment is a fitting tribute to his lasting impact on the industry."

"We really appreciate that Elwood has always been a strong supporter of the MSU dairy program through his 28 years at MMPA and are grateful that MMPA has developed this research endowment," said Karen Plaut, chair of the MSU Animal Science Department. "This

type of support will help us answer applied research questions that dairy farmers think are most important and continue the legacy that Elwood started with his support of MSU. This is a great example of the wonderful partnership between the dairy industry and the department that we plan to continue to foster well into the future."

Organizations or individuals wanting to make a contribution to the Elwood Kirkpatrick Dairy Science Research Fund may do so by contacting the MMPA Member Relations Department at (248) 474-6672 for a contribution form.



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"It doesn't make sense to keep treating a cow and holding out her milk," Tom says. "We are better off to cull her."

Dean Letter makes routine visits to check the milking system to be sure it is running properly. "We are very pleased with Dean," Tom says. "He comes out here when we are milking, sometimes at 5:00 in the morning to do a system check. We can't get that kind of service from the dealers anymore; they will check the system but not when we are milking. That makes a big difference."

The Carsons have also been working with NorthStar Cooperative to improve the genetics of the herd. Because they are a closed herd, using all their own replacements, they need to make the right breeding decisions to improve the herd. Through the NorthStar

mating service they are working to improve the feet and legs and udders of the younger cows.

"We are just trying to do the best we can with what we got," Shirley says. "We had the mindset that we were willing to do things differently in order to do things better. I think that makes a difference if you are willing to change some things."

The Carsons also give credit to their milk hauler, Doug Weiler, for helping them achieve the quality awards. They recognize the important role he plays in properly collecting and transporting the samples.

"Our milk hauler is top notch," Tom says. "He lets us know if something didn't run right at washing, he restocks our supplies and he pulls the samples the right way by making sure the tank is agitated properly. He is never in too much of a hurry to not do things the right way."

The Carsons are excellent examples of members who take advantage of the services available to them from MMPA. From the on-farm sampling and system check, to milker training schools and online test monitoring, the Carson used what was available to them to increase their quality and their profits.

"Farmers have so many services available to them through places like MMPA, NorthStar, feed co-ops etc., it is just a shame that so many people never use what is offered to them. Using the services we had made a big difference in our entire farm. Better quality milk and better overall herd health leads to more profits for the farm," Tom says.

The Carsons were recognized by MMPA at its annual meeting in March. They also traveled to Texas for the National Mastitis Council meeting in January.