



Quality is Job One at MMPA

Today is one of those beautiful spring days when all you want to do is soak up the warm energy of the sun. Another winter is behind us as we enjoy the annual rebirth around us. The green grass and glorious blossoms are a welcome relief from the winter scenery, although I have come to understand why we have snow; it really brightens an otherwise drab landscape. But enough about winter scenes. It is warm and vibrant again in MMPA land. We've spent the winter months planning for the new crop season, while at the same time not letting anything slip on the cow side of our businesses.

The dairy economy isn't as good as we'd like, but that hasn't kept MMPA members from continuing to provide excellent care for our cows. This high level of care leads to a high quality product for our processors and finally, for our consumers. The ability to furnish consumers with the highest quality dairy products requires attention to detail—from production to consumption. If we don't produce a high quality product on our farms, nothing the processing industry can do could make it better. They can only do their part to maintain the high quality that begins on the farm. Consumers want high quality, and we have proven we can deliver what they want.

Starting with November of last year, the Somatic Cell Count (SCC) average for the entire membership has averaged less than 200,000 each month. That is absolutely fantastic!! It wasn't long ago that many of us thought a SCC of 200,000 was a dream on our farms, even though we saw many members already

averaging less than 100,000 SCC. The thought of achieving an average less than 200,000 on 1,500 farms in the face of so many variables and challenges in the Midwest would have been unimaginable not that long ago. Our cooperative's impressive overall milk quality is a testament of the dedication to quality exhibited by MMPA members.

Excellent milk quality doesn't just happen; it requires planning, dedication to detail and hard work to achieve the quality we receive from MMPA member farms. Gary Trimner, Director of MMPA Member Services and Quality Control, has an excellent professional staff dedicated to helping our members with quality issues. The MMPA Member Representative group is only a phone call away for any producer needing assistance on a variety of quality concerns. Be it a cleaning issue or a milking system issue, MMPA Member Representatives are qualified to assist. If they don't know the answer themselves, they will have a good idea of where to turn next.

On our farm, we have involved MMPA Member Representatives to assist us in solving both cleaning and milking system issues and we were impressed with their ability to resolve what were elusive problems for us. For example, we had a recurring problem with small areas of our pipeline not cleaning properly. The areas were quite small, and it would take time for problems to develop. We would first notice an increase in our raw bacteria count, after which we would take the line apart and

manually clean the dirty area. Though our counts never were high enough to result in a loss of quality premium, it was a pain to manually clean the pipeline. Member Services determined that a lack of water action was the problem. They worked with our equipment dealer and recommended that a "butterfly valve" be installed to better control the wash action of the pipeline. Works beautifully, end of story.

Support from our co-op isn't the end of the story. It is just the beginning, because milk has a long road to travel before it reaches the consumer. It starts at the farm and then involves a ride on the milk truck, a trip through the plant processor, being packaged in a container, traveling to a distribution center, and then waiting in a retail outlet until the ride home with the consumer.

MMPA has a reputation of providing high quality milk to the marketplace. It's important to all members that we maintain and improve on that image. Today's consumer expects only high quality food sources for themselves and their families. We must continue to meet their expectations if we want to continue to enjoy the good relationship we have with both processors and consumers. Playing our part before the milk travels down the long road to the consumer is very important and requires a high level of attention to detail to make sure that the product that leaves our farms is of the highest quality.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.