

The following 4 pages are a reprint from the June-July 2004 issue of *KOW Ruminations*.

If you take offense to this, you may as well get all “advice” from *salesmen* . . .

Cottage cheese is the cause of obesity . . . You only see fat folks eating that stuff.

- Dr. James Dobson

Do you need assistance with forage testing, ration formulation / evaluation? Call!

KOW Ruminations

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

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Okay, go ahead and run your farm, feed your cows any way you feel . . .

But when you think you're thinkin' for yourself, are you?

Disclaimer: this newsletter contains adult content, adult language. Immature, juvenile, emotionally unstable readers prohibited. Reader discretion advised. If you *feel* like you're *about* to be offended, *please* do not read!!

The past several months I have been doing a lot of *thinking* about *how* decisions are made regarding production management on dairy farms. Since the winter season, when I was asked to give a presentation on the topic of *managing with a grass based mindset* at the Ohio State Grazing Conference (Jan. 29, 2004, Wooster, Fisher Auditorium), I've been considering *the thought process* that is used to arrive at conclusions for best management / input / investment practices on dairy farms. Change is very difficult for all of us (yours truly included). The fact is that *most* people don't change until they *have to*. Yet, one of the few things we can all count on in life is *change*. It really comes down to the reality that we either wait for life to force it upon us or we, on rare and glorious occasions – in our finest hours personally , look ahead and make changes *proactively*. These self initiated re-setting of course experiences, *if wise in actuality*, bring us more freedom and opportunity. If I always wait until “I guess I've got no choice,” well, it just doesn't *feel* quite so liberating ('cause it's usually not). Granted, there are many things in life, that come upon all of us, that we do not “ask for” or

that are beyond our personal control. I'll call these, as the insurance business would, Acts of God (and they may well be!). Nevertheless, so much of our individual futures are actually the simple consequences of our personal decisions –multiplied and laid one upon another. Either they can set us upon a sure foundation in our lives and business *or they may paint us into a corner that we'd rather not be* (I have personal experience). Since this compounding effect is so profound, I thought that it would be appropriate to write about deciding about decisions , instead of providing *reasons* to *decide!*

Some of my readers (the ones I have left, ya know, the mature, emotionally stable ones) probably wonder if I ever get tired of “telling people what to do on their farms.” Actually, the answer is “yes,” but I would much prefer helping folks decide *for themselves* what to do and I have never exactly thought my role / responsibility was as much to do with *telling* as it has to do with *teaching*. *Selling* would be a whole lot easier. As an advisor / teacher / service provider charged with looking out for my clients' interests (see the KOW Mission Statement), it can be a fine line to walk between providing unbiased information, critique, persuasive argument and helpful hints –and stepping over the line to be *perceived* as an arrogant, judgmental, pushy “blankity-blank” ! I don't like being a

Page 2 “blankity-blank”! (Insert your choice of derogatory terms . I’ve been called ‘em all, blamed for saying it [rarely for not] or saying it at the wrong time or in the wrong way [even if *admitted* to be true]. I’ve been blamed for *the weather*. Blamed for being *too confident* when it would be a lot *nicer* to plead ignorance. I can’t count how many times I’ve heard a farmer say something to the effect that “I like salesman so-n-so” . . . because he says he “only knows enough to be dangerous” [very little –very humble] never tries to “tell me anything” and is “so nice!” That pretty much eliminates doing any useful *advisory* work!) I’ve pretty well held onto the words and wisdom of Abraham Lincoln to carry me through, “*If I were to read, much less answer, all the attacks made on me, this shop might as well be closed for any other business. I do the very best I know how, the very best I can, and I mean to keep doing so until the end. If the end brings me out all right, what is said against me won’t amount to anything. If the end brings me out wrong, then angels swearing I was right would make no difference.*” This *doesn’t* mean that things aren’t *balanced* out somewhat with an occasional word of thanks, or encouragement from seeing the successes on our highly valued **and appreciated** clients’ operations. It is extremely gratifying to know when you’ve been able to play a *small* role in improving another family’s situation. All I or my Associates can do is present information and options, help evaluate and troubleshoot or plan. The farmer client gets all the credit (and responsibility) for the *decisions* and management. Unfortunately, *influencing* those decisions does carry the risk of *taking the blame* for any potentially disappointing outcomes (even if variables / factors beyond control of *any* human influence are the cause or even when recommendations are only *partially* followed).

As I sat down to gather my thoughts for this writing, my Associates Keith and Mike faxed me a quote of unknown origin, “*Knowledge is like manure. Put too much of it in one place and it does no good, but if you spread it around, everyone benefits.*” I *arrogantly* replied that this must be the reason some people tell me I’m so full of it! I may now accept this as a compliment! Another thing that I’ve heard many times, which is of unknown origin (to ,me anyway –oh the things I **don’t** know!), but *might* be true, is that we humans only use a *fraction* of our brain capacity. I’ve become increasingly convinced of the validity of this statement. That is what I told the folks in Wooster, Ohio, this year. Why? Because *unscrupulous* salespeople and sales practices still hold far too much sway over what *actually happens* on dairy farms –*maybe* even a *few* I work for. (Names withheld to protect the messenger. Please recognize that the *only* place *your* name can be found on this newsletter is the mailing label! I’m not trying to single-out anyone.)

Modern *sales* training and advisory / consulting work are *worlds* apart in their fundamental objectives. The salesman’s *ultimate* goal is to advance the movement of products and/or services he is hired to *sell*, while the consultant / advisor’s role is to focus on *his clients’*

interests. These *fundamental presuppositions* can be blended and a bit more difficult for the client / customer to divide when presented as *consultive sales*. A good example of this would be the feed salesman as nutritionist. Nevertheless, the *primary* role can be distinguished from the *secondary* role without need of a *mind reading* level of discernment. Either he works for you (the farmer) or he works for another entity and *one cannot serve two masters*. Who writes his paycheck? It’s that simple. If the “advisor” actually works for Brand X, no matter the title, credentials or *personal character*, there will *always* be some level of *conflict of interests*. This is not to suggest that *all* advice / information offered is faulty and/or misleading. It is simply a recognition that, when “push comes to shove,” the interests of the master (check writer) will come first. If it were not so, the salesman would not long represent his company. Unfortunately, now-a-days in business, what is “right” is most often defined by what “works” (sells) and a weak mind is recognized / identified by the individual’s *inability to overrule his conscience*. If you think this assessment is a bit too harsh, I submit that you are naïve and have probably never worked in sales and/or management for any large corporation in America in the past decade or so. I’ll grant exceptions, but exceptions to this rule are *very rare* indeed. **If your decision making process doesn’t start with this mindset** (fundamental presupposition-the *foundational concrete* you trust / assume to be true and upon which you begin building your *house of thought*), **I am of the considered opinion that you’ll be easily confused and misled**. If there’s one thing unscrupulous salesmen and sales managers thrive upon, it’s what I call *wo/andering farmers* –confused, but inquisitive farmers that are either *too busy* or *too intellectually lazy* to *carefully*, skeptically, question things while liberally granting trust after merely being presented fine sounding research and/or credentials, titles or testimonials. (Make special note that being a good skeptic is not the same as being closed-minded which is actually just a cover for being *intellectually lazy*, or controlled by *emotional* influences [more on this following]. Personally, I’ve been accused of being so narrow-minded that I can look through a keyhole with both eyes at the same time. My rebuttal is that I’m simply not so open-minded that I’ve allowed all my brains to fall out! I don’t want you to be that open-minded either! Make no mistake, I like *thoughtful* skeptics and questions! Let’s move on to using those brains . . .)

A flow chart for making dairy management decisions

In order of *logical* sequence:
Logic: A system of *reasoning*. Logical: showing consistency of reasoning. Reason: **The basis or motive for an action, decision, or conviction**. Reasonable: Rational . . . Governed by . . . Sound *thinking* . . . Within the bounds of common sense. (Nothing found regarding *feelings*.)

Obstacle 1: Emotional decision making –*the salesman’s playground*. The above definitions are listed not with

intent to offend anyone's sensibilities, but rather to highlight the **absence of feelings** being involved in *sound reasoning / logical* deduction. While I personally must admit need of continued *sensitivity* training (God has given me a wife and children for this. The term "brutish" has been used historically, but they've made some *limited* progress with me. The formative years were dominated by the influence of 8 brothers [no sisters] and a tour in the U. S. Marine Corps. Thank you for your patience.), I'm quite confident that a *unscrupulous* salesman's job is made *much easier* if you allow any of the 4 following *emotionally* driven influences to control the *decision process*. **When the emotions are engaged, logic and reason are disengaged.**

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

These first two *emotional drivers* are actually *often* interconnected. Mistakes may get us into trouble, but it's pride that keeps us there. Sometimes we continue to do things the same way because we have *insecurity* and/or must (we *feel*) prove our rightness. While it is commendable to "stick to our guns" in those circumstances requiring moral courage (Oh, how our culture needs men of character!), it is not necessarily wise to be dogmatic in *all* of our business decisions. "Showing" rightness or hiding differences (peer pressure) rarely pay *economic* dividends. If it's a moral conviction, the payback may be compounded *eternally*. Enough. It's a personal choice. Unscrupulous salespeople know how to work both of these *well* –to *their* advantage. I could tell you stories of salesmen laughing all the way to the bank.

Fear of the unknown: *Unknown* fears are the most crippling of all, limited only by the *imagination*. We can only get beyond this one by going at it head-on and getting a handle on the *facts*. This can be temporarily uncomfortable, and at times require a great deal of courage. *Imagine* if we never overcome the fear of the dark. When my son *fears* the monster under his bed, I switch the light on. We consultants / advisors like to talk of "screwing the light bulb in." Most *unknown* fears turn out to be like the *Wizard of Oz*. There's a good reason why that movie portrayed the traveling *salesman* as the wizard.

Management in a bag: This is not a solution, but actually a *false hope*. It makes the dairyman *feel* better, *temporarily*. In its *worst*, it may give *some measure* of limited, *temporary* relief. This then brings about a longer duration of *false confidence* –until the root cause of the problem(s) eventually *change* or overcome the band-aid. Nothing gets healed, the infection can get worse / deeper. When combined with the *crippling fear of the unknown*, things can become financially *terminal*. (This is not to suggest that *all* farm inputs are to be viewed as putting false hope in purchasing simple solutions [to often complex problems]. When the light bulb is turned in and every *reasonable* effort has been made to examine the facts, the missing puzzle

piece can become obvious. It's just very difficult to assemble the puzzle in the dark.) Management in a bag can be presented by the snake oil salesman in a very *unsophisticated* way. Example: Brand X "Super SCC Dropper." You've got a high SCC, Salesman X, *without evaluation of all the variables*, suggests you need to buy. Salesman X *knows* that your herd SCC will *change*. If it goes down, it worked! In case it goes up, he warns you that, *sometimes* the SCC will tend to go up *before* it goes down ("The cows are just cleaning out")! If you believe all of it, maybe you're gullible. Management in a bag is *more often* presented in a very slick, sophisticated manner –mixed with 1/2 truths (there's poison in the Kool-aid!). Big company Brand X has *purchased* reams of research "proving" the benefit(s) of their exclusive, patented input. Color brochures with photographs and testimonials *prove* the efficacy (a popular term) of their product. Quotes from "independent" researchers support the use of Brand X's products and programs. It's all very difficult for the layman to refute. Have these experts *thoroughly* evaluated your farm management system? Or just their market? Don't be too quickly convinced! The greatest driving force behind "research" today is *not* concern for **your** profitability and difficulties, it's *marketable* products. Marketable products create demand for more "research" to create more marketable products. Are you with me?? It truly takes time and effort to troubleshoot *most* problems . . . and as for careful planning for the future? Many dairy expansions that are given over to the "team of experts" cannot be given a high grade for careful risk management and sustainability. There's a great amount of conflict of interest tolerated in our dairy industry. You can't leave any of this to merely what *feels* right at the time, you need the facts to get to the *real, low cost* solutions.

Obstacle 2: Presuppositions stand in the way of facts. Presuppositions, *like opinions*, are also like "rear ends" – everybody's got *at least* one. There's a great deal of difference between the two. Opinions are like *preferences* (green is my favorite color, I'm *sure* I'm right about *that*, but I'd be *wrong most of the time* if I were to assert that green is the only color that *is right*). I, too, have presuppositions, they can be wrong. I try to be very open about **why** I have them and *how* they are formed. My presuppositions about cows, for example, are things like: cows *need* unlimited access to feed and water, protection from environmental extremes and that they were *designed* to digest fiber. Modifying and manipulating their diet and environment can be advantageous to the dairyman *to a point*, but *grossly* manipulating causes problems. My *presuppositions* about dairymen and their families include things like the desire for a comfortable lifestyle and that profitability and labor "*comforts*" of the farm are the primary support mechanism of this. Personal preferences / goals / hobbies have their proper place, but apart from structuring things around deeply held religious convictions and family needs, it's my *presupposition* that *most* dairymen wish to make things work well for *the cows*. For when the herd does well, so does the dairyman and his family. Too often, decisions are

Page 4 made that, even if non-emotional, get the priorities wrong –the cart before the horse as they say. Changes that are made to make the cows healthier and more comfortable *tend to* make the farm run smoother with less trouble (better lifestyle) and ultimately *more profitable*. In other words, the air conditioned tractor may be easier to pay for *after* the cows have a clean, comfortable place to lie down and chew their cud! I *presuppose* there are no magic solutions or shortcuts. I presuppose a “hot” feed ration is not a sustainable solution to low milk production / inadequate milk sales / profitability –it’s not a viable, optional, shortcut. These presuppositions, *like yours*, are based upon my experience and education. Since *education is merely the discovery of ignorance*, **my presuppositions have been challenged and changed over the years**. I’ve found it *advantageous* to investigate the validity of claims made by people *who’ve told me I’ve got it wrong*. Without doing so, I can neither refute the “bad” idea or *learn* from it. *What* kind of presuppositions do you have?? Presuppositions are the things we take for granted *are true* (reality).

Presuppositions can be *prejudices* (ya know, like white boys can’t play basketball , etc.). Prejudice is *intellectual laziness* and a poor substitute for the *hard work* of thinking and learning. I hear prejudice comments frequently like, “That’ll never work,” “There’s no right/wrong way to feed cows, lots of ways work equally well,” “Organics is just for hippies,” “My numbers are average, so I’m doing just fine,” “It has to be a good business plan, I got the loan,” “You can make a good ration from anything,” “University research is unbiased,” “I’ll be more efficient after the expansion,” and “Grazing cows is just for people who are going broke” -as examples. Pre-judging before the facts are known is very limiting indeed! When a *foreign* idea is presented, before *shutting down the mind*, give some consideration to it. It may well be a bad idea for your situation, or it *could* open a new door of opportunity –but you’ll never know unless you *engage* it. Are **your** fundamental presuppositions *true*? The cows know. Do you only tolerate people that agree with you?

Obstacle 3: Faulty fact gathering.

Trial and coincidence –This is the first stumbling block that I’m witness to *frequently*. While it’s inevitable that you eventually have to turn *thinking about* into *trying out* any new idea / practice / protocol, I’d highly recommend *against* using this method as your **only** means of fact gathering. First of all, you don’t have enough *time* and, likely, financial resources to suffer all the mistakes that’ll be required to work out the bugs! It’s also frequently subject to misinterpretation of data! For example: You try planting a new crop without fully investigating requirements like seed depth, rate, and soil temperature. The crop fails. “Research” report -“I’ll never do that crop again!” Or, another example, you try a new forage crop and have it custom chopped and bagged. The bag does not get packed properly. “Research” result –This stuff is junk! I’ll never grow that again!” Please laugh with me, I’m witness to this sort of thing many times over. Thoroughly gather all the details before you try any new idea. The KOWboyz

would like to assist, that’s our job. Reading is time well spent. Our most successful clients are *readers (=thinkers)*.

Snapshot instead of the full movie (seeing isn’t *always* a reason for believing). This applies not only to photographs you see in the farm papers, but also to *one day* visits to *anyone’s* farm (I’m not suggesting that *visiting* other farms is without value, just be careful about jumping to conclusions about *long term* success / profitability). For an example, I recently followed up on a magazine article featuring a new freestall built *without* cement –instead they used fly-ash as a base for the walkways, etc. By the article you would be led to believe it was a wonderfully economical alternative implemented on a well managed expansion. Without exaggeration, the place was a “poop hole” with manure *holes* in the cow lane. No follow up article. I’ve also seen my share of *ideal* set-ups implementing *ideal* rations, that have ended up with cow health / financial disasters in the long term –that can be *logically* traced back to the great *idea(s)* promoted.

Johnny cash procurement –Here’s where I get a little self serving. For those familiar with the old Johnny Cash song that went, “I got it one piece at a time and it didn’t cost me a dime.” You probably realize that it was both highly improbable that he could get away with *stealing* those car parts all those years and getting them put together as a running machine in the end –at least not without a lot of grief and unnecessary expense! *A lot more* than a dime! Johnny Cash’s method is a lot like running your farm based upon *opinion polls*. While some would make a fair argument that it’s wise to ask a lot of people a lot of questions in order to gather as much info, and ideas as is possible, unfortunately, too much reliance on this method **alone** can keep you going *in circles*. *Opinions* are mostly what you’ll get from people who have very little stake in your long term success. Even if the people polled are not trying to *sell you* something. Even fellow farmers have little time to sort through and answer all the questions required to give you good advice. This is why there’s a benefit to full time consultants –that work directly for you –the KOWboyz.

In conclusion, there really are no shortcuts or cheap ways to put together a truly smooth running, successful dairy. No, I and Associates *do not* possess all knowledge. Continuing education is a great part of the work we do for you (when you don’t see me working, I’m not playing golf). I don’t know of a farm that doesn’t run into trouble from time to time (*some* folks should put the word “trouble” on the farm sign). I never have, nor will I promise zero problems if you have the KOWboyz working for you. What I can promise though, is to continue to provide the most unbiased, tested information and troubleshooting / planning advice as we can find. This is why I write *KOW Ruminations* and provide the *Review of the Dairy News* service. Research and claims of any sort are *carefully* cross referenced. My favorite research/evidence are those things discovered coincidentally/accidentally and then proven to be profitable *over time* on *real* farms –not the results of a *rigged for success* 6 week trial.