



## Quality Watch

By Dean Letter

MMPA Mastitis Management Advisor

### MMPA's Quality Shines Nationally

This month, the *Messenger* features MMPA's top quality award winners; Kevin Cavanaugh and the MSU Dairy Farm (see their stories on pages 14-19). This is the first year where two MMPA member farms are awarded this honor in the same year. Although these farms did not have exactly the same SCC on bacteria counts, when all of the factors are taken into account, these farms had equally high quality milk—congratulations!

Producing high quality milk does not happen accidentally. Producers of this caliber pay a lot of attention to detail and make use of resources available to them, whether it is cooperative extension, veterinarians, nutritionists, equipment dealers, private consultants, or MMPA.

Many dairy people subscribe to *Hoard's Dairyman* and may have noticed the impressive number of national quality award winners that happen to market their milk through Michigan Milk Producers Association. Three of the eight national Platinum Quality Award winners; Tom Carson, the MSU Dairy Farm and Van Polen Farms are from Michigan and market their milk through MMPA. Two of the ten Gold Quality Award winners and one of the thirteen Silver Quality Award winners are also from Michigan. It is readily apparent that Michigan and MMPA are well represented on the national milk quality scene. These farms help enhance MMPA's reputation as a marketer of quality milk.

### National Platinum Quality on MMPA Farms

Tom Carson, a perennial MMPA Gold Quality Award winner, past MMPA top quality award winner, and two-time NMC Platinum Quality Award winner, has told me on several occasions that there are a lot of resources available today to help dairy farmers achieve high quality milk. MMPA provides its members with some high value services—all members have to do is ask and follow through with what they are advised to do. Tom utilizes several MMPA services, having us culture his cows, evaluate his milking system on a routine basis, and he has also attended a milker training school. One of the changes Tom made after attending the school was to wear gloves while milking. He says he developed a greater appreciation for how pathogens can be transferred from cow to cow by bare hands.

One of our top quality award winners, the Michigan State University Dairy Farm in East Lansing was also a NMC Platinum Award winner this year. A university farm has a lot of additional challenges to producing quality milk that commercial farms may not experience, such as a variety of student labor (higher turnover rates) and cows subjected to a variety of trials. MSU has good resources at its disposal such as Dr. Phil Sears at the MSU Veterinary School, a great milking equipment dealer, and MMPA. Bob Kreft,

the MSU Dairy farm manager, has had Tom Herremans from MMPA help interpret the statistical analysis provided by their milking equipment management program. Armed with milking performance benchmarks, Bob and the MSU milking crew set out to optimize their udder prep procedure and milking equipment. Benchmarks were monitored frequently and adjustments were made. Monitoring benchmarks, along with many other details they diligently manage, have helped MSU maintain an average SCC at nearly 50,000 cells/ml for the past three years, an outstanding record!

The Van Polen Farm in Marion has averaged less than 100,000 SCC for more than four years. The farm is in the midst of updating housing and milking facilities. The Van Polen family has shown that one does not necessarily need new facilities to consistently produce high quality milk.

I would like to personally thank these producers and others like them who strive to produce an exceptionally high quality product. I realize that this involves proactively paying attention to a lot of little things each and every day. I am glad that every once in a while we can take a little time to recognize the "cream of the crop" in the industry for the things they do every day. For a complete list with biographies on all the national platinum winners, go to [www.nmconline.org](http://www.nmconline.org).

Over the next year or so, MMPA will be re-evaluating

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