

# National Milk Producers Federation YC Conference

By Jeremy and Summer Werth, MMPA 2009 OYDC

We arrived in Texas ready to begin the 2009 NMPF/NDB/UDIA Joint Annual Meeting and soon realized the saying is true—things are bigger in Texas. The Gaylord Texan is a beautiful resort located in Grapevine, Texas, which turns out to be not only wine country but also the Christmas capital of Texas. The hotel hosts over four acres of a glassed-in planted atrium, which was lit up to help kick us into the holiday spirit. An indoor ice paradise complete with colored sculptures and an ice slide also sparked our holiday spirit.

We followed the map, but also took advantage of the bellman who showed us to our room and gave us a few helpful pointers. Later, we followed the signs and made our way to the Young Cooperator (YC) reception where we were greeted with true southern hospitality by National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF) staff and last year's MMPA Outstanding Young Cooperators Brad and Tonia Ritter. Also joining us were MMPA's 2009 OYDC Runners-Up Tom and Heather Wing.

We enjoyed a relaxed evening

of introductions, socializing and ice-breakers. We got a chance to meet other YCs and share experiences. Joan Horbiak was present with microphone and camera to interview people for her media training the next day and everyone gave good responses despite still being amateurs.

This year's theme was "Building Partnerships Building Opportunities Now More Than Ever." This seemed fitting looking back over the year and some of the challenges the dairy industry faced (cooperatives and producers). Through rock bottom milk prices to media and activists attacks, this industry still prevailed. As producers, we remain positive because we have a life long commitment to dairy farming. Along with the other approximately 90 YC members, that positive attitude prevailed and united us. Many shared "their story" of farm tours, breakfast on the farm, Internet videos and overall positive interaction of farming with the public. We are happy to say we did not hear any negative comments. Programs such as CWT, the

industry's growing partnerships with McDonald's, Domino's, and the new school program "Fuel Up to Play 60" with the NFL are marketing our product to consumers.

The NMPF YC meeting started off with a welcome from Jerry Kozak, President and CEO of NMPF and Tom Gallagher, CEO of Dairy Management Inc. (DMI) who discussed the events of the dairy industry and, more importantly, where it's heading in the future.

Our first speaker of the day was Jolene Brown with her topic of "10 Stupid Things that Families do to Break up their Business." This hit home to many people on many topics. Her down to earth demeanor and funny but true stories had everyone exchanging knowing glances. We farm with our family and could relate to some of her stories. We learned how to improve our relationships and to treat "family as family and business as business." There were many key topics such as: have a business plan, educate don't expect, just because they are family doesn't mean they are entitled, wills, and to have a positive attitude.

Our next speaker was Joan Horbiak on media training. Joan discussed the importance of promoting a positive image about farming today and how to speak to the public. We started out with mouth aerobics and proper body language. We got to see ourselves from the previous evening on two big screens. She told us that with the Internet and the media focus on food today it is important that the correct information is being portrayed in the media. Today more than ever people want to make sure they are buying a safe "nutrient rich" product and that animals are well taken care of and not mistreated. We learned how to



MMPA 2009 OYDC Runners-Up Tom and Heather Wing and MMPA OYDC Summer and Jeremy Werth participated in NMPF's YC Conference



The NMPF staff answered questions on topics ranging from CWT to regulatory issues to milk pricing during the Town Hall session prior to the start of the Joint Annual Meeting's General Session.

word things and keep a positive light on farming. With only two percent of the public educated on farming people can easily be misled.

After a few milk breaks and a wonderful lunch, our next speaker, Gary Sipiorski, discussed topics relating to the economy. Gary currently works for Vita Plus and spent several years working with Citizens State Bank as an agricultural loan officer. He was very informative on the state of the U.S. economy in relation to the dairy industry. He explained the volatile dairy market and spoke optimistically to us as young producers. He spoke about generations and the money market today. He states "teach your children well" about the way to manage money and to start young.

The next speaker was Dr. Wes Jamison, who spoke on the animal rights movement and agriculture's answer. Dr. Jamison explained animals' correlation with religion and the politics of the Humane Society of The United States (HSUS). Although this is a touchy subject, it is here and present in our industry today and we need to hear the harsh facts. In today's society people are viewing animal rights as equal to human rights. There are many pet owners who view their pets as very important family members and not just pets. He states that consumers are very hypocritical, demanding unreasonable animals rights at times while remaining "meatatarians" and viewing one animal as a friend and another as food. Although controversial at

times, he stressed today's issues with animal activists in the dairy industry and what may lie ahead.

After a full day of farming knowledge we piled on shuttles to share an evening of dinner and dancing at Austin Ranch. We got a chance to socialize with other YC's from all over the U.S. Then we had a "real big time" (as they say in the south) line dancing.

The next morning the YC leadership and development started out with breakfast and speakers David Pelzer and Jolene Griffin. David is senior Vice President at DMI and deals with issues management and crisis preparedness, along with producer communications, and relationship building efforts in national agribusiness. Jolene Griffin is manager of Industry Communications at DMI. She informed us on the myDairy social media program for dairy advocates. She's getting producers to spread a positive image of farming through Internet media tools such as Facebook, Twitter and other interacting sites.

The next speaker was Gary Matteson from Farm Credit Counsel. Gary shared stories of his experiences as a board member starting up a small business and financial responsibility.

At the beginning of the Town Hall Meetings, NMPF CEO Jerry Kozak discussed restructuring of the milk pricing for the 2012 Farm Bill and the CWT program. Peter Vitaliano, NMPF VP of economic policy talked about the economic

graphics and charts in relation to the increase of milk prices due to the CWT program and what is in store for the future. The audience had a chance to interact with NMPF's staff during the town hall meeting and was able to ask questions of their qualified staff. Everyone must have been paying attention due to all the good questions asked.

We had an opening luncheon next with guest speaker Daryl "Moose" Johnston, former Dallas Cowboys pro fullback and FOX sports analyst. Daryl spoke highly of agriculture and enthusiasm towards the new program "Fuel Up to Play 60." He talked of the importance of nutrition and physical activity in children especially with the rising number of child obesity and diabetics. And, of course, football.

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front and center,” Gallagher said. Now, DMI and the NFL are working toward a partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) because they, too, see the positive impact this program can have on kids.

Within three weeks of the program’s launch, 50,000 schools have signed on to participate, and 150,000 school children have registered online to track their progress, he said.

“This program has also caught the attention of the health professional community, business partners, because of its unique aspects and the positive impact it can have on our nation’s youth,” Gallagher said.

### **Reasons for Optimism**

“These partnerships, plus three other significant factors, lead me to be optimistic about dairy sales in 2010 and beyond,” Gallagher said. The three factors are:

1. The industry has a shared vision and a roadmap through the globalization study conducted for the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy to analyze international dairy opportunities. “That study indicates that there is a growing marketing for U.S. dairy exports if the industry capitalizes on it,” Gallagher said.

2. The global economic meltdown has not changed the fact that there will be more people in more places with more money who want dairy products.

3. The U.S. dairy market is a growth market. Gallagher pointed to the recent history of U.S. per capita consumption of dairy products. Between 1951 and 1972, consumption declined by 175 pounds. From 1972 to 1983, consumption flattened out. From 1983, the year the national dairy checkoff was enacted, to the present, sales have increased more than 80 pounds per capita.

“If you give people what they want, when they want it, and where and how they want it, the U.S. is an incredible market for growth,” he said. “Look at what happened with school milk. Look what can happen with pizza, if it’s fresh, and tastes good. Look what can happen with McDonald’s with specialty beverages. This is a growth market. And it’s is going to get better with innovation.”

The dairy checkoff responded quickly in 2009 to increase sales while still advancing the long-term goals. Through partnerships, the dairy checkoff is well positioned to grow global dairy demand and sales in 2010 and beyond, Gallagher said.

At the close of the meeting, the nearly 1,000 dairy farmers attending the meetings left armed with information and hope for the future.

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After lunch, the General Session of the Joint Annual Meeting began with host speaker Mike Adams, Agri-talk radio. Next, Representative Collin Peterson, Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee discussed the role he played in writing the 2008 Farm Bill. After the meetings, all were invited to sample feature winning NMPF Cooperative Cheeses.

That evening we got the opportunity to attend dinner with Michigan Milk Producers Association board members, staff and guests. It was a nice chance to visit with fellow Michiganders and discuss the trip and the wealth of information we received.

On Thursday, Dave Brandon Chairman of the Board and CEO of Domino’s Pizza took the stage. As the second largest pizza chain he explained innovative menu options including 40 percent more cheese on specialty pizzas and the marketing behind them. As an added bonus we got to sample those very pizzas.

The general session continued with guest speaker Clinton Anderson, partner of Bain & Company. Specific to the dairy industry, Anderson spoke of global issues ranging from milk sourcing, supply chain management, sales and management strategies. We also had a chance to sit in on sessions including methane digesters and the pros and cons of the investment.

As our day drew to an end, the YC conference concluded with much help and organization from Mary Knigge, NMPF YC Coordinator. We discussed future events for the YC council and voted for chair positions. Our dinner session was pleasant with entertainment from country singer and song writer Dean Brody.

We would like to sincerely thank Michigan Milk Producers Association for allowing us this opportunity to represent our co-op. We are looking forward to serve as MMPA’s Outstanding Young Dairy Cooperators and greatly appreciate this opportunity to “build partnerships, and build opportunities now more than ever.”



*NMPF YC Coordinator Mary Knigge recognized MMPA 2008 OYDC Tonia and Brad Ritter as chaircouple of the NMPF YC Committee.*