

## MMPA's Summer Food Systems Fellowship Intern – Karen Bastek

The first time MMPA Summer Food Systems Fellowship intern Karen Bastek applied to Michigan State University's College of Veterinary Medicine, she wasn't accepted. Her grades were good enough to get in, but the college



**Karen Bastek**

said she lacked experience with large animals.

Undaunted by the rejection, the then MSU sophomore studying animal science was determined to get into vet school. Karen had little exposure to large animals while

growing up, since her family moved several times following her father's U.S. Coast Guard assignments. Her lack of exposure to animals didn't deter her love for them nor her childhood determination to become a veterinarian.

"I wanted to go to vet school as a kid," Karen says. "I didn't have any other goals in mind other than being a veterinarian."

To garner more experience with large animals, Karen offered to volunteer weekly at Country Dairy in New Era, Mich., where she was given a broad introduction to all aspects of dairy farming.

"They were a bit caught off guard when I told them I wanted to volunteer," Karen says.

Every Monday throughout the summer, Karen helped in the milking parlor, bedded stalls and fed cows in the morning, learning more about how involved dairy farmer's jobs are. In the afternoon, she shadowed the farm's veterinarian, observing and eventually assisting him with injections and palpitations.

"While at Country Dairy, I learned a great deal about the dairy industry and gained an appreciation of all the hard work that goes into

running a dairy business," Karen says.

Following her summer of dairy experience, Karen re-applied to the MSU Veterinary School and was accepted. Based on her positive experiences at the dairy farm and in many of her undergraduate animal science classes, Karen has a strong interest in becoming a food animal veterinarian with a focus on the dairy industry. She is currently in her third year of veterinary school.

"The biggest thing for me is the people," Karen explains of her decision to pursue production animal medicine. "I've had a much more positive experience working on farms than I've had working in small animal clinics. I really like being on a farm. People respect each other, they're laid back and it's a good atmosphere. The veterinarians and farmers work together—I like that."

Karen says she likes working with cows and is eager to learn more about Michigan's dairy industry while interning at MMPA this summer.

"Karen is getting acquainted with various aspects of Michigan's dairy industry," Dean Letter, MMPA's manager of Producer Testing and Herd Health Programs says.

"In the first few weeks of Karen's time with MMPA, she had the opportunity to meet people throughout the industry at the Michigan Dairy Industry Conference and visited farms with MMPA Member Representatives."

In early June, Karen began assisting MMPA with Wildlife Risk Mitigation action plans in the northwest modified accredited TB free zone.

"I have really enjoyed my first month with MMPA," Karen says. "I have been riding with a lot of the field reps learning all about their different jobs and the importance of

each specialty for dairy producers. I was able to work in northern Michigan with Preston Cole doing a Wildlife Risk assessment on bovine TB. This project was a great experience and I was able to interact with a lot of people and learn about different ways producers run their dairy operations."

Later, Karen will work on a project with MMPA's Mastitis Management Supervisor Tom Herremans to determine what impact udder prep has on milking parlor performance.

"MMPA is fortunate to have someone with her initiative and interest to assist us with these projects," Dean says. "I hope the experience she gains this summer will help her in her future endeavors."

*The Summer Food Systems Fellowship program was developed by the Department of Animal Science and the College of Veterinary Medicine at Michigan State University to provide relevant industry experiences in the food systems arena for veterinary students. Through educational summer study programs, MSU recognizes the importance of teaching veterinary students the realities and challenges animal agriculture faces through continuous food safety and security problems, the potential for an intentional introduction of pathogens by terrorists, decreasing profit margins and a changing workforce.*

*Several food industry organizations, including MMPA, are "Food Systems Partners," meaning they employ a veterinary student in a summer position that will provide a meaningful and relevant experience in food systems. The partners also help the student design and implement a project that benefits both the student and the partner.*

*For more information on the program, contact Dan Grooms, DVM, Ph.D at 517-432-1494 or [groomsd@cvm.msu.edu](mailto:groomsd@cvm.msu.edu).*