



Got PACs? Do We Ever!

As cooperative members we intuitively understand the need to work together to achieve common goals. The principle behind political action committees is much the same. The contributions of many have more impact than individuals acting alone. The history of PACs dates back to the 1940s when, after legislation made political contributions by labor unions illegal, individuals pooled their contributions to gain more political clout. Since then, the use of PACs has grown to be an accepted and sometimes necessary part of our nation's political landscape.

While I now understand the need for PACs, I have to admit that I have not always agreed with the use of PACs for political contributions. I used to think that by contributing to a PAC I was giving up control of whom my contribution would support and would ask myself, "Since it is my money why would I want to give up that control?" My fear was that if I contributed to a PAC, the people who disbursed the money might support

somebody whose view of the world didn't match mine. So, for many years any political contribution I made went directly to the candidate of my choice.

When I was first elected to the MMPA board of directors 15 years ago, I was convinced my method of political contribution was correct. Along with the election to the board came new obligations and expectations, one of which was an expectation that board members would contribute to the Michigan Milk Political Action Committee (MMPAC). I reluctantly complied. How could I not participate knowing that 100 percent of the MMPA management staff contributed? I would have a guilty conscience knowing staff felt strongly enough about our industry to invest their own money to help shape our future.

It was then that I started seeing the political spectrum in a different light. I realized how disconnected people were becoming with the source of their food supply. That is not a criticism of consumers, but a realization of how far we have moved beyond the agrarian roots of our society. With that distancing, we face challenges from well-meaning people of how and why we follow the various practices we do to produce what we know is a very safe and nutritious food supply.

I arrived at a point in my thinking where I became aware there is more to this vocation of producing food than I had realized. I am becoming more and more con-

vinced that in addition to milking and feeding cows, we need to feed the consumers and policy makers (politicians) the knowledge of how and why we produce food the way we do.

Even though our association's PAC (MMPAC) is small when compared to the dollars other PACs have to work with, we have used our available money to educate and support candidates and legislators who in turn support dairy farmers. Our support of a candidate/legislator gives us the opportunity to have an open dialogue with that person to further explain our business and political needs. It also means that whoever delivers the message is representing not just him/herself, but a much larger group of people. A key portion of our message is always the economic impact that agriculture – and specifically the dairy industry, the leading commodity group in Michigan – has on the economic well being of the U.S. and Michigan. PACs provide the opportunity for a more focused delivery method, especially when it is followed up with individual members contacting their legislators to deliver the same message.

As you've noticed by now, I have become a strong supporter of the MMPAC now that I more fully understand the value of a PAC. The MMPAC provides an important mechanism to help deliver the message of what we do and why we are so important to the economy of this state. I no longer cringe when I send

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Agriculture Commission Names Donald Koivisto As New State Agriculture Director

The Michigan Commission of Agriculture named Donald W. Koivisto as the new director of the state Department of Agriculture during a special session held August 13 at the Lansing Center. He will begin his new position on September 4.

“Don is not only a strong advocate for Michigan agriculture, but has a wealth of knowledge and experience to further expand the state’s second largest industry,” said James Byrum, Commission chair. “He will be able to hit the ground running in terms of growing Michigan agriculture, especially in the areas of renewable fuels and food processing, which are critical to the continued diversification of the state’s economy.”

“Michigan agriculture is a rapidly growing sector of the state economy, and I’m looking forward to facilitating new opportunities as the state’s agriculture director,” said Koivisto. “As an advocate for agriculture, I plan to protect the industry base while increasing Michigan’s presence in other sectors, such as specialty crops and exports into the global marketplace.”

Koivisto, 57, was born and raised in the western Upper Peninsula, graduated from Central Michigan University in 1971, and currently has a Centennial Farm in Ellsworth where he grows corn, soybeans and hay. He was elected to the Michigan House of Representatives in 1980 where he served three terms and was chair of the House Agriculture Committee from 1984-1986. Additionally, he served 12 years in the state Senate after being elected in 1990 and was on the agriculture appropriations subcommittee. He is married with four children.

The Michigan Commission of Agriculture is a bipartisan body appointed by the Governor to provide oversight and policy direction for MDA programs, appoint the director of agriculture, and approve the rules and regulations the department promulgates.



Excellence in Dairy Promotion Award Nominations due by October 1

Do you know a Michigan dairy farmer that goes above and beyond his or her daily responsibilities to positively promote dairy products and the industry? If so, nominate that person for the Excellence in Dairy Promotion Award by October 1, 2007.

The Excellence in Dairy Promotion Award, sponsored by the Dairy Diplomats of Michigan, annually recognizes one outstanding Michigan dairy farm family member for his or her dedication to promoting dairy products. Qualified individuals will possess extensive dairy promotion accomplishments and volunteer service to the industry and his or her local community.

The award recipient will be announced during the Annual Dairy Product Promotion Seminar. The outstanding dairy promoter wins a free trip to the UDIM Annual Meeting and the Dairy Product Promotion Seminar, where they will be honored for their dairy promotion efforts.

Written nominations are accepted annually through October 1. Nominations must be postmarked by October 1 for consideration.

For more information, or to download an application, visit www.udim.org or call Staci Garcia at 800-241-MILK (6455).

MMPA Matters

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my contribution to the MMPAC, because I know it will be put to good use. It is too difficult for me as an individual to fully evaluate where my contribution will have the most impact. But, even though I am now a supporter, I did check my records as I wrote this column to confirm that I had indeed sent that check every year, and found that I had missed two out of the last six years. The oversight has

been corrected and my check has been cashed.

Don't be like me and forget to make your contribution to the MMPAC. If you have any questions concerning PAC contributions, please contact me or Sheila Burkhardt in the MMPA Novi office at (248) 474-6672.

Ken