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KOW Ruminations

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We do dairy nutrition from the soil up.

"Socialism in general has a record of failure so blatant that only an intellectual could ignore or evade it." -Thomas Sowell

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"But see, we are slaves today, slaves in the land you gave our forefathers so they could eat its fruit and other good things it produces. Because of our sins, its abundant harvest goes to the kings you have placed over us. They rule over our bodies and our cattle as they please. We are in great distress." Nehemiah 9:36-37

Rube Goldberg Dairy Management and Austerity Measures

Does technology have anything to offer that's economical?

We humans seem to have an unlimited capacity to deceive ourselves and ignore the caution and warning signs of life. This until the *consequences* of our *decision* (often by default, lack of proactive change) bring us to a place of *harsh undeniable* reality. I must begin this newsletter with a note of *clarification* regarding "political stuff." I recently had an associate make the comment that "I just skip over that political stuff" when reading the *KOW Ruminations / Review of the Dairy News*. My response was as that, due to the *economic consequences*, he would not long be able to completely ignore the political decisions. Lest anyone thinks I have any motive other than doing the *morally right* thing of *forewarning* fellow travelers that the bridge is out up ahead, I assure you it is not my focus *or pleasure* to bring you the "political" news of the day. The political decisions end up having *significant economic consequences* and a few of my readers have recognized that *economic concerns are my primary motivation* for all the "fussing" over federal government growth and intervention. For those that *might* (?) take offense (none *expressed* so far) that an ignorant KOWboy such as I

dare question the decisions of our elected officials, I thank you for your tolerance and patience. I am not expecting to lead a modern day *Shay's rebellion* (learn more at www.mikechurch.com). If any (?) of my readers think the KOWboy is wrong-headed in analysis / perspective, I am confident that the *truth or consequences* (anyone remember the old TV show? ☺) will become apparent to all of us in 2011. The reason for my confidence is the *historical perspective* I'm considering, and history *always* repeats due to the foolish, *willful ignorance* of men. Another reason is that I understand that **the laws governing economic value are as unbending as any other natural law**, such as gravity. If it be true that what goes up must come down, it is equally true that *economic value cannot* be *created* by government edict. Naw, if I wanted to go totally "political," I would be writing a *lot more* about things like the outcome of the elections, the *Marxist* strategy being openly (it's no "conspiracy" when anyone with eyes can see it) employed to intentionally *collapse* our *republic* and civil society (it's not suppose to be a *democracy*, find out who *Saul Alinsky* was, what he

taught), the things being done to promote anarchy and violence (including but not limited to our open southern border). I have merely given little bits of info that any *curious* person could pursue further –**if** interested. I would not *dare* put anything in this newsletter that could not withstand scrutiny . . . for another “bone or two to chew on” (only for those interested! ☺), do a little of your *own* research on things like what the new farm bill contains (Senate Bill 510), General Electric Corporation’s past, present and future (published, planned) involvement in “state capitalism” (what used to be called *fascism*) and **manure digester systems** in both China and the USA, the *intentional* collapse of national currencies and the work of *George Soros* –as well as this *internationally known* multi-billionaire’s investments in *Monsanto* (oh, the surprise the *organic* folks are going to get when they realize the *hope* [some of them -mostly non-farmers], put into big government funding, mandates –picking of winners and losers –was *misplaced*). Include an investigation of the US Dept. of Labor website *recent* promotion of Venezuela’s *collective* (state controlled) farms. Check into federal government loan guarantees and financial failure of the mega-dairies in our nation and *consider* who *really* owns them after they are taken over by their creditor. You see, **it’s really impossible to divide the economic from the political decisions**. The day after our national elections (11/3/10) the federal government / federal reserve began to *further* monetize our national debt to the “tune” of \$600 billion (if this means nothing to you, study what *causes* inflation, why interest rates hit 20% in the USA in the 1970s and what happened to Germany’s economic system in the 1920s, and the political consequences it led to). Today (11-24-10) China and Russia announced they will no longer trade in US dollars. I’d prefer to be ignorant.

“Money has value only if trading partners believe it has value. This is why currency quickly becomes stove fuel when people stop trusting it.” Jay W. Richards, from *Money, Greed and God. Why capitalism is the solution and not the problem* (ISBN 978-0-06-137561-3).

This brings me to **austerity measures**. You may have heard this term used in world news regarding the cause of *riots* in Greece (the government of Greece has run out of money for all the “*free*” entitlements the people were accustomed to –and had to implement “austerity measures”). This means *not just small* reductions in spending, but *severe* cuts. I guess the folks in Greece weren’t *prepared* for it. Are you? Bringing this back from the world news to *your* farm (hey, the mantra has been “think global, act local” ☺), what could you do to implement your own *austerity measures* **before** they are *forced* upon you? *Please* do not misunderstand, I fully realize that the pay price of milk vs. the cost of producing it has already *forced* some significant austerity upon you. I’m thinking more of *how* costs to production may be

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rapidly / further changing . . . and how subsidies may be *severely* reduced to all **but** those *nationalized* carbon credit supported mega-dairies with G.E. Jenbacher engines running on methane from the manure digester systems in order to produce “green” electricity –like they’re doing in the people’s paradise of Shenyang China. What I just wrote just *cannot* be true, can it? Naw, and it’ll *never* happen here in the US of A because farmers *don’t* rely on or do whatever the *central planners* (big government bureaucrats and academics) want them to! . . . Nope, no evidence of the sort. **If** you happen to be one of the *few* dairy farmers left that have been able to *survive without* reliance on the direct government payments, you are already at an *advantage* over those that have become *dependents*. I know these farms exist because we (the non-recipient farmers and I) talk about these things, and these are the operators that have been **proactive** in implementing austerity over automation / technology, that have all (every one) implemented *well managed intensive grazing* plans.

Screwtape to his deputy, Wormwood (from the Screwtape Letters by C. S. Lewis):

“I note what you say about guiding our patient’s reading and taking care that he sees a good deal of his materialist friend. But are you not being a trifle naïf? It sounds as if you supposed that argument was the way to keep him out of the Enemy’s clutches. That might have been so if he had lived a few centuries earlier. At that time the humans still knew pretty well when a thing was proved and when it was not; and if it was proved they really believed it. **They still connected thinking with doing and were prepared to alter their way of life as the result of a chain of reasoning.**”

Rube Goldberg (1883-1970) was a popular cartoonist in the early 1900s. His specialty was designing / illustrating *very complex* machines / inventions capable of performing *very simple* tasks –that no one really needed a complex machine to do. He too was known to enter the *political* arena with his work, but much of his political viewpoint has been *scrubbed* from history, so I can’t judge whether or not we would have seen eye-eye on those matters. ☺ Regardless, Rube became quite famous for using *absurdity* to make a point about **unnecessary use of technology**. One way to be *proactive* in implementing *austerity measures for dairy farm management* is to look for *unnecessary / non-beneficial* use of equipment and/or technology on your farm.

Start in your soil / crop program. For example, the KOWboyz like to use GPS and computer technology to *measure* fields and record crop / fertility data. However, use of that technology does not mean that we can offer you more precision / accuracy *in the soil test lab*. While grid (more intense) soil sampling can help provide a

more representative sample to the soil test lab, it cannot ever improve the accuracy of the *test procedure*. At this time, soil test labs are *admitting* that they are having great difficulty in endorsing the reliability of potassium (K) values provided, regardless of the extraction method. Crops can “pull” K from *deeper* in the soil profile than the 6 “to 7” core taken for typical testing -and there’s a lot of doubt about the value of current procedures. The *KOWboyz* have seen this growing trend (no pun intended) the past few years and are now prepared to rely on **forage** tests to *better* guide soil K fertility in puts. So long as *forages* test over 2 ½% K, save your money, don’t apply any. Potassium is not the only soil test procedure that has accuracy problems. Not a single one of the elements (include pH) we test for can claim *precision* (all are an *extraction* process designed to **predict relative nutrient availability in season**. High, medium or low is the best we can ask for.) **Sulfur** is another major nutrient that is *poorly predicted* by a **soil** test (but *accurately measured* by a forage analysis) because it’s either tied-up in organic matter *or leaching* (a lot like nitrogen). **Sulfur may be more likely in need in your fertilizer program than K**. Gypsum (21% Ca, 17% sulfur), fortunately, costs much less than potassium-sulfate/chloride. Let *forage* testing guide you. I could continue, but *none* of the things we test for in the **soil** is an *actual measurement* of the total amount therein -because that still does not tell us just how much may **become available** to the plant during the growing season. Therefore, no matter how Rube Goldberg –like sophisticated we want to be on soil *sampling*, technology on-farm cannot take us any further than the value of the lab procedure –which is *very limited*. Unless you are *required* (by regulation for nutrient management) to do intensive grid sampling, I would not spend for more on the soil testing than a *representative* random / zig-zag sampling of each field every 4 years. Beyond this, let your dairy **forage** testing guide fertilizer needs (because it’s an *actual measurement* of what did happen). Furthermore, let’s keep the *Rube Goldberg marketers* away from that fertilizer program, cover the basics, and stop looking for that *special* ingredient / input ‘till those *fundamental* needs are *fully* covered. All too often **lime** (*fine ground* calcium-carbonate) is still neglected while folks are fooling around with some type of *foliar* concoction, or **phosphorus** is woefully low while *trace* minerals get all the attention. **Austerity measures for soil fertility should have us treating livestock manure as more valuable than dollar bills** (because it may soon be!) and **legumes** like a queen once again. **As the value of the US dollar goes down, the cost of everything priced on the world market will go up accordingly**. Lime and manure will be better priced than *commercial* N, P, and K. I have been *begging* all *KOW* clients to move back toward a *legume dominated* forage base in preparation for *these days of austerity*. Legumes *grow* nitrogen, buying it with *hyper-inflated* dollars may not be an option in the not too distant future. *Soil structure and organic matter* improvement is an on-

farm *management* issue more than a technology *input* problem. Tillage *radish* may soon prove to be much more economical than deep tillage with a diesel powered tractor and perennial legumes build soil quality while producing low cost protein for cows. Oftentimes, when the **yield monitor** records a low outcome, it’s a very basic thing like compaction or low pH. **If** you want to invest in *technology* for your crops, **invest in yield monitors** that can be used to make maps that can help identify low yielding areas of fields. We can then check the fertility, pH and *structure* of those poor areas. The *solutions* are usually some very low-tech fundamentals.

Harvest and storage costs of forages in 2011 and beyond may bring (force) *intensive grazing* onto many more farms. I’m at a loss (pun *intended*) to see how farmers can *afford* to bale or chop a forage for their heifers one week and transport that same forage to a *confined* feedbunk the very next (!). The economic benefit of *grazing* heifers several months of the year in order to reduce ration, harvest and storage costs is *undeniable*. *Milking* cows that are managed *with a plan to prevent heat and fly stress* can also **significantly** reduce ration, harvest and storage costs, while *still* producing *economical* levels of milk. Rube Goldberg would be amused to see how much *unnecessary mechanization* is used in harvest and storage. Whenever a cow can efficiently harvest it herself, we are “*going Goldberg*” to burn diesel and wear out equipment just so she doesn’t have walk after it (add to this consideration, *hauling* the manure back out to the field vs. self application by a cow). As for that amount of forage we **must** store (for winter), does anyone recall that **bunker balage** recommendation I first gave on 4-2-07 (revised 5-19-10)? I finally got a client to try it this year. They intend to do it all that way next year. I challenge anyone to come up with a more *effective*, lower cost way to store –using less *Goldberg grease* ☺ and more *austerity*. If you improve on, or have a *better / more* economical storage method (*that can deliver high quality forage*) for winter rations, I’ll eagerly share it in this newsletter. The days of *recreational* tractor driving and purchasing / maintaining *unnecessary* equipment are over. It’ll simply take more US dollars than we can *bale up* to pay for it.

Feeding cows, both our ration formulation methods and feedbunk management, can involve a lot of Rube Goldberg inspired added costs. In fact, as I have tried to explain in many ways / times past, *marketers* *intentionally* use *unnecessary complexity* in order to lower the farmer’s defenses and encourage purchases. If you’re using technology to better *record* what *has been* fed rather than **predict** what *should be* fed, you’ll probably be spending those federal reserve notes in a wiser manner (if you *insist* on using computer software to formulate / “predict” ration needs, I see Michigan state University now as an updated version of the *Spartan* program available for a “free” 60 day trial [it’ll cost you

over \$450 to buy it]. However, I'm *still* of the *considered* opinion that KOW's methods utilizing *full brain engagement* ☺ with pen and calculator result in a consistently *superior* formulation!) Other *heavily promoted programs* purported to "*precisely*" balance rations for amino acids (in order to reduce nitrogen excretion, save the planet –and sell supplements!☺) are long on claims but short on results. Any ruminant nutritionist worth his salt knows one cannot *precisely* "dial in" *digestion*, but whatever *claims* to save us from "climate change" now-a-days has a pretty *green* funding pipeline and there are many willing to sell their souls (literally) to be part of it. A prime example of this is "The **fact** (!) of global warming is being ignored" by Richard Keller (www.dairyherdnetwork.com). Some are calling those **scientists** that **question** human / cow caused global warming "renegade" "non-believer" . . . "Pseudo-scientists" *as compared to* "legitimate scientists." Gee, I thought *real* science was suppose to *encourage* questioning –not coerce consensus! This "*non-science*" has nothing to do with helping you feed cows *economically*, efficiently and **everything** to do with getting some carbon tax (cap and trade) greenbacks. Tell them to stick that Rube Goldberg ration formulation into the anaerobic digester☺.

The true cost of a ration isn't just in the formulation, it includes the cost to deliver it to the cows. We have already noted that it's possible to have the cows go get it themselves (grazing) -or at least a portion of it. As we consider austerity measures and the cost of grain, protein concentrates, energy (fuel, electricity, etc.), and labor, delivering that ration 24 hr/365 days as TMR can really become economically *oppressive* (unless you're getting a carbon payment bailout like the *nationalized collective dairy business center* model). **Lock-up headgates are a great low-tech option for controlling the intake of an old fashioned grain mix**, and/or *high-chopped, high grain* corn silage or *snapple* (an efficient starch source, could be the **only** source of grain in the ration). As **feeding equipment** and **grain costs** continue to rise (with the fall of the US dollar), the high – and higher- forage ration (based upon *legumes*) with very low starch / grain fed will make TMR feeding *less* beneficial and *economically obsolete*. This is **not** to suggest that no technology will be economically viable. The computerized feeding station as used with (or *without*) robotic milking systems **may** (might) be here to stay due to the need to control grain and **labor** costs (especially **if** the *communist* front groups usually referred to as **unions** get their way on dairy farms). Beside *elimination* of employees, robotic *milkers* provide valuable data collection (while *robotic milking appears*, at first glance, to be Rube Goldberg management of the highest order, it is, in fact [**if** managed rightly!] a tremendous *record keeping* and *efficiency enhancing* tool). I would personally like to see a hi-tech *concentrate feeder wagon* developed that could be taken to the **grazing** paddock to provide grain mix in 5 or 6 meals per

24 hours, offer free choice salt-mineral mix and monitor activity for estrus 24/7. No, this KOWboy is no luddite (as I've been called! ☺), I'm just **not** a Rube Goldberg – use it *because it exists and the salesman say -so guy!* Time will tell, *hopefully* we'll have an economic system in 2011 and beyond that affords *some* of this new tech.

What about feeding *young* calves? Should we go for the hi-tech computerized feed system on these also? While it may seem "kinda neato" at first, we are back to winning a Rube Goldberg management award if we max out technology here. Why? Because you already own the *most sophisticated* automatic calf feeders possible! Consider that as the cost of grain / protein concentrate (calf starter) and *labor* goes up, while the sale value of your milk and cows are poor, *there may come a time* when you can *justify* (economically) keeping an extra *milking* cow around to feed every 3 to 4 calves. If that just took a turn far too radical for your following, please consider that **cows were the original automatic calf feeders** ☺ and I'm merely suggesting that, as with other areas of management, we keep an open mind toward the tried and true methods of the past. I've been *observing* some **very successful** calf feeding programs on *certified organic* dairies the past few years that **skip the need for calf starter grain** and daily *labor* required to feed it -and the calves milk -by leaving them on a cow for the first 5 to 6 months of their lives. While I don't think one can pencil out the economics *without* considering the cow as *skilled labor* ☺, I know I do see beautiful, healthy, and strong calves produced (*rarely* sickness –including symptoms of coccidiosis [in spite of **no** anti-cocci drugs]). It must be that *miracle supplement* –milk. One may as well turn some of that milk back into the *original* form of wealth. Did you know that the word "capital" derives from the Latin word "caput" meaning "head." According to at least one medieval Latin scholar, "caput" referred to **head of cattle** or livestock. Maybe we need to invest in *more* cows until we have a *more stable currency*? ☺ I don't know about *trading* in cows, **but at least we can eat them** ☺ and no one can flood the market with them simply by pushing a button on a printing press (the *real* cause of *inflation* and the way governments *steal* wealth from the creators of it!)

Finally, this KOWboy, as you might expect, has been *preparing* (to the extent I can) for his own days of austerity. *Part* of my **proactive plan** is to reduce some printing and postage expenses in 2011. **Starting in March 2011, KOW Ruminations and the Review of the News will be combined into one publication**, mailed **quarterly** -only to KOW clients (*KOW Ruminations* will no longer be available via subscription, *non-clients* will need to subscribe to the website). Beside this, I am developing ideas / programs that I *hope* to be able to bring to you in 2011 and beyond that will cut your costs of production, including costs to supplement minerals and vitamins. Hope you'll "stay tuned!" May God bless you and keep you well in 2011!