



Quality Watch

By Gary Trimmer

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Farm Energy Audits

The rising cost of energy is a concern for all dairy farmers, no matter what size their farm is. As a result, there is a continued focus on reducing energy costs and renewable energy. Both Federal and State governmental agencies have energy efficiency programs and provide incentives for dairy farmers to conserve energy.

Dairy farmers need to be aware of funding opportunities and take advantage of those opportunities when they occur. In an effort to be ahead of the game and continue providing services to members, MMPA Member Representatives, Dean Letter and Michael Marvin, have received certification as Farm Energy Auditors.

The certification process took one year to complete and was led by Michigan State University (MSU). The certification involved three days of intense classroom study, one day on the job training in the field, one day reporting and evaluating practice energy audits, and then finally conducting an energy audit on their own. The trial energy audits were then reviewed by MSU Ag Engineering for approval and to complete the process. Dean Letter and Michael Marvin are two of only six people to become certified Farm Energy Auditors in Michigan this year through this program.

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This was the first year for the Farm Energy Auditors training program. This program was developed in coordination with MSU, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, Michigan Department of Agriculture, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Michigan Ag Electrical Council.

We expect the next farm bill will provide even more incentives for producers to increase energy efficiency. The 2002 Farm Bill Section 9005 would have provided funds for energy conservation education for producers but was not funded. However, Section 9005 is included in the upcoming 2007 Farm Bill and could be funded this time around.

Under the current farm bill, producers are able to receive grants and loans for implementing renewable energy projects and energy efficiency improvements. USDA, through Rural Development, has grants and loans available for such projects. These grants and loans are a part of the 2002 Farm Bill Section 9006. Dairy farmers can obtain grants to cover partial cost of energy efficiency improvements by reducing energy consumption.

To determine if energy is saved with the project, energy audits or assessments are required. Projects such as installing variable speed vacuum pumps and constructing energy efficient replacement facilities and implementing energy efficient projects by reducing energy use may be eligible for partial funding under the 2002 Farm Bill Section 9006.

To qualify for grants and loans, producers must apply prior to imple-

menting the project and must either conduct an energy audit or energy assessment. If a producer is considering making any energy efficiency improvements, they should contact the USDA Rural Development office at (517) 324-5157. Traci Smith is the program director.

If and when additional funding becomes available for energy efficiency projects, MMPA will keep you updated. Even if there are no funds available, it is a good idea to conduct an energy assessment or audit on your farm to lower energy costs. This service is available to our members at no cost. If you would like more information, please contact Dean Letter, Michael Marvin or the Member Services Department at the Novi office.

Indiana Grant Assistance Workshops

USDA Rural Development and the Indiana Office of Energy and Defense are hosting seven USDA Renewable Energy & Energy Efficient Program Workshops throughout Indiana during March.

The workshops are designed to help farmers understand and navigate the federal grant process required to apply for Section 9006 grants and loan guarantees.

For more information on the Indiana sessions, call (765) 336-9522 or e-mail katherine@causematters.