

# KOW Ruminations

*A man watches his pear tree day after day, impatient for the ripening of the fruit. Let him attempt to force the process, and he may spoil both fruit and tree. But let him patiently wait, and the fruit at length falls into his lap. -Abraham Lincoln*

*Fully independent soil consulting-agronomy-nutrition. We do dairy nutrition from the soil up.*

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## Have You Been Buying Milk From The Feed Company?

Your challenge feeding program may be more than you can afford and the benefits of grazing cows are too great to ignore.

Traveling about the countryside as I do sure is a great educational opportunity. Most of what I have learned that has made my academic study practical / useful (and sometimes proven wrong) has come from sharp thinking farmers. I truly appreciate this. The professional can easily get *tunnel visioned* and needs to be guided by the layman who puts theory to the test –ultimately the *profitability test*.

If I ever become afraid to get dirty and stop getting involved with farms, I am sure I will soon be in need of *re-education*. (My experience in the academic and corporate arena confirms this –my how simple the solutions to farmers' problems are when one is far removed from the realities of *the work* of dairy farming.)

However, there are also times that I learn a lot while observing individual dairymen *making mistakes*, and this brings me to our topic this issue: Buying milk; no, not from the grocery store, from the *feed store*. Because you may be spending so much to challenge feed for short term gain, the law of diminishing returns may not merely have caught up to you, but may have passed you like you are sittin' still!

I am very confident that under KOW Consulting's system of dairy management, a Holstein herd should be able to maintain a 60 to 70# or more tank average

"It is a temptation to adopt new methods just because they are high-tech, even though they may not have been shown to be better and more economical than traditional methods" (L.B. Crittenden, USDA Scientist, 1961-1989).

year round without challenge feeding (2x/day milking, no hormone shot – figure FCM equivalent for other breeds). Our goal is to achieve that 60 to 70# of milk feeding 60 to 70% or more of the ration as high quality forage (DM basis). (If you don't think this is possible, I recommend you reconsider your definition of *high quality forage*.)

Of course, this system includes cow comfort, good herdsmanship, harvest and storage issues, etc., as well as *nutrition that starts in the soil* (*balanced* fertility). Production driven via quality forage is the *only* way you can have (1) high production, (2) healthy cows, and (3) high net profits *simultaneously*. Going the challenge feeding route to "push" production may get you a little extra milk in the short term, but you will surely lose Nos. 2 and 3, and end up paying far more than the milk is worth in the long term. The KOW program, nutritionally speaking, is about *equipping* cows to milk via the forage program –not pushing them. Take a few minutes to look over the following hypothetical (but realistic –I see this happening) example to get a sense for what I mean and then give some consideration to where *your investment priorities* are. What is your crop / feeding program setting you up for this year?

<b>Joe Cowmilker</b>	
High forage ration in confinement (Equipping cows to milk with quality forage)	
70# tank ave @ \$12 milk =	\$8.40
35# DM of KOW quality forage @ \$.05/# =	- 1.75
12# DM corn @ \$.03/# =	- .36
4# DM home roasted soy @ \$.08/# =	- .32
8-10 total oz. Mnrls and vitamins =	- .40
hormone shot –Oops! Forgot about it.	<u>0.00</u>
51½# total DMI Income over feed cost:	\$5.57
Note: Feed salesmen like I/FC calc's!	

<b>Tim Treadmill</b>	
Conventional confinement ration ("Beating" Joe with 10# more milk!)	
80# tank ave @ \$12 milk =	\$9.60
19½# DM of high RFV forage @ \$.05/# =	- .98
24# DM corn and corn silage @ \$.03/# =	- .72
10# DM conc supp (incl fat/fiber supp) @ ave of \$.12/# =	-1.20
1½# total minerals/buffer/vitamins	- .55
hormone shot @ \$5.40 /dose	<u>-.38</u>
55# total DMI Income over feed cost:	\$5.77

Does this mean Tim has "beaten" Joe? *Who really made money on that extra 10# of milk?? Who really took the beating??* Like they say, "It ain't over 'till it's over." Consider the figures in the table below. Tim's been *fooled*.

Joe	Additional Daily Costs Per Cow (That people <i>selling</i> you the <i>challenge feeding</i> program don't care to talk about)	Tim
\$5.57	Income over feed cost \$ left over	\$5.77
-\$0.06	<u>Low vet &amp; hoof care costs</u> due to a high forage ration <b>vs.</b> <i>high costs</i> due to challenge feeding.	-\$0.28
+\$0.82	<u>20% /cow/year voluntary heifer sales</u> due to less than a 20% /yr herd <i>voluntary</i> cull rate <b>vs.</b> a 35% / year <i>invuntary</i> herd cull rate when "pushing" cows. Joe's cows <i>ave</i> nearly 5 yrs old while Tim's are under 3½ yrs. Tim's "empty stall" replacement costs are equivalent to 10% of a cow/year. (Both figuring a replacement cow or heifer costs \$1500, the cull cow worth \$400.)	-\$0.30 / cow/ day
\$6.33	Potential for profit/cow/day left over. Multiply this out by whatever number of cows you would like. You still fall \$1.14/cow/day behind when challenge feeding. <i>These figures cannot be overcome by an expansion.</i> Why do dairymen want to be on this treadmill?? Who <i>really</i> benefits??	\$5.19
??	There are other costs: Life style and stress cost?? Risk / debt management? (Fewer cow problems vs. walking a tightrope.)	??

Maybe you disagree with my simple figures and thoughts. That's okay. I am sure some of these numbers would need adjusting to fit *your* situation right now. Do some of *your own* figuring. There is certainly more to consider when evaluating the total farm's profit potential. The most important thing is to **look beyond production** to find **your** point of highest net profit. **Each farm has a unique most profitable level of production.** This does not mean *yours truly* is opposed to high production (How foolish!) -it depends *how* one gets it –high forage or high grain?

Have you read the March 25, 2002, issue of *Hoard's Dairyman*? I would like you to pick it up and read the article on page 261 entitled "Take a look at costs you can control" by A. J. Kunkel, DVM. I will give you some very brief excerpts to peak your curiosity. "The graph demonstrates the *relatively poor* correlation between production level and profit . . . It is interesting that . . . the high cost dairy still would operate at a slight **loss** if milk averaged 80 pounds per cow. In contrast the *low cost dairy* would show a small **profit** at 60 pounds of milk per

cow . . . Dairymen who intensively graze are amazed at the health of their cows." (Emphasis added.)

That brings me to this final question: Have you ever considered opening the gate? It's my *considered* opinion that there *aren't too many* cow problems that couldn't be *positively* affected by employing *well managed* grazing (MIG) as, at least a portion of, the feeding program. If considered objectively (not from an industry *sales* perspective or *neighborhood peer pressure* evaluation), *well managed* (not open the gate and *jump in the hammock*) grazing *utilizing the high quality forage genetics available today and a plan to protect cows from heat stress* could *further* improve all of the numbers above. Grazing should be considered *the ultimate* in high forage / low cost / *ruminant friendly* feeding. Why not start with a little nighttime grazing near the barn to *supplement* your high forage ration fed in the stall through the heat of the day? *More* grazing could follow as *your* comfort level increases. If the mind is open, the gate swings easily.