

# A Positive Outlook

2009 MMPA OYDC Jeremy and Summer Werth

Like all farmers, Jeremy and Summer Werth are resilient and creative—always finding ways to turn challenges into opportunities. Dairying in the heart of Michigan's Bovine Tuberculosis Modified Accredited Zone (MAZ) offers the young couple unique challenges that dairy farmers in other parts of the state don't have to deal with, but the couple says they make it work because that's where they choose to raise their family.

"We choose to live here," Jeremy says. "We try to cope with the issues we have and better our

operation in order to farm in this area."

Bovine TB is one of the issues dairy farmers in the Alpena area deal with on a daily basis. It has an effect on nearly every decision the Werths make at Butterwerth Dairy Farm. Rather than focusing on the negative aspects, the Werths keep a positive outlook, finding ways to make it work to their advantage through programs set up specifically for farms in the MAZ.

"There's assistance out there," Jeremy says. "Most of the time you do have to put money up front to complete a project, but there's financial help to offset the costs once it's complete."

In order to qualify for reimbursement through Bovine TB related programs, such as Wildlife Risk\*A\*Syst, the Werths must ensure they are following management practices that protect their cows from disease spread by wildlife. To date, the Werths have received financial assistance to install gated hoop barns for dry hay storage in order to keep deer away from the cow's feed.

Last year, the Werths tested 336 cows during an annual state mandated

Bovine TB test performed on

on all cattle 12 months old and older. The Werths are currently in the process of installing headlocks to reduce stress on the cows during Bovine TB testing time. Because the Werths farm is risk mitigated, a portion of the headlocks will be cost shared through another program aimed at assisting cattle owners in the MAZ.

"We do see a loss in production when we TB test due to stress," Jeremy says. "We are trying to better our operations by installing headlocks so we're not pushing them through a chute during TB testing."

The annual TB testing is always a stressful time for farm owners, managers and workers. But, say Jeremy and Summer, even though the testing can make for difficult days, they remind themselves that this—dairy farming—is what they want to do and the area is where they want to live. Aside from the headlocks, the Werths have also found starling control helps reduce the amount of false positive tests that can occur during Bovine TB testing.

"We found starling feces caused the cattle to be more prone to false positives during TB testing," Jeremy says. The Werths utilize USDA's Starling Control Program each year, along with other MMPA members in the area, reaping a two-fold benefit for both farms: a better starling kill and lower per farm costs to administer the program.

"It does work better when we team up with another farm because



*Photos, clockwise, from left: A hoop barn stores dry hay locked away from deer; Kiera climbing a hoop barn gate; Jeremy feeding calves; Jeremy, Summer and Kiera at their own farm.*



starlings do travel from farm to farm,” Jeremy says.

**Relocating to Expand**

In 1999, Jeremy’s parents, Larry and Paulette Werth, purchased a former dairy farm from the estate of a family member. Cows had not been milked on that farm for many years, so the Werths kept their milk cows at the original farm until the parlor and freestall barn were completed at the new location. Upon completion of the facilities, the Werths moved their 90 milk cows to the new farm.

“There is more land at the new farm, making it a better location to expand the dairy to a size that will provide for two families,” Jeremy says.

The Werths sought out a new location for their farm for several reasons: Jeremy had completed college and wanted to join the dairy operation; the original farm was near state land; and the new farm had a larger land base, a plus for nutrient application and growing forages.

“There just wasn’t any room to expand at the original farm,” Jeremy explains. “We didn’t have enough land base to produce feed on 15 farmable acres and we were restricted with manure application. We had to haul manure four miles to apply it. The new farm’s on 280 acres and is centrally located to some ground we rent.”

**MAEAP Verification**

The move to a new location that required extensive construction offered Butterwerth Dairy Farm the opportunity to more easily become



**Butterwerth Dairy Farm Facts:**

**MMPA Members of:** District 12 and the Hillman Local  
**Herd size:** 240 milking and dry; 250 replacements  
**Acres farmed:** 750

**Milking set-up:** Double-14 swing line parallel parlor

**Ag and community involvement:** Jeremy is vice president and a delegate of MMPA’s Hillman Local, as well as vice president of the co-op’s District 12, and serving as an alternate on the MMPA State Advisory Committee. In the community, Jeremy serves on the Alpena Conservation District Board.

*“One thing that makes a difference on our farm is... our commitment to quality farming and family. We also emphasize effectiveness, efficiency, and affordability.”*

*Photos, top: Summer, Jeremy and Kiera in front of Butterwerth Dairy Farm's MAEAP sign; bottom: Kiera and her grandpa, Larry.*



verified in the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) than they could have at their original location. The farm is verified in three MAEAP Systems: Farmstead, Livestock and Cropping.

"The environment is very important to us," Jeremy says. "Moving to a new location and having the opportunity to build things like a new fueling station, lagoon and dry manure stacking facility gave us the chance to comply with MAEAP standards."

While Jeremy says the unique opportunity of constructing new facilities did make MAEAP verification more attainable, he's quick to point out that the entire process still took a great deal of time and effort—approximately 6 years—working toward verification.

### **Change at the Original Farmstead**

Another problem with the original farm, which is now owned by Jeremy and Summer, was its proximity to the woods. The farmstead is near state land with many deer in the area, that Butterwerth Dairy Farm could not have

expanded the milking herd at this location without running into deer to cattle contact problems.

"We've got a lot of deer at our house," Kiera, the couple's 3 year old daughter says of the home her father purchased from his parents in 2002. Jeremy and Summer are currently in the process of remodeling the former dairy's tie stall barn into transition pens to raise heifers for Butterwerth Dairy Farm.

"This place works well for heifers because we don't run the number of animals a dairy farm would and all of our heifers are in a confined barn system," Jeremy explains. "All of our dry hay is stored in an enclosed hoop building."

Summer, who also works at the local hospital, assists with the heifer operation. Currently, the heifers ages range between 2 and 10 months. Summer and Jeremy will raise heifers at this farm until they are 2 years old before they return to the main farm.

The Werths currently have 60 heifers, with plans to go to 100.

"We worm and vaccinate the heifers here, Jeremy does that," Summer says. "I do most of the feeding and bedding and health check the heifers every day."

The Butterwerth herd consists mainly of Jersey cows, some crossbred with Holsteins, according to Jeremy. At one time, the Butterwerth herd contained mostly registered animals, but with the Bovine TB status of the area and the recent focus on increasing the herd, the Werths discontinued registering animals.

Now that some of the rules regarding movement of Bovine TB free animals have changed, and the farm is risk mitigated, Jeremy and Summer are considering amending their income by marketing up to 30 heifers each year.

Jeremy and Summer's preserving spirit and ability to create opportunity from challenge helps the young couple remain positive about their future as dairy farmers.

"Years ago, we used to strive for production, but now it's more about doing a good job keeping our animals healthy and continuing to farm in northern Michigan," Jeremy says.

