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. . . You even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you . . . 2 Cor. 11:20 NIV

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"On the law of averages, a mere moron once in a while would make a decision that would be favorable to the United Sates. When policies are advocated by any group which consistently work out to the Communists' advantage, that couldn't be happenstance." –Congressman Walter Judd, The New American, 8-3-09

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Sometimes **the Best Course of Action is In**action **–or to Stay the Course**

When to be proactive, when it may be wise *to do nuthin' –but never to give up!*

I recall from years ago a salesman that I often worked alongside that would like to often say, "Ya better do somethin', even if it's wrong." That's about as wrong as standing up to negotiate while bullets are whizzing above your foxhole. ☺ Any *action* taken or *especially* input purchased for your dairy farm has *got to* have a good *risk management* analysis before you jump into it with both feet or you'll be *unlikely* to be left standing on 'em. When you're in a business of slim margin, *great* risks are illogical and can too often lead to great losses that take *decades* to recover from –if ever. That salesman liked to use that line because he knew that *fear* of what *might happen worse* than the present circumstances (*fear of the unknown*) was a great motivator to close the sale. No, it's not ethical, but the method is used all the time. Don't you realize that the reason most people visit your farm is because **they** *need* something *from* you, not because you cannot operate without their stuff? It's the truth and the reason why this Kowboy refuses to get involved in the sale (for example) of various *questionable* feed additives and microbial products (by the way, just recently a salesman called to entice me into silage inoculant sales with an offer of 20 cents/treated ton of profit margin ☺). So far as the KOWboy inputs, I can only *justify* our *basic* minerals and vitamins, as found in KOW TM and VTM paks (with VTM reduced or *eliminated* while *grazing*). Otherwise I'm concerned about creating a *conflict of interest* between our advice and your *real* needs. While you do see me recommending other *tools / inputs* based upon *well defined* circumstances and needs, that's the critical point: doing something, even if it turns out to be wrong *usually* turns out to be ***stupid***. Reputation for *reliable* advice is *everything* in my business (-yet no one can control all factors!). The focal point for the hired *advisor* is the ***long term***-end outcome, while the goal of the *salesman* is usually the end of the month sales volume. I want long term results **and long term *relationships***. I'll admit that not every farmer wants the diet and exercise routine over the diet pill. Nevertheless, I'm only looking for the serious *managers* (diet pill types don't "stick with" *anything*). Considering the past year and

future prospects for high profit margins in our industry, I thought it may be wise to pen a few thoughts not necessarily on *what* to think, but <u>how</u> to think as you evaluate this year's results and make decisions for the *next year's* management strategy. When is it wise to react / *change*, or to <u>add</u> something?

The crop failure you experienced this year.
Every crop year brings *some* disappointments. *Expect* some. A *good* year brings fewer, but *perfection* is not to be found in the farming biz. Some results are due to bad management decisions while others are simply due to *circumstances beyond the farmer's control.* **The timing of weather events** is a good and frequent example that is **often** *the cause* of trouble. Recognizing that *no one* can control <u>all</u> of the factors or variables is a wise startng point **to help one have *restraint* and not *overreact* to a poor outcome**. Problems are opportunities for the salesman, but do **you** really need / benefit from the new "investment"? Could it really prevent or solve the root of the problem? **Education is the key**. Not *necessarily* the latest research "proven" input or practice from the university system, *because they do not work directly for you* (always ask "***who funded* it?**" and *consider* how this may bias things*). I think <u>all</u> farmers <u>want</u> the truth, *but most no longer **expect** it due to a history of unfulfilled promises.* Most "advice" has come with an "angle" to get them to part with *more* of their *hard earned* wealth. Practical application of knowledge that is fundamentally **true** and ***proven** by years of on-the-farm experience* is the only *common sense* foundation for management. This KOWboy goes through great effort to be sure that my newsletters and website contain only these things, *<u>un</u>biased by a sales motive*. Thank you for the *trust you invest* in KOW Consulting Association. I sincerely appreciate your business and **I take this trust as the most valuable thing we have between us -and *please trust* me on this,** I could've chosen an easier path if I work merely for financial gain. If only I'd endorse *every* new product or program, I'd be a more popular and prosperous businessman. That's not my calling in life.

Is there anything new under the sun? (Ecc. 1:9) While there truly are *newly **improved*** seed genetics (buy the best you can!) released every year, none of them really have any significant different or "new" *needs* for **germination** and **growth**. Yes, species and varieties may have *special* strengths, weaknesses / needs, but not *fundamentally different* needs within their kind. Corn has corn needs, legumes have legume needs, cool season grasses, etc. <u>If</u> you bought "good" (germination tested and disease resistant) seed ***selected for your climate and soil type***, the problem is <u>not</u> likely that you need to switch *brands* next year, or give up on the crop species altogether. *Anything* can and will fail occasionally. Was it planted into a well prepared seedbed at the proper depth into soil with appropriate moisture and temperature? Only ½ of *these* needs can be *managed*, the rest is *an act of faith* and left to God. If you plant too early or too late, you may have to accept some of the blame, but only God can control the climate (please don't write me about ***man*** causing *climate change* – liars!*). If the plants germinated but failed to thrive, could there be a herbicide carryover problem? Any CCA (Certified Crop Advisor) is *trained* to recognize the *various* ways herbicides can ***damage*** crops, could this have been a factor? How *fertile* is the soil? Do you have soil test data *less than 4 years old* that meets or exceeds KOW recommendations for pH, phosphorus, potassium and sulfur? Nitrogen adequate for non-legume species? **There are no substitutes for nutrients** and they can / should be tested for adequacy every 3 to 4 years (include *forage* analysis where appropriate). **<u>If</u>** it's in the soil but not showing up in crop **yield** (or **concentrations** within normal ranges in forages –see your feed tests), the problem will <u>not</u> be lack of a "*more available"* ***commercial*** fertilizer. The next step in troubleshooting is to investigate why nutrients in the soil are "blocked" from *availability*. Consider soil *structure* –air and water movement. ***Saturation* with H_2O** causes nitrogen to be lost and other nutrients to be unavailable –the *beneficial* microorganisms and roots cannot function without air. **Compaction** –sidewall from planting or horizontal layers –prevents roots from growing into nutrient rich soil. Nutrients can be "immobilized" by <u>*raw*</u> organic matter – especially if it's "woody" and slow to break down. Remember that soil organisms always "eat" first and will take nitrogen away from crops that may be dependent on soil supplied N (non-legumes) until they fully digest *leftover crop residue and bedding materials.* Before you *question* (and it's okay to do so!) the seed and soil test data, be sure to do a little digging up roots, evaluation of soil structure and recycling of organic matter. If no *plausible* explanation based upon soil structure or excessive <u>un</u>digested crop residue becomes clear, a **disease or insect or weed** *could* be the problem. Of course, weeds compete for both sunlight and nutrients. Diseases and insects may or may not be under your *proactive* control. There are some that appear only under extreme climatic conditions (example: wet = fungal diseases) and others that are more *randomly* distributed every year (examples: armyworms and leafhoppers). The best *general* recommendation I can give to *proactively* avoid ***most*** problems with these crop destroyers is to develop a ***diverse and frequent*** crop rotation strategy. **Generally it is true, whatever you do the same year after year will be "open" for it's weakness(es) to be exploited by some weed, disease or insect.** If you're **<u>not</u>** growing a continuous monoculture using the same tillage (or non-tillage) practices, but rather are rotating frequently from legumes to grasses (and from *cool season to warm season* grasses), you can *usually* blame factors ***beyond your* control. Don't "beat yourself up," till and replant, try again** with another appropriate crop for the time of season. Go to plan B or C or D! **Never give up growing season** due to a crop failure. A dairy farm *always* gains by turning solar energy into forage. While it's <u>not</u> ***always*** true, *without* **diversity and frequency in**

crop rotation, you'll find yourself *continuously* in a *reactive* situation using (spending on) pesticides and bio-tech to combat ***ever increasing*** problems. Granted, there are *occasional* pests that emerge that *must* be addressed with plant breeding for *resistance*, but these problems are the *exception* rather than the rule for a (diverse) dairy farm rotation including forages and regular (but not excessive) use of tillage. **Bio-tech** *resistance* should be viewed only as a *short-term* solution because we are already seeing the *unintended consequences*. (Example: in corn, poor residue decomposition and an *explosion* of western bean cutworms **damaging ears** due to bt removing insect competitors -*expect* mycotoxins this year!) Don't overlook opportunities for ***winter annuals*** or *even green manure* crops such as ***tillage radish, hairy vetch or buckwheat*** to improve soil "health". **Winter cereal rye**, for example, is a "no-brainer" for providing early forage the next spring while at the same time improving soil "health" –tilth and biology. The potential economic payback is great. I wonder why *more* farmers don't grow it (?). It is exceedingly rare for the crop to fail, and even if it cannot be harvested on a timely basis in the spring, you could harvest some for *seed* and as a high yield bedding crop. Of course, there are other winter annuals to choose from –such as *triticale or wheat –or even canola*. I've *witnessed* many successful legume (including alfalfa) establishments by ***early*** *spring*

*For an example of more *propaganda and politics and the pursuit of research* funding being above truth, read the article in July 19, 2010, Feedstuffs titled "Crops must adapt to climate change" (emphasis to quotes added). University of Ill Professor Don Ort says "*Global* change is happening so *quickly* that it's impact on agriculture is taking *the world* by surprise, until recently, we haven't understood the ***urgency*** of addressing ***global change*** **in agriculture** . . . elevated carbon dioxide is creating a *global warming* effect . . . by 2050, rainfall during the Midwest growing season is projected to drop 30% . . . [Gee, some folks I know would *like* that this year! –TW] . . . For every additional *one part per billion* of ozone, soybean yields will decrease 1.5 bu/a . . . We are ***applying for funding*** to examine corn's sensitivity to ozone." S. Fred Singer, Virginia based *atmospheric physicist* responded in Copenhagen to those who insist *humans* are causing climate change: "They have no evidence. None!" (The New American, 1-18-10) Although dairy herd management reported on 7-22-10 that the US Senate has "abandoned" plans to pass the *huge* energy **tax** often referred to as "Cap & Trade," don't believe it. Judging by the other *actions* of the *wealth redistribution Marxists* in control of our federal government, it is likely that they will attempt to use the *unaccountable and unconstitutional* environmental *progressive* agency (EPA) to do the dirty work –bypassing congressional approval / accountability. The *weathermen* of the late 1960s are back and they are *using* this enviro-climate stuff to *fund* their *revolution* –which ain't really *green*, it's red. These are not the *weathermen* we see on the evening news. If you are *curious*, do a little history homework. This is about *freedom vs. tyranny*. This should concern all Americans not only due to *skyrocketing energy costs* projected, but because it will also affect *small* business in ***agriculture*** negatively -due to favored subsidy and regulation for *international* corporate ag. This *includes* funding / enforcement of research / regulation that will favor the politically connected. I could offer *countless* examples of how "research" and "advice" on ag *investment* is being *biased* by the *hope of* and/or *current "feeding upon"* this money trail. Be very careful not to become *dependent* upon the subsidies associated with all this *climate hoax,* as the unbending laws of economics will *eventually* have to correct due to all the mal-investment and *loss* of capital. The *socialist* economic system *always* grinds to a halt (after the easy credit, other's capital creek runs dry). Sources I have tell me the day of reckoning is drawing near. Seems like we've had these cycles of easy credit to farmers every couple of decades -that catch many by surprise and result in many business failures. Federal government is spending like the accelerator is stuck to the floor (congressmen all drive Toyota? Thought they were all for GM!? ☺) –and the bridge (to prosperity) is out up ahead. **If** you think agriculture will be *protected* from the *crash*, go ahead and join the party, but I'll continue to encourage others to take the path less traveled, one that reduces *debt and risk and dependence* on energy other than solar (green crops!) and "cow power" *rather than political power*. We've been given some *time to implement intensive grazing*, amongst other *changes*. Are you being proactive? If you are so inclined, please pray for our nation and work / vote to bring a solution to our problems. The *answers* are quite simple, ***if*** we will only turn back to the *source* of our *historic* wealth. Our country's founding fathers provided *law* (the constitution) to ***limit*** the size and scope of **government** - and they were students of the Bible. As your conscience leads you. For my part, I'm urging we get government out of the charity (subsidy) and loan business and that we the people stop looking for the *savior* in Washington, D.C. I leave you with the words of **George Washington**, "Government is not reason, it is not eloquence, it is force –like fire, a troublesome servant and a fearful master. Never for a moment should it be *left to irresponsible action*," and **Benjamin Rush**, ". . . the only foundation for a useful education in a republic is to be laid in religion. Without this, there can be no virtue, and without virtue there can be no liberty, and liberty is the object and life of all republican governments" . . . and "I maintain that there is no book of its size in the whole world that contains half so much useful knowledge for the government of states or the direction of the affairs of individuals as the Bible." This is what I believe and may God bless America as we *earnestly seek* his blessing.

interseeding into these winter annuals (excepting canola) –so long as a well prepared *clean* and smooth seedbed was created *the fall before*. Of course **mid-summer** affords other options if a spring planted crop fails. Rather than waiting till fall to establish a winter annual, one could (for example) plant sorghum-sudangrass with ***reed canary grass*** on that piece of bottom ground that the *corn got flooded* out on *again* this year, and end that *potential* for repeated failure in the future with a *flood resistant perennial* species. Again, even if the canarygrass cannot get harvested due to *next year's* wet spring, the *first* cutting could still make good bedding. Bedding ***production*** would be better than a crop ***loss***. **Buckwheat** would be a *last choice* for the dairy farmer because it does not make desirable ***forage*** (*toxic* factor may cause *photosensitization* in livestock), but it can be used as a small percentage of feed ***grain*** (if there's *time* to get it to maturity [10 to 12 wks]) and it does "crowd out" weeds and improve soil structure. The ***tillage radish*** is noted for the same reason, **soil structure improvement** (large deep root). If / when a crop fails due to *excessive* moisture and ***soil compaction*** is a concern as you look toward the next season, these soil structure improvement "tools" may fit where W. cereal rye is not a good option, or when mid-summer -*fall* seeding of legumes has been fully *maximized*.

We've seen some *awful* wet *disasters* in the southern Iowa / northern Missouri area this past spring-summer and that's why I'm making note of these *rarely* used crops. My first choice recommendation for folks in this area has been to *mid-summer* seed red clover (and possibly orchardgrass) as soon as the soil conditions permit, then by the first week of September *broadcast* oats to boost yield of a late *fall* cutting of forage. The red clover could provide a new stand for the following season or a nitrogen credit to the next crop. While oats are not normally *ideal* milk cow forage (alone) the mix with clover will add protein and the fiber quality / digestibility will be *much better* than *stressed* (possibly *mycotoxin* infected), *poorly eared* corn silage. If, for some (rare) reason the forage is *not* needed and you want a *nitrogen credit* crop for *next* season, consider ***hairy vetch***.

In summary, don't search for the *exotic* cause or input when one or more of the fundamental needs for crop growth has not been met. If that missing fundamental is not under your *management control*, don't let the (understandable) discouragement cause you to give up the rest of the growing season to the weeds. If the limiting factor was the weather or some other manageable factor, guard against the "I'll never do that again" mentality –because you'll only limit your future options. To quote an anonymous wise old farmer "the success of the farm has *more* to do with the top 6" of the farmer than the top 6" of the soil." ☺ I've watched farmers, over the years, suffer great setbacks. Some *resign to buying* all the winter feed by mid-summer, while others keep putting seed in the ground like it's an unhealthy addiction, kinda like *gambling*. I guess it actually is ☺! Yet the "odds" are great for *climate change* (short term, on *your* farm! ☺) and the next try will likely succeed. The key is in *knowing* your options for each circumstance, stage of the growing season. The KOWboyz *always* want to help sort these things out. I'll confess that our clients in the *super-soggy* region have really put us to the test for "bright" ideas this year (!) and I *pray* the rest of the growing season turns for the better. I'll end this topic by relating a good *longer-term* outcome story.

The past 3 years (2007-2009) of growing conditions in NW Wisconsin have been *very droughty*. My young client *and friend* Sidney Nolt suffered enough setbacks and disappointments in crop production to discourage the most seasoned of farmers, yet whenever we came up with plan A, B, C, or D (!!), he continued to *try* to grow feed. If mid-summer wasn't gonna cooperate, spring and fall were gonna give up whatever they *could* offer. Soil fertility (test data) could've been better, but we did *what he could afford* to do to correct that *limiting factor* (which was not a lot!). Being such an *optimist*☺, Sidney decided to transition to ***certified organic*** during that same time, and through the *brutal* milk prices we all experienced he had to purchase ***organic*** grain. Yet **forage** *purchases* were kept to *surprisingly* low amounts(?!). He did *not* have *extra* land for forage production and did not have enough land to grow his grain. This success was, in part, due to ***grazing*** fall oats and turnips, etc. -until *Thanksgiving Day* last year! End of last year, Sidney was commended by his banker for economic viability beyond his peers. Today he's shipping milk to *Organic* Valley and thanks God for his *many* blessings (far beyond crops and cows). How did he *survive* without Bio-Tech and pesticides?? *He didn't grow any corn*, or feed much of it. I suppose he was *secretly* using one of those *special* feed additives purported to enhance digestion and feed efficiency (?). *Everybody knows* ya can't succeed without high energy corn silage in the ration, and it would be essential to make enough "tonnage" for winter feeding needs. If you need encouragement to keep moving forward on the crop production by doing a few "*different"* things, Sidney is one example that kept "*swinging the bat until he got one over the fence*." Now, I wonder if he's been reading my newsletter any more? How long until my phone rings? ☺ He probably wouldn't want me "bragging" on his success –so I hope he'll forgive! I just offer his experience as an *encouraging* example for others to consider.

This now brings me to consider things in the barn. Have you experience anything *less than ideal* there this summer? Recently, I saw a report in *Progressive Dairyman* magazine (7-1-10) that butterfat test has been *unusually low* all across the upper Midwest this summer. I, too, have seen some unusually low % BF that *seems* to coincide with feeding new crop forages. However,

there may be a combination affect with last year's *moldy* corn crop coming out of storage during warmer weather - and growing some *mycotoxins* in the process. Most of the corn grown in the cool wet conditions last fall (upper Midwest) ended up with *some* amount of mold on the kernels by harvest time. The testing we've done has found much of it positive for **DON** / ***vomitoxin and zearalenone***. Vomitoxin is associated with butterfat depression, while zearalenone is known to cause reproductive problems -such as cystic ovaries (it has hormone, *estrogen* mimicking properties). *Sometimes*, clay-type toxin binders can aid to tie-up the zearalenone, while there are other commercial *enzymatic*-type products (Bio-Min's BBSH797 as in Bio-Fix Plus™, for example) that are purported to enhance the detox/breakdown rate of vomitoxin in the rumen. We *are recommending* use of some of these additives this year, but I cannot give any unqualified endorsement. *Most* of my *experience* with the toxin binders / additives has been *disappointing*. Cow performance problems, too, are best addressed by rechecking the fundamentals *first, before spending* on extras in their ration. If only a bag of this or that could solve every problem! *Wisdom* is first acknowledging that we do not have *all* knowledge or the ability to control all factors. If the butterfat depression, for example, is due to a *combination* of *trans-fatty acid* production in spring forages (as little as 5 grams/hd/day of *some* trans-fats can drop butterfat over 25%) and mold problems in last year's grain, we may not be able to achieve much with binders and additives –at least not enough for an *economic* payback. Best I could advise to do on *spending* here is to run a *short-term* trial on *your* farm with one of the *many* research supported additives. However, just as on the crop side of things, best review the fundamentals *before* you start writing the checks!

Did global warming go local for you this summer? It did here in Wisconsin! ☺ Especially noticeable with all the *humidity*. That high humidity makes a cow *uncomfortable* at not much over 75°F(!) and helps those *flies* reproduce like, well, flies ☺. The combination of heat stress and flies *tormenting* cows can *easily* reduce a milk tank average by 10 to 15 lbs/hd/day, even if the most "expert" *precision* (Ha!) ration formulation is recommended by your local KOWboy! Did the *weather* catch you by surprise at the barn this year? Now, don't get me wrong, rations can be wrong. Things change without anyone recognizing, *estimates* can simply be in error. Even the most sophisticated ration formulation methods are merely estimates relying on *assumptions*. Far too many of these ration assumptions *assume* ideal feedbunk management / conditions. **Don't expect a ration formula to feed / milk any better than the feedbunk and cow comfort conditions will allow**. Let's consider *first* what a cow *needs* to make the most of any ration.

Dairy cows have got to be managed like *union labor*. As much as we may be *tempted* to post a sign in the barn that reads, "Conditions will improve after morale improves," it won't do us any good to take a "those stupid cows" attitude. All the cow is trying to do is *survive* under the conditions *we provide*. If those conditions cause any pain or even *light discomfort*, those girls are going to "sit down on the job" we want them to do. Break time is a *necessity* for cows, and we wish for them to *only do productive activities* for us. A cow lying down on a *clean* (they don't much care, but we should if we want udder health, quality milk to sell), cool, *soft* bed *chewing cud* is working for us. This after the belly is full of a "good" ration. We really only want them standing when the milker is on or they are eating (–which should be *frequently* and therefore must be *easy* to do). Just as with *human* union labor management, individuality is lost –hence the term *herd mentality*. The union boss cow(s) decide what will be done *and for how long*. Cows that don't respect the pecking order soon learn that they don't get to do whatever they want and get *punished* severely if they attempt to disrespect the "union boss" by *individual* activity *ahead of* her wishes (excepting isolation for calving or *sickness*). In fact, those **new** heifers / cows actually soon ***fear*** getting out-of-step with the herd. Therefore, we've got to strive to make them all very "happy" –comfortable and low stress to "get along." This *requires space* around the bunk and water trough. Many cross-over lanes and no over-crowding. Every move to and from the pasture *needs to be a leisurely stroll* rather than a "death march" in *heat stress* across swampy, muddy, ***rocky*** paths. A cow with *one* severely injured sore hoof milks and breeds back ***worse*** than a cow with *two* missing teats and a ***temporary*** post calving uterus infection –if you can understand what I'm getting at. If we wait until they've *crowded* 'round the waterhole or trees before we let them walk back to the comfort of the barn, we can subtract that as time-and-a-half from *our* wages –cause it's on-the-clock *lost* productivity (maybe even pregnancies). Fancy is not in the union contract, but "comfy" is. Yours truly *reminds* of heat stress prevention and fly control every spring because I know every hour lost to it is in an hour a cow could be eating or chewing her cud. Fancy ain't an absolute necessity, so simple, *inexpensive* shade cloth and water soakers can accomplish a lot during mid-day heat (so long as there's *easy* access to *palatable* feed). If you want a John Deere level of fancy for *soaking* cows, check out the Edstrom Cool Sense Motion Activated System (www.agselect.com or call 800-558-5913). A **big** bonus would be tunnel ventilation fans that draw air from a shady area (or through underground tunnels / culverts if you really want to do the best). Soakers and air movement can also do a lot to "*set down*" flies. A dollar spent on these *basics* will have potential to return far more than all the feed additives and fancy programming I see advertized in the dairy farm magazines. Look at these herd conditions *before* you give undue scrutiny *and extra dollars* to ration formulations, and you'll gain much more in the long term. Be proactive to make *on-farm* changes and improvements, but it's usually better to stay the course and *drag* those boots as you consider *solutions in a bag*.