

The following 2 pages are a reprint from the December 1999 issue of *KOW Ruminations*. At this time our newsletter was being sent to prospective clients without charge in order to introduce our point of view and school of thought. After approx. 2 years of “free” advice offered to prospective clients, due to growth of both our mailing list and business, the mailing to prospects ceased.

KOW RUMINATIONS

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

Produced by Weaver Feeding & Management, LLC, for KOW Consulting Assoc., ph 608-762-6948, fx 6949 Dec. 1999

This month's editorial: The Dairy Industry's New Clothes

Greetings!

This past month my wife was reading a story to our children before bed. I normally don't pay attention to story time, but this one caught my interest. Do you remember the fairy tale classic “The Emperor's New Clothes”? It is a story about how some charlatans came to town (gee, I am sorry to have to tell you they *claimed* to be weavers) and convinced the Emperor that they could make him “the most magnificent costume you have ever worn in your life.”

Let me pick up in the text with some of my favorite lines: “Your Highness,” said the weavers, “it [the cloth] is special because of the way we weave it. *People who are stupid or who don't deserve to have their jobs will not be able to see it.*”

“How interesting,” said the Emperor. “With such a suit, I will be able to discover which of my subjects is *smart* and worthy, and which should be banished to the farthest corner of the kingdom.”

So the story continues on and the Emperor hires the charlatans to produce this wonderful suit *that is only visible to the intelligent and worthy*. These expert weavers are given the gold thread required (they actually hide it away), and they begin to weave and sew the new clothes that are invisible to the *common*, the *unschooled*, and the *unworthy*. Now back to the text.

“That night the Emperor was so excited about this new suit that he couldn't sleep. He called for his Prime Minister to come immediately. ‘Go and see how the weavers are doing,’ he told the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister saw the weavers busy at the loom, *but he didn't see any cloth*. ‘It is true,’ the Prime Minister said to himself. ‘This cloth is very special. *Since I can't see it, I must be stupid and unworthy of my job*. Unless I lie about this, I will be banished.’ So

he watched the weavers at work for a minute or two and then he said, ‘It is magnificent, marvelous, magical! I can hardly believe my eyes.’”

The story went on and the lie was promulgated in like manner throughout the kingdom. In spite of the obvious, *no one dared to question the official line for fear of losing their position and income*. The story ends with everyone being brought back to the senses by a little boy, who, having nothing to gain or lose, shouted out, “The Emperor has no clothes on!”

Wow, think about it –**this is the dairy industry today!**

I won't dare to compare myself with the little boy. I do have something to lose, *we all do*. However, I would like to place emphasis on the urgent need for forthright, outspoken common (or *uncommon*) sense consulting.

There really are *two* lessons that we were suppose to learn from this children's story and are applicable as adults in our dairy industry today.

First, *don't believe everything you are told*. There are still charlatans about making incredible promises *in exchange* for golden thread. They often do come from out of town (far away –and are too easily granted expert status). Always ask for references. If claims are made that contradict your current base of information or experience, simply ask the salesman to clearly state those claims *on company letterhead* as well as ask for sources of *independent* information to back them up. It is not asking too much. Anyone who is not merely making unfounded claims *in order to sell you* will be happy to provide the information.

Second, of equal (or maybe greater) importance: **just because “everybody's doing it or saying it” does-**

Page 2 **n't make it right.** We were suppose to have this inculcated during childhood in order to have it available in *instant recall* to apply in adult situations. Why not apply this logic to our dairy management decisions?

We tell our teenagers not to run with the crowd because the crowd so often (human nature) takes the easy way. They are running down hill on a slippery slope. We tell them the crowd doesn't have their best interest in mind and that they need to think for themselves.

Yes, what a great concept! Thinking things through, asking ourselves why am I doing what I am doing, and why do I do it this way? If I do this or that, *who benefits most?* (Watch the money trail!) Is there another way of doing things I have never even considered? **Not all new or different ideas are bad.** Sometimes they are a whole lot better—a great alternative to what *everybody's doing*.

The biggest scoundrels in the fairy tales were not the charlatans posing as weavers (by the way, I am a true Weaver—sorry, had to get that in), *but actually the leaders*—those that people trusted to be *in the know*. Sadly, they enabled the hucksters and put their personal gain before *truth and reality*. The majority of the people followed like sheep!

Now, it doesn't work that way in the *real* world, does it? There isn't anyone willing to speak the party (company / research money) line in order to stay on the money trail, is there? Yes, everybody knows this stuff only happens in fairy tales.

I would dare to submit to you that what *seems* to be the majority opinion on management advice offered to the family dairy today will do much more to achieve the (sales) goals of its *proponents* than its *recipients*. If this were not true then:

Why are cull rates so *sky high* and why are we running out of replacement heifers? (How can we have such a low price on milk at the same time?? That one is beyond me! Oh yeah, but I must be stupid [I don't understand the benefits of free trade / dairy imports] . . . By the way, KOW Association can help you access better milk markets via the *organic* opportunity. Professionally / successfully.)

Why does the drumbeat to get bigger continue to sound louder in spite of:

1. Concerns about disease (such as Johne's) getting out of hand (due in part to the high concentrations

of livestock).

2. Lower Efficiency / net returns per cow for herds above 250 cows vs. herds below 100 cows (see 1998 data from UW Center for Dairy Profitability).
3. *Significant problems* related to employee management that *appear* to be overshadowing any benefits to regular time off / lifestyle improvement expectations in *most* (not all) expansion experiences. (My personal observation.)

How then does this *push* for expansion *help* farm families? Is it creating a better future? Or just more debt?

Don't get me wrong. I am not putting down folks who have decided to put up a free stall because they need it. My concern is over the *sales push* to get big in a leap for some promised pot of gold or life of leisure.

Folks, conventional wisdom really isn't delivering the goods. Now, more than ever, if you as a dairyman are looking for some alternative answers, KOW Consulting Association would be pleased to work for you toward that end. If you are tired of the weary cycle of accepting conventional *expert* advice only to need more and more expert advice (to solve the problems it created), you will be refreshed by our *practical* advice. Ask yourself, are you being *sold* or consulted without bias? Does your current advisor represent you or *some large company*? (If your advisor is getting a salary to move a company's wares, just who do you think gets priority? You or the folks who sign his check??)

KOW Assoc. represents you. Our job is to look out for the interests of our clients. Yes, we do get our paycheck (one you sign) via our mineral premix, but is not a feed company brand, is no more costly, and makes hiring KOW as economical as what you are currently doing. Yes, we do come with some *different* ideas at times and as the fairy tale goes, sometimes we just can't see the *magic cloth* others are so impressed with! (Truth is, like the fairy tale, what we see doesn't look so smart!) *No*, KOW Assoc. does not have *all the answers*, but I think we have better ones than what are being offered! Thank you for your consideration.

Before judging KOW as an arrogant bunch, let us take the time to get to know each other. We truly try to live by the Golden Rule in our work for you, and this newsletter does not offer enough space to communicate all we would like. Also, please take the time to ask for references and visit their farms so you can see what we are all about.