

CALS

Imagine your future in agricultural leadership



Pete Kappelman
Partner, Meadow Brook Dairy Farm, Manitowoc, WI
UW Madison- B.S. Dairy Science, 1985

“People think of UW-Madison as a big school, but I see CALS as a small school. Being able to walk down the street and know every third person is valuable--- those faces and relationships will grow important to you over time.”

-Pete Kappelman

He's helping shape the future of dairy

No one ever talked to Pete Kappelman about going to college. “Going to short course is what guys in our family did,” says Kappelman. “That’s what everyone expected me to do.” While he wanted to farm, first off he wanted to get a four-year degree.

As a UW-Madison student, his hard work in classes and extensive involvement in agricultural clubs and activities paid long-term dividends, beginning with his receipt of the National Dairy Shrine Student Recognition Award as a senior. This award was the first of many recognitions Kappelman would receive during his academic and farming career for his outstanding achievements and contributions to the industry.

During his junior year, Kappelman’s future plans were solidified while doing an internship at a registered Holstein farm in California, where he learned about dairying in a different region and made a wealth of valuable professional connections. More importantly, Kappelman says, “I knew when I returned home that dairy science was the career path I wanted to take.” Upon returning to UW-Madison, Kappelman continued to excel academically and took on a variety of student leadership positions, such as World Dairy Expo Chairman for the Badger Dairy Club.

After graduation, Kappelman returned to farm with his family, and eventually formed a business partnership with his brother. As young dairy farmer, Kappelman felt compelled to help the dairy industry grow, and so took a position as the first chairman of the UW-Madison’s Center for Dairy Profitability, a brand-new center designed to educate farmers in business management and production systems related to dairy farm profitability. “We worked hard to convince producers to think of themselves as business people,” he describes. “Our board wanted to make sure there was a place for farmers to receive help with business decisions and management practices.”

Around the same time, Kappelman helped establish the Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin (PDPW), an organization designed to help farmers become better businessmen. The group, which initially started with just a few farmers and a non-existent budget, now includes one out of every three milk producers in the state. “I had a passion for doing what would benefit the industry,” says Kappelman.

More recently, his successful dairy operation, which milks 420 registered Holsteins, and his leadership in the local dairy industry have led to even more opportunities for Kappelman. He was elected to the Land O’ Lakes Cooperative Board in 1995 and currently serves as the Chairman of the co-op’s board of directors. “Your farm and business is a reflection of the kind of board member you will be,” Kappelman says. “A well-run operation lets people know you’ll represent their equity the same way.”

Kappelman was also appointed to the National Dairy Board and the U.S. Dairy Export Council. He is excited about the opportunities that lie ahead in agriculture: “Right now, the US is in the driver’s seat for agricultural exports. I want to make sure for the sake of other producers and the next generation that we take every opportunity to help the market grow.”

While he is modest about his own leadership, Kappelman does not hesitate to encourage current students to get involved. “It would be shortsighted not to take advantage of all the organizations and activities that go on at UW-Madison,” he says. “Your GPA is just three digits on your resume--- what you did in school can fill pages.”