

The following 2 pages are a reprint from the January 2000 issue of *KOW Ruminations*.

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## Y2 KOW Ruminations

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

Produced by Weaver Feeding & Management for KOW Consulting Assoc. Ph 608-762-6948, fx 6949 January 2000

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 *dairymen* 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?