

The following 2 pages are a reprint from the Dec 2002 - Jan 2003 issue of *KOW Ruminations*.

Without humility a man cannot learn, for the first step to learning is the realization of ignorance. Quintilian, the great Roman teacher of oratory, said of certain of his scholars, "They would no doubt be excellent students, if they were not already convinced of their own knowledge." -commentary on the Gospel of Mathew, William Barclay, pg 97.

KOW Ruminations

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

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What'll It Take To Get **You** To Change?

It's time to review the mission statement and production management plan for your dairy.

Yep, I'm writin' to *you* –Y.O.U.! That's the way a former client (now retired) addressed me one day in a voice mail message, "Tom, I want to talk to you—Y.O.U." I still laugh when I think about it. That fellow was quite a *character* to deal with. He probably thought the same about me because I would always be challenging him to consider new ideas.

One of the nice things about sending out this newsletter is that I can *hit you right in the nose* (in a caring sorta way, of course) with challenging thoughts and ideas –without it being *too personal*. (Although it has caused me to be mistaken and prejudged at times [by folks that I've never met] as an arrogant "know-it-all." Hey-I'm just *confident* in what I'm presenting and want to make myself clearly understood!)

Change is *difficult*. I've often said to my associates that we must be conscious of the fact that *we cannot change people*. It is not in *our* power or mission statement to do so. To be quite honest about it, I'm nearly helpless to change myself –only by God's grace and with His help can I become more of what *I know* I ought to be, and so –that is my prayer always. That, in spite of myself, I would be able to fulfill my role as a husband, father, and farm advisor in a manner worthy of the calling. My associates and I simply try to do our best to find those farmers we are compatible with and present our information. As I've stated before in this newsletter, it is our job to present the information, but it is *yours* to make a good decision. When you have made your decision, we work within those parameters to work out the details. The only *non-negotiables* are those things that violate the morals of honest business practices and the things *specifically* set forth in the KOW Association *mission Statement* (You are occa-

sionally reminded of this Mission Statement in this newsletter and other literature. If you'd like a copy for review –just ask.)

I've used the term *Mission Statement* a couple of times already. I'm wondering . . . Do *you* have one? Ours has been criticized as being too lengthy / wordy, but I wanted it to be more specific. Some businesses simply have a mission statement like, "To provide profits to pay employees, management and stockholders in ever increasing measure," or something of the sort. Some of these businesses also provide "free" production management advice to farmers!

Do you see the farmer's interest considered in that equation?! The mission statement of *any* organization is suppose to be the bottom line measure for all decision making –so it really matters how it is constructed. If there is no mission statement amongst a group of people working together –they are very likely not *working together* toward any particular common goal(s) at all! All that an outsider could do is surmise the probable "*mission*" based upon *how* actual decisions are made and the resulting actions.

When I observe *some* farmers in action, *sometimes* I come away with some *odd* sounding mission statements:

"To *impress* the neighbors and industry observers with a demonstration of maximum production in short term measures –regardless of economic consequences."

Or, "To operate a dairy farm in such an *industry norm* fashion so as to avoid the offense / risk caused by doing something better / different than others –or *chal-*

lenging the ideas of suppliers, bankers, and university extension.” (I can respect the U-Ext for their knowledge while at the same time have reservations about their wisdom.)

Or, “To milk cows in order to support the accumulation, testing, and repair of all sorts of new equipment and technology –or other bad habits. ”

Not a word about lifestyle, profitability and retiring of debt. Granted, if a dairyman has *financial* incentives to reward him for some of the above (like sales of breeding stock), there may be a place for *some* of this *within* the overall statement of mission. However, it is by observing decision making and actions on *most* farms that I’ve come to the conclusion that *most* dairymen allow their decision to be driven by the following 4 factors.

1. Pride;
2. Peer pressure;
3. Fear of the unknown; and
4. Management in a bag.

(For more specific descriptions of each, ask me to send you a copy of the Dec 2001 *KOW Ruminations*. I stated in that same newsletter that if you can make a decision that is not swayed by one of the above, it was probably a good one.)

This time of year is a time when many decisions are made –in planning for the next season’s crops –that will dictate much of the production management protocol (and costs associated) for the following year and beyond. **I would like to encourage you to consider writing a formal mission statement for your farm.** In doing so, you’ll need to give serious consideration to what is truly important to you and your family –and these things will very likely go beyond financial needs / wants (but, of course, must include them). When you formalize what it is you are *really* after, it would be easier to decide where to put your time and resources – and we’ll be able to better judge if or how we can assist you. If help to do this is desired, please let me know.

These are days in dairy that leave little room for “shoot from the hip” production management. My associates and I are eager to assist with positive, *proven* change that can make a real difference in lifestyle and profitability. It is my *assumption* that all of the dairy farm families we work for would like to continue to make improvements to secure acceptable levels of both. I am fully aware of the *conventional* price of milk –but have you ever considered the *organic* market? It’s worthy of serious consideration.

The cropping plan suggestions to reduce production costs and improve cow health / longevity contained in this newsletter really do make a difference –does *your* mission statement allow considering change in this area? Yes, these ideas are a radical departure from conventional norms, but the conventional answers are not helping *most* farm families to reach *their* goals (these “*solutions*” are actually benefiting the interests of the ag supply and milk marketing part of our industry). I’ll end with a few excerpts from an article I read in the November 21, 2002, *Agri-View* newspaper titled, “Brunners Believe People, Not Cows, Really Count.” Although I’ve never met Brad and Lorie Brunner of Cecil, Wisc., I instantly gained respect for them. Here are a few excerpts:

Brad Brunner has ridden the expansion merry-go-round and grabbed for the golden ring. This Shawano County dairy producer says it’s hollow. It’s the people in your life –not the cows –that truly matter, Brad contends . . . He’s frustrated that expansion hasn’t produced the lifestyle changes the experts promise it will . . . This highly-touted, new-and-improved way of dairy farming carries its own set of problems . . . Brad insists he has to find a way to somehow free himself up on his dairy. He’s plain sick-and-tired of 12 hour days, followed by two hours of paperwork, so that his “family doesn’t know who I am.” That’s not what he was anticipating when he first embarked on a major dairy expansion. It’s not what many of his fellow dairy producers are expecting either, but unfortunately, Brad points out, it’s what they get. Brad is almost a voice in the wilderness these days, when he flat-out criticizes agriculture’s emphasis on increasing the size of the operations on the promise of farm families have “more time off –more family time.” For many, it’s a bill of goods. He doesn’t think he’s the exception in finding “life hard, less family time and less time off” . . . He fears the dairy industry in the U.S. has headed down the path that the poultry and pork industries have already taken . . . Debt is your enemy . . . “Why do we do the same things over and over and expect different results,” he says of “chasing more cows.” If you’re not profitable at 50 cows, changes are you won’t be at 500 or 5,000.

Brad is a big man to make these public statements about *conventional* wisdom. I think he’s suggesting a *different* path. KOW Consulting has one for your farm. That’s always been my favorite definition of insanity: doing the same thing over and over again all the while expecting different results. Would you like things to go better? Then you have to be open to *change*.

Now would be a very good time to have your dairy’s milking and electrical system thoroughly evaluated / repaired.