



## Get Involved in the Dairy Industry —your future may depend on it!

**H**ave you ever had “I don’t want to get involved in that issue” or “I don’t have the time, so let somebody else do it” sentiments? Maybe you say to yourself, “I don’t have the talent to tackle an issue of that nature.” If you haven’t felt some or all of those emotions, you are either not being honest with yourself or you are superhuman.

Recently I had the pleasure of interacting with this year’s participants in MMPA’s Outstanding Young Dairy Cooperator (OYDC) program. I’m sure they would admit that they have experienced some of those sentiments from time to time. Yet when they were offered the opportunity to take part in the OYDC program, they made the decision to become involved. The experience removed them from a familiar daily routine and placed them in a situation that demanded a rigorous two-day schedule of challenges and activities as they learned more about their milk cooperative. Activities included public speaking, sharing their backgrounds and lives with each other, meeting MMPA staff and discussing all their hopes and concerns about the dairy industry.

OYDC participants take the time to get involved in industry issues. I thank each one of them—past and present—for becoming involved in the OYDC program at both the district and the state level. In addition I want to thank everyone who steps forward to speak on behalf of our dairy farmer industry.

It isn’t an easy task. Communicating with cows is much easier than communicating with

people. You don’t have to use many words with cows, because they respond to hand and arm motions. Effective communication with people, on the other hand, requires carefully chosen words to convey what you are trying to say.

So taking yourself out of the “cow world” and into the “people world” requires tapping into traits and skills that are not used on a day-to-day basis, or do we have it all wrong? We are good at working with cows and the people we encounter every day, so maybe we underestimate our ability to communicate with people outside the farm environment. Maybe we are letting those sentiments in the opening paragraph get in our way. Yes, it is hard to carve time out of the day, and it is easy to let someone else do it. But there aren’t enough “someone else’s” left in our industry.

The judges for the OYDC program provide another example of people who give their time and talents to the dairy farm industry. This year’s judges included a member of the MMPA Board of Directors, a representative from Michigan State University Extension, and a dairy farmer who has been an exemplary leader since being selected as an Outstanding Young Dairy Cooperator in the past. These people understand the value of contributing to the future of the industry.

As dairy farming becomes affected more every day by issues beyond the gates of the farmstead, more of us need to step forward to help lead our cooperative, our dairy industry, our state, and our nation. We are fortunate to have the OYDC

program at MMPA to help identify future leadership potential. The program has worked remarkably well over the years. It is only one way, though, that a member can become an effective leader.

While there are many leaders in our organization who have been involved in the OYDC, there are many leaders who have not. Whether or not you’ve been involved in the OYDC Program, don’t hesitate not only to attend MMPA meetings, but to come forward to offer your opinions and suggestions. Contact your board member between meetings if you want to share ideas.

Of course, MMPA is not the only place where leadership is important. To tell the story of dairy farming and to be good citizens, we must take part in activities inside and outside of agriculture. Every community needs volunteers. Pick an organization that captures your fancy.

According to Judy Emmons, MMPA member and former state representative who spoke to our board during her final term, knowledge of agricultural issues needs to be expanded in the state legislature. Her advice was to encourage farmers to run for these positions. Get involved in the legislative process at any level.

The bottom line is that if you are a successful dairy farmer, you have the ability to represent our industry. You have the ability to make a difference. How you apply your talents to make that difference is up to you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken". The letters are cursive and fluid.