



Local Meetings Matter

The local annual meetings have been an enjoyable experience for me again this year. My travels have taken me from Hillman in the north to Middlebury, Indiana in the south, from Bad Axe in the east to Dowagiac in the west, and to various points in between. The driving conditions have varied from dry to slippery, and in both cases there has been plenty of snow cover to make for some very beautiful scenes.

As I drive, I spend some of my time thinking about the Local Meeting process and how important it is to the success of MMPA. We have 39 locals in our cooperative, and they each have an annual meeting. Each meeting is attended by members who belong to that local, of course, but also by the Director from the District, at least one Advisory Committee member, and either me, John Dilland or one of the other members of our management staff. We attend these meetings to disseminate information on a personal level and also, maybe more importantly, to hear firsthand your thoughts about your cooperative and what we can do better to improve each member's success.

Every year it seems as if there are more issues to discuss. This year, especially, was a time when so many issues needed discussion that it was difficult to discuss anything in depth. The poor economy of the world leading to drastic cuts in milk prices without a corresponding major cut in input costs is a subject that could have consumed the allotted meeting time all by itself.

Given the milk price outlook, I thought I might have some material from questions asked at local meetings to discuss in this column, but that is not the case. While questions were few, we did discuss pricing at every meeting I attended. The feeling of the members has been "I don't like it, but I knew it had to come, so we'll just have to work through the obstacles that low prices present" and then we moved on to another subject. This leads me to believe most of our members think they can ride out the storm and still be in business when the economy rebounds. Most of us understand the reasons behind the low prices we are facing in the near future. I wonder if reports of increasing prices may have prompted more discussion. With all the media reports of "doom and gloom," good news would likely have caught us off guard.

We discussed the CWT actions of 2008, including the two herd retirement programs and the record use of the export assistance portion of CWT. Comments that I heard indicate that member sentiment regarding CWT remains positive.

Animal well-being was discussed at each local meeting I attended. The passage of Proposition 2 in California and the impact it will have on animal agriculture in California has the attention of everybody connected with our industry. Proposition 2 effectively banned cages for chickens and crates for the pork industry. Speculation is that it will push those industries out

of California. Where will the next vote occur? Will it be one of the four states where we have members? How do we prepare to be ready to address the issue if, or unfortunately, more accurately—when—it lands on our doorstep?

I am almost out of space and I've not even mentioned sustainability, bovine TB, carbon footprint or the dire financial straits of the budgets of most governmental units. The point I'm trying to make is that we do discuss many important issues at the local meetings, and those discussions are very helpful for your leaders and management at MMPA to make decisions that best represent the needs and desires of MMPA members. The local meetings are the beginning of policy process leading up to the annual meeting in March where the elected delegates representing the whole cooperative will enact policy governing MMPA for the next year.

Sometimes when I was driving to or from a local meeting this winter, I wondered what the beautiful winter scene might look like in June with green grass and leaves on the trees, and then I wonder why I don't take the time to enjoy these views in the summer. But we all know the answer to that question, and that is we are all very active enjoying those views on our own busy farms that time of the year. Winter has become known as the meeting season. It is also when we take the time to look ahead. Enjoy the winter snowscapes as you plan for the rest of the year.

Ken