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Y2 KOW Ruminations

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

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Everybody knows organic dairy farmers are a bunch of KOOKS!
(But why are those KOOKS still getting \$17.60/hundred base price?)

This past month I was given kind-of-a neat opportunity. I was asked to speak to the Dairy Science students at UW Platteville. The topic was "Alternative Dairy Management, is *organic* style production a viable program?" My job was to expose these students to a little *outside the box* thinking in regard to producing milk.

Although **organic certified farms are actually a small percentage of our clientele**, I do see it as a profitable / viable opportunity and expect to see that percentage continue to grow. Although I would prefer the keen interest and *interactivity* (due to \$ interest) of our farmer meetings (no offense intended students), it was nevertheless, a pleasure to insert *alternative ag* into the curriculum.

It was clear to me afterward that many of those students had never been exposed to the new *professional organic* (no oxymoron) farmer—most thought low yielding crops, weedy

fields, low producing cows, etc. were all *mandatory* within *organic*. Of course, like any group of people, one bad apple . . . and *organic*, as a group, unfortunately has a barrelful. We (KOW) call farms that promote the stereotype *organic by neglect*: weedy fields, low yields, and poor doing cows. (This example of *organic* is usually created because of a focus on *magic potions* and the *don'ts* in place of the *do's*. "*We are organic. We don't use herbicide, synthetic nitrogen, etc., but the salesman says this wonder dust may help our situation. How? We are not sure . . .*")

I really *don't* like the term *organic*. I would much rather use the term *sustainable* because by definition, *sustainable* must also be *profitable*. We all realize that the production system / marketing opportunity called *organic* is not defined by the Webster's Dictionary—all farming methods are *organic* by that definition.

Therefore, I think, *sustainable* or *low input sustainable ag* are better terms. I also am of the opinion that to *successfully* produce milk for this new market (or any market today), emphasis needs to be placed upon putting a *system* together—not just dropping the *don'ts* (pesticide, etc.). Low input / *high output* is possible and *sustainable* with a good *system* approach (*dairy nutrition from the soil up*). It is about doing the *do's* to *reduce and/or eliminate the need for the don'ts*. **This system approach thinking has a big payoff no matter what milk market you are producing for.**

Are all ideas and methods employed by organic / sustainable farmers' *kooky* and unsuccessful?? If you currently think so, one visit to a KOW association professional organic farm will likely get the silly grin off your face. (You know, the one that appears when you hear the term *organic*.) Most pro-

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organic farmers don't have long hair, wear sandals, or smoke "weed" . On the organic farms I'm thinking of, you can see healthy cows and a *profitable* operation. They do the *do's*. The *do's* make *any* dairy more money.

For example, *organic* milk market or not, if via soil fertility / manure management, crop selection / rotation planning and using the new tools / technology available you can reduce or even *eliminate your herbicide bill*, wouldn't it make your farm a bit more profitable?

What if the farm system produced forages that were more nutritious / healthful and fed them in such a way that you **no longer needed** to purchase so much supplement? Whether or not you would want to risk being called *kooky* (by being paid \$17.60/hundred for *organic* milk), you would still be more profitable by *reducing your cost of production*.

Okay, I have jabbed you with that \$17.60/hundred again. I am not trying to rub wounds due to our current conventional market price. I am not pleased with it either. KOW Consulting gets hurt too—no dairy farmer, no job.

However, I am wanting to draw your attention to an opportunity that is open to many that could make a real difference for their family dairy. That figure, \$17.60, is the January 2000 base pay price being offered by Organic Valley/CROPP. They are actively seeking more milk to meet their *demand*. Yes, *demand!* How are they offering their farmers this premium? Simple, by listening to the consumer and providing a quality, value added product. Not just a mere commodity. There is a growing number of consumers who are willing to pay a premium for milk and milk products that are produced under *organic* standards / restrictions. If Ford learns that people are buying more Chevy's because of the pretty green color, they start painting them green too! The opportunity is there. What's

kooky about that?

Can you *really* grow high yielding crops without GMO's and pesticides? Can you *really* produce profitable milk without high concentrate rations and rBST? Maybe these *KOW* guys are full of baloney . . . or maybe you as a dairyman are being put into a box of *high input, bio-tech dependent* (soon to be vertically integrated and corporately controlled) production methods and you need to *think outside the box*. The John Deere guy is not going to sell you a New Holland. Of course the Bio-Tech salesman is going to ridicule and find fault with organics!!

Alternative ideas / methods are good for the dairy industry *and may make a big difference for your farm*. *Alternative marketing* appears to be a necessity.

If more farmers would jump into alternative marketing channels, we would have more farmers. If *dairy*men and *consumers* could get more closely connected, *both would be much better off*. Today's technology makes that more possible than ever. *The time is ripe for downsizing in milk marketing*. (Like the move back toward small business in industry the past few years.) **Organic, consumer driven** markets are a good first step toward a more *direct marketing* approach that puts the middleman in check (and leaves room for something in *your* check).

If you would like to get more information about the *organic* milk market give us a call. If going *certified organic* in your production methods would be as radical to you right now as trading in your *registered Holsteins* for dairy *goats*, we understand. Maybe we could just start out by evaluating your soil / agronomy / nutrition system for leaks in the bucket.

Conventional advice today appears to be making no *real* efforts to improve the family dairy's situation. Seems that some like the status quo because the *dependency* cycle they promote is very

profitable (*for* them). Possibly *KOW Consulting* and I seem like *radicals* to you. In today's politically correct climate, everybody's suppose to agree—even if they think something is wrong, just *go with the flow*. We are proud to be providing an alternative. You will find our advice to be sound and practical. If that is radical, so be it. The status quo is not *sustainable*.

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What is the most important piece of equipment on your farm?
The skid loader? TMR mixer? Yep, they are important, but when was the last time you gave your milking machines a tune up? Now is a good time of year to have a thorough evaluation done of your milking system *as well as milking procedures*. Your local dairy equipment supplier, and your milk plant should be able to provide some help. If you would like some independent info / resources, don't hesitate to ask your KOW consultant. We have got plenty of information and can recommend trustworthy *independent* specialists to evaluate your system / procedures. You won't take time for this come spring—so why not this month?