

BIOGRAPHY

TOM WEAVER

Tom grew upon a Southwestern Wisconsin dairy farm. *Nearly* “born-in-the-barn”, Tom has been *working* around dairy cattle since the beginning of grade school. Although not aware of it at the time, Tom’s dairy cattle education began very early in life. Upon graduation from the 8th grade in school, Tom, having been born in to a family of 9 boys (no sisters) was allowed to take employment off the family dairy “full time” (when schooling obligations were met). This provided opportunity for tutor by an elderly, highly experience dairyman by the name of Clifford Hawkinson, known as “the old Norwegian” (now deceased). Tom’s understanding of proper dairy husbandry and management was very limited at this time in his life. Fortunately, through this mentoring relationship and other experiences, Tom’s foundational knowledge was established. Noteworthy of the experience offered by the “Old Norwegian” was witnessing the potential for production of milk without the aid of protein supplements –relying solely on baled hay, ground corn, careful breeding / mating, and gentle husbandry.

At age 17, during the Reagan era, Tom signed a contract with the US Government, and upon high school graduation, entered training to become a United States Marine. This too, proved to be an experience that would forever impact and imprint – and expand– the view of Tom’s world. Exposure to Marine corps training also included a first hand view of *rural life* in the third world –what life *could* be under conditions of less freedom and opportunity than *American* farmers are accustomed to. Tom was meritoriously promoted twice, receive numerous letters of recommendation and received the highest peacetime award: The Navy Achievement Medal, before his commitment ended.

Upon discharge, Tom returned to the Midwest USA and married his sweetheart, Rebecca. After a brief stint working in manufacturing (having been promoted to management within one year of employment), Tom was drawn back to agriculture –shortly after the birth of his firstborn daughter Katlyn (desiring to raise her in rural America).

The opportunity to work in *feed sales* was offered and considered a natural “fit” due to Tom’s experi-

ence and background. The choice proved to be one of dismay and *disgust*. Tom’s experience with two feed sales firms and their associated suppliers revealed a *minimal* emphasis on dairy nutrition and husbandry training –while great conflict of interest tolerated within the industry. Farmers were not offered advice from suppliers and extension *that was not tainted* by a sales agenda –apparently, in Tom’s view, motivated by a supplier-funded research money pipeline –but from his past experience, he *knew* that cows *can* be healthier and live longer, while producing milk with less inputs.

Tom used his past experience and every available resource (books, successful dairymen) to become a highly educated catalyst for *change*. Tom is an avid reader, intensely curious student, and demanding skeptic. His journey continued into private consulting work and lead to being hired as a sub-contractor for a corporation involved in fertilizer supply. Tom’s role was to create and develop a dairy program and work as trainer and technical support for on-farm troubleshooting. After 7 years of traveling throughout the upper Midwest and into Pennsylvania in this capacity –and writing over 300 pages of training material, the desire for intellectual and professional independence was revived (in order to gain freedom from conflict of interests between advisory work and *sales* and personal vs. corporate ethics issues).

In September of 1998, Tom and long time Associate, Keith Ostby (a relative by marriage to his mentor “the Old Norwegian”), founded KOW Consulting Association (K. O. of KOW is Keith’s contribution while Weaver provides the W). KOW is an *Association* (not a corporation) of independent businesses bound by a common Mission Statement (see KOW literature) and committed to providing *truly independent* advice that puts the dairy farmers’ interests first. Through Tom’s work of being technical director to KOW Associates and farmers, he has been enabled to continue his writing, teaching, and speaking on behalf of the best farm management practices for soil, agronomy and nutrition. Tom has developed management strategies and techniques that are unique in their *efficiency* for providing and feeding high quality forages. Tom has personally authored a unique system for evalu-

ating forage quality and supplementing it appropriately for optimum herd production and health / longevity. All of Tom's teaching and guidelines are intended to be practical, intellectual "tools" for the farmer.

Tom is a Certified Crop Advisor and member of the Wisconsin Association of Professional Ag Consultants. Although he has never pursued academic credentials in the field of dairy nutrition, due to Tom's extensive education and *ability to demonstrate working knowledge* through his writing, speaking, and on-farm problem solving, he has often been *mistakenly* call "Doctor" Weaver. Tom is not beholden to any feed, seed, fertilizer, chemical, or drug company to provide his income, nor has he relied upon allegiance to any particular academic school of thought to advance his professional career.

Tom resides in Southwestern Wisconsin with his wife Rebecca, daughters Katlyn and Rosemary, and sons Grant, Malachi, and Noah. Tom is a devoted husband, father, committed Christian, and an old-school patriotic *freedom-loving* American – without apology. *Semper Fidelis* (the Marine Corps motto – "Always faithful") is still his *personal* motto.