

From Milking Parlor to Board Room

MMPA District 6 Director Tony Jandernoa

Looking across the tidy freestall barns and manicured bunks at Dutch Meadows Dairy in St. Johns, it's hard to believe the operation was once home to only 100 cows. With a current milking herd of 1,400, it's even harder to believe its owner is a first generation farmer.

"I started with nothing and literally had \$20 in my pocket," Tony Jandernoa, newest member of the MMPA board of directors, recalls. "I think that's part of the reason I was able to grow the farm and be so involved in the industry; I had nothing to lose. I started with nothing and even if I ended with nothing, I was in the same place I began."

While Tony didn't grow up on a dairy farm, he spent his fair share of time in the parlor at a young age (12 to be exact) milking every other weekend for neighbor Richard Feldpausch. After a brief stint working in a manufacturing facility, he returned to the industry, working as a herdsman for another neighbor, Alphonse Thelen.

A year later, Tony bought into Thelen's operation, and the rest is history.

Now in partnership with his wife, Patti (who he attests is the "brains of the operation"), Tony has grown the farm to increase its sustainability. "Since it's a first generation farm, we have to milk more cows to pay things off. I had to build something bigger over the years if I wanted there to be something to pass on

to the next generation," he explains. "It's exciting one of my sons, Kyle, is now on board fulltime and looking at buying into the family farm."

In addition to being one half of MMPA's 2002 Outstanding Young Dairy Cooperators, Tony served as vice president of the Mid-Michigan local as well as on the advisory and resolutions committees before beginning his tenure on the board.

He and Patti hosted the first Michigan Breakfast on the Farm event, opening their doors to 1,500 neighbors and consumers.

Yet, his service to the co-op is just getting started.

"When I look back, I see we've accomplished a lot. When I look forward, it seems like we should be doing more," Tony says. "I think MMPA is in the same boat. We have such a rich, successful co-op history, but we're at a point where we need to grow. I'm honored to be part of guiding MMPA and helping shape what the co-op will look like for our kids and grandkids."

With experience managing diverse farm sizes and the struggles of being a first generation dairyman,



Tony Jandernoa, MMPA District 6 director, is a first generation dairyman and owns and operates a 1,400-cow farm in St. Johns.

Tony brings a unique perspective to the board room, joining the other directors in making decisions for the good of members of all sizes.

Anxious to help the cooperative chart a course for its next 98 years, Tony was elected to represent District 6 by the delegates at the district meeting on February 18, 2014. He will work with the other 12 MMPA member dairy farmers on the board to set strategic goals for the co-op and oversee progress towards those goals.

"MMPA is all I've ever known. It's incredibly important to have a strong MMPA so the next generation knows nothing but MMPA, too," Tony concludes.