

The best nutritionist in the world is closer than you think

By Tom Weaver

Not all nutrition advisors agree on how cows should be fed –this is common knowledge. Then how do you decide who balances your ration? Let me make a suggestion: **you**. I'm serious. If you ask your accountant where all of that *cash flow* flows, you will likely see big numbers in the categories of feed, vet and cull / replacement expenses. Getting in the *driver's seat* on your nutrition management can make a great difference on these costs to production. A *good consultant* (yep, one of those fellers with KOW!) should be viewed as the *driver's ed instructor* – his job is to teach, guide, and work with you. This *hands on, team* approach is the key to success. *The herdsman should make most of the feeding management decisions because he is the one who daily observes the cows.*

Are you intimidated by dairy ration programming? All those numbers (ADF, Nel, etc.) just make you want to throw your arms up in the air and give up, don't they?! You don't have time to study what's behind all those terms and numbers, do you? *Have you ever considered that this is just what dairy supplement marketers are hoping you will do?* (Give it up, give us your mind and we will take over from here –just go milk cows, haul manure *and write checks.*) In my opinion, feeding dairy cows does not have to be so complex, especially when feeding for *profit* on a low input *sustainable / high forage ration.*

I like to compare ration balancing to driving through a large city. Yes, at first it can be a little intimidating, but really all you and I have to do is pay attention to the basics: road signs, stop lights, and *the other cars*. When I keep my focus on those three basic things, it's not so difficult to make it through. Everything else –all those neon lights and billboards are *merely marketing tools.*

So it is in dairy nutrition. When you begin to realize how *untrustworthy* some of the numbers are that we work with (they are estimates at best) then you as a herdsman, *watching your cows*, will have a great deal more confidence in your own good sense / observations! Many nutrition advisors (often involved in feed sales) are working in a *virtual reality computer world* in

which they can only see your cows' health and productivity *through those numbers!* I am confident that **you** can do better. Computers are great tools for accounting or engineering, but nutrition just doesn't work that way –not everything in nutrition management can be accurately quantified. A good herdsman spending two minutes observing his cows is often more effective than a nutritionist spending two hours in front of the computer screen.

Learning to adjust the ration by observing the cows may sound difficult and complex, but really it is only difficult and complex in the same way we could view riding a bicycle. **The key is in learning how to feed and care for the rumen microbe.** *The best indicator of how well the rumen microbes' needs are being met is the digestion quality of the cow's manure.* Just look in the gutter and apply some good common sense. Is the stuff that went in the front end getting well digested before it comes out the back end? Then there's evaluation of rumen fill and cud chewing time. *I call ration evaluation by milk tank response only dipstick mentality.* Talk to your local KOW Consultant about being the *driver's ed instructor of your feeding program.* We won't feel threatened seeing you behind the wheel. Driving your own nutrition management not only gives you a sense of freedom, but it also frees us up to work for you in other areas of farm management. In fact, KOW Consulting would like any opportunity to equip you with the knowledge and skills to develop and monitor the success of your own ration plan. **Ask us for a mini-class on our ration rules of thumb and/or an on farm hands on workshop on evaluating cows and manurology.** Anytime.

"Doubting everything or believing everything are two equally convenient solutions, both of which save us from thinking." -Jules Henri Poincaré