

# No Place Like Home

2008 MMPA District 12 OYDC Loren Hoolsema



**D**airy farming on the eastern side of Michigan's Upper Peninsula has its own set of challenges stemming from longer, colder winters and heavy soil that is difficult to farm. But for life-long residents like Loren Hoolsema and his family they couldn't imagine farming anywhere else.

"We like the quietness. We like the winters. We wouldn't want to live anywhere else," says Loren, this year's District 12 Outstanding Young Dairy Cooperator. "We don't have any problems with urban sprawl or neighbors complaining. We know everybody around here and we all get along."

Loren, along with brothers, Darrell and Eric, and their parents, Gerald and Ann, live and work on the family's 50-head dairy farm in Rudyard, Michigan. The family has milked cows on the farm since the 1980s. In 1997, Gerald took a full-time job at a local feed mill and Loren stepped in to take over the day-to-day responsibilities on the farm. Today, he and his brothers work together to manage the herd and work the 500 acres of cropland.

The Hoolsemas raise forages on most of their cropland because the soil in their area is not conducive to raising corn. Most of the hay they raise is put up in small square bales and sold to the horse farms. They market their hay through a broker, most of which ends up in South Carolina. The forages kept for their own use are stored in Ag Bags to be fed in the winter.

Since taking over the responsibilities on the farm, Loren has developed an intensive grazing program to better utilize the land around the farm. From May to late October the herd is turned out on the pastures. Having the cattle on pasture for five months reduces feed costs and labor to handle the manure.

"During the growing season we will move the fence lines every 12 hours

so the cows always have a fresh lot,” Loren says. “It is easier to check for heats when they are on pasture and we have less manure to handle.”

Supplementing the cows with grain while they are milked, has kept the herd’s milk production stable. The Hoolsemas use DHI testing to track production and somatic cell counts. Their current rolling herd average is over 22,000 pounds of milk.

Since 1997, Loren has worked to double the herd size using his own replacements. He uses a breeding program set up by Semex to improve the overall genetics of the herd. He selects bulls that will improve the feet and legs and udders of the cows. In the winter months, when the cows are in the barn, he uses the Ovsynch program to time heats and synchronize the breeding.

While the Hoolsemas don’t intend to add interval calving to their intensive grazing program, they do tend to have more cows calve in the fall months.

“We will breed the cows when they are ready and we catch them in heat. We use A-I breeding on all the cows and heifers,” Loren says. “We have tried some sexed semen, but we got a string of 13 heifers this year without it so we don’t see the need to use it.”

Like all dairy farmers, Loren is keeping a close eye on rising input costs and looking for ways to cut costs. While they raise all their forages, they have to buy all their grains. This past year Loren substituted ear corn for shelled corn in the ration because the ear corn was less expensive.

Freight charges, which have always been higher for the Hoolsemas due to their location, are also increasing causing, them to look for ways to cut costs. Due to their remote location they tend to keep more parts on hand. “We probably stock more parts than other people so we can combine shipping charges and not have to travel so far to get something when we need it,” Loren says.

Loren and all the 2008 District OYDCs will be recognized at the MMPA Annual Meeting in March.

## ~ Loren Hoolsema ~



### *One Thing that Makes a Difference on Our Farm is...*

*Intensive rotational grazing*

~ *MMPA Member of* ~

District 12

Chippewa local

~ *Herd size* ~

60 milking and dry

~ *Replacements* ~

60

~ *Acres Farmed* ~

500

~ *Milking Set-Up* ~

Tie stall barn and parlor

~ *Ag and Dairy Involvement* ~

Loren is an officer of the Chippewa MMPA local board and has served as a delegate to the annual meeting. He is also a member of DHI and has served as a Deacon for his church.