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If a man will not believe in God, the danger is not that he will believe in nothing, but that he will believe in anything.

–G. K. Chesterton

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!!

KOW Ruminations

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

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When Dairymen Get Milk Fever

. . . And how you can make better decisions for your farm

By Tom Weaver

Milk fever in cows is a *costly* and troublesome problem. When cows get milk fever, they usually end up with other problems as well –side effects or secondary troubles such as metritis, ketosis, etc. We realize today that milk fever, in spite of a *generally* rapid response to treatment, cannot be tolerated as a simple, isolated condition of little consequence. Milk fever reduces the productive lifespan of the cow significantly and, through both primary and secondary complications, short term profitability of the farm. Fortunately we know a lot about prevention now-a-days.

While an *occasional* case of milk fever may be unavoidable, those who accept a significant percentage of occurrence (clinical *downer cows* or subclinical *slow starters*), are simply *ignorant* of the cause. Really, it's the farmer's management, *from the soil up*, that is at fault when a high percent of cows get milk fever. We *know* today that dry cow forages heavily fertilized with potassium predispose cows to get milk fever. We *know* that force feeding of salt to dry and pre-fresh cows promotes milk fever. We *know* that over-graining, causing transition acidosis and *off-feed*, sets cows up for milk fever. These are simply the *facts*. Objective truth, not subjective opinion. Cows don't get milk fever just because:

1. You have superior genetics than all your neighbors and therefore the *will* to milk and calcium demand is so great that occasionally your superior cows and herdsmanhip overcome the system.
2. The neighbor's cows have been getting milk fever too –it's a bad year for it, bad weather is the culprit. Other folks are having the problem, it'll pass with the change of the seasons. Accept it as normal.

3. You failed to *vaccinate* for milk fever. Good farm managers know that it's important to *vaccinate* to prevent problems like this. You heard that a friend of your neighbor had a salesman inform him of the countless milk fevers that would occur if the vaccination program was not up to snuff. Better get with a new vaccination program or things will likely get worse.
4. Your cows are *deficient* in a *probiotic* of some type or the right brand of supplement makes all the difference. You're feeding the wrong brand. Your neighbor has "good luck" with Brand X, better switch.

(For you veterinarians, please let me know if you get any inquiries about the "new milk fever vaccine." I'll be sure to give up on trying to consult those individuals!)

Now that we've *thoroughly* (ha!) addressed milk fever in cows, let's move on to an even more serious and devastating disease that occasionally occurs on dairy farms. The side effects and costs are even greater. When **farmers** get milk fever . . .

Subclinical symptoms: Muscle tone between the ears gets poor, pupils sometimes fail to respond when making eye contact (mind seems to be elsewhere, possibly thinking about someone else's farm, not *his own business*). Hearing becomes *sensitive* to sales people and bragging neighbors who get lots of milk with *zero* problems. (Yea, right.) Generally nervous and insecure.

Clinical / downer dairyman: Reasoning ability and mathematical skills are no longer apparent. Ears closed and handshake toward *professional independent* advisors (truth tellers) get cold. The will to resist *salespeople* appears to be completely gone. Emotional

decision making is in full control. Caution: keep your distance when a dairy farmer is in this stage of the disease, a small percentage may lash out in anger if you try to move too quickly into the realm of logic, facts, and long term profit concerns. In this *emotionally* charged state it can be dangerous –allow time for the patient to sedate themselves with stress and fatigue. Note that this may take a few months to several years. This disease runs its course within differing time frames depending upon the stamina (foolish pride) and inherent immunity (common sense) of the individual.

Treatment: At the stage of exhaustion and disappointment, memory of patient returns, some mathematical skills, and common sense can be seen in operation. (The **long term cost** analysis is getting clearer.) At this point, logic and facts can be administered without the use of a balling gun or syringe. They will be readily and voluntarily consumed. This recovery of good muscle tone between the ears can be expedited by counsel from a fully recovered sufferer of the disease. Prior to this stage in the life cycle of the disease, *there is no effective treatment*. Unfortunately, much damage will have occurred at this point. Recovery may take 1 to 3 years depending upon the virulence of the strain. Immediate infusion of cash may be warranted. Recognize that some cases may have advanced beyond *financial* recovery at this stage.

Prevention: Vaccinate on a regular monthly basis with reminders of the financial *and lifestyle* benefits of best management practices –in a timely, seasonal fashion. Use a modified live strain of the reading and education bug. Readers are thinkers. **Thinking for one's self will be necessary for full recovery.** Active immunity with this vaccine greatly reduces the farmer's susceptibility to **the following pathogens** and will keep their decision making organs functioning at optimum health:

1. **Pride** –I'm gonna push for more milk to prove to my neighbors just how good of a dairyman I really am – even if it costs more than it pays in the long run.
2. **Peer pressure** –I've gotta get more milk out of these cows before the neighbors find out. What if they hear I dropped under 70# per cow?!
3. **Fear of the unknown** –If I make a change in how I am currently doing things, I *could* get lower production. I am not sure, *because I'm not exactly sure why I'm doing what I'm doing right now*. The guy from the Co-Op seems to think I'm stupid to consider any change, so I *fear* it would be best not to change, but rather to stay just the way things are right now (stupid?). After all, I did go up a couple pounds of milk since the last ration change. *I don't know why*, but all that matters is they're milking good now, that's all I should *think* about. Yes, the cull rate

is a little high, but the bankers says I still have enough cows to spread my debt. Sure is *scary to think* about change right now 'cause I've gotta keep those tank average and debt per cow numbers right. I *hope* things get easier. It *scares* me to think about what could happen if they don't. I'd better work a little harder. No time to question things (think) now. (Gee, how did he ever get over the fear of the dark anyway?)

4. **Management in a bag** –I've got a problem and *somewhere* out there is the right *product* to solve it. I just haven't found it yet. This problem *can't* have anything to do with my management. After all, if I'm doing it, it *can't* be wrong. If I spent the kind of money I did on this big purchase, it *can't* be a mistake. If you're supplying me with *anything* and I run into *any* problems, you can be sure the answer will be found by calling Brand X. I don't understand what the product is intended to do, but I'm sure, if it was any good at all, it should've covered for any deficiencies in my management (or factors beyond *anyone's* control). I like to buy magic. You confuse me when you start talking about cause and effect. I like to talk to the Brand X salesman. He always says such nice things about my farm. He's my friend (for now). He's got something that'll get some milk out of these cows (or get 'em bred, etc.). I know they were milking good before (while using your products) but something must have changed and it *couldn't* be anything on my end. I just had to do (buy) something. I tried your program, but it doesn't work. (Translation, "I bought your products for a while, but never listened.")

If you can make a decision that does not get swayed by one of the above "pathogenic *brain bugs*," you are probably, by a process of elimination, making a *good decision* –by use of objective truth / facts (not ignorance, fear, pride or peer pressure) and logic / reason (not emotion). KOW Consulting's job is to provide you with the information, education, and options from an *independent of sales* point of view on soil-agronomy-nutrition. **Your job (responsibility) is to make a good decision.** Take a little time to consider the mental process you have been using to do that job. It'll make all the difference to the success of your dairy. Final note, if what you get from this is, "Weaver is against high milk production," you've completely missed the point.