

August 27, 2008

Vote for Lenzmeier if you care about farm future

I own and operate a dairy farm northeast of Melrose. Stearns County is the No. 1 dairy county in the state, but following a prolonged slow trend, the industry in the county faced a troubled future in 1994.

The cows were literally leaving Stearns County. The number of herds were shrinking and the average age of dairy farmers was at an all-time high, as was the average age of dairy facilities.

The response of the Stearns County board was the creation of the Dairy Advisory Committee in 1995. Consisting of a cross section of farmers, plant managers and suppliers with an economic stake in the industry, committee tasks have included helping with land use planning, streamlining feedlot applications, encouraging dairy educational programs and career opportunities in local schools ... development of a mentoring program, and creation of discussion groups on new industry trends.

Though he was not unanimously supported, county Commissioner Leigh Lenzmeier played an important role. Lenzmeier now sees opportunities in the newly designated St. Cloud area bioscience zone, which was helped by Rep. Larry Haws, a former Stearns County commissioner. Lenzmeier's vision is an incubator nutraceutical foods industry, creating things to eat that make one healthier. We grow the food in Stearns County, so why not add value to it before it leaves?

I can't vote for Leigh Lenzmeier. I don't live in his district. If you do and you care about the farm community in Stearns County, vote for Leigh Lenzmeier.

By Dennis Ritter, Melrose