

The following 4 pages are a reprint from the Oct-Nov 2003 issues of *KOW Ruminations*.

I set up an Excel spreadsheet to look at the impact of cull rates . . . while some things can be argued, the analysis does tell a story. . . Two dairy farms are each milking 100 cows, with a 40% replacement heifer crop. But one of the farms has a 20% cull rate, while the other is at 30%. In 10 years the farm with a 20% cull rate could be milking 430 cows just from raising its own replacements. But the one with a 30% cull rate would only be milking 210 cows. Increase that cull rate to the 35-40% levels that are prevalent in today's confinement herds, or reduce the heifer replacement numbers due to extended lactations or calf mortality, and suddenly the herd is shrinking. In my opinion, that's what's happening in many of today's larger herds. -Dave Forgey, June-July 2002 *Graze*

# KOW Ruminations

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## ARPAS PROVIDES ASSURANCE WHEN DEALING WITH ADVISORS?

Is this the *real* solution to our industry's cow *longevity crisis*?

By Tom Weaver

In the September 25, 2003, *Hoard's Dairyman* on page 602, you'll find an editorial that begins with, "There still are too many people without solid training trying to give dairy farmers advice or trying to sell them something that has not been proven effective. One way to protect yourself from wasting your money *or perhaps even doing harm to your herd*, is to deal with consultants, veterinarians, salespeople or others who have been recognized for their competency and professionalism." (Emphasis added.)

My title above is the same as that over the *Hoard's* editorial, *excepting that I've added a question mark at the end*. I'm in *complete* agreement with the first paragraph, but am not yet understanding *how* an *American Registry of Professional Animal Scientists* (ARPAS) certification provides "assurance" to any dairyman that he is going to receive "good" advice. *Hoard's* suggests that "the best way" to get a competent advisor is to seek out an ARPAS certified one –and that a good first test might be to ask if the potential advisor knows what the letters ARPAS stand for. "If not, watch out," *Hoard's* advises. (This last point was so *unnerving* that I immediately contacted all KOW Association advisors for an emergency training session. )

Wanting to be fair and open minded, prior to writing, I went to the ARPAS website ([www.arpas.org](http://www.arpas.org)) so as to gain a greater level of understanding of just *how* ARPAS can command such respect. Wow! There's some very impressive stuff there! For a couple examples (go see the

rest for yourself), a 19 point *code of ethics* was listed. Truly, God knows how our industry (and entire country) *desperately* needs a *revival* of "good ethics." (I wonder if it wouldn't be too politically *incorrect* to recommend the 10 Commandments and the "golden rule" be displayed at educational conferences to use as a *foundational anchor*?) There's also an explanation / listing of some rather lofty requirements in order for one to have the right to put PAS (Professional Animal Scientist) behind their name on the business card. Rest assured that not just any "Joe Shmo" can pay his dues and walk away with these credentials. First of all, a BS, MS or PhD is required "in one of the animal sciences or a closely related field." This alone should satisfy any reasonable farmers concern regarding competency –but ARPAS doesn't stop there. One must also pass a *rather challenging* exam. Example questions were listed on the website. I will reproduce what was listed exactly as you'd see it on the website -so you see clearly just how demanding the exam truly is.

**NOTE:** The answer to each question is **bolded** and **italicized**.

### DAIRY

1. A digestive upset in cattle where large amounts of gas are trapped in the rumen is called?
  - a. Acidosis
  - b. Founder
  - c. Shipping fever
  - d. Bloat**
2. How many days are in an average gestation period for a

dairy cow?

- a. 215
- b. 260
- c. **280**
- d. 300 days

3. Which of the typical rumen volatile fatty acids normally is present in the greatest quantity in the rumen?

- a. Butyric
- b. Propionic
- c. **Acetic**
- d. Lactic

4. What term is commonly used to define three weeks before and three weeks after calving?

- a. The dry period
- b. **The transition period**
- c. The lactation period
- d. The postpartum period

5. A female calf (free martin) born co-twin with a male calf is infertile about what percent of the time?

- a. 30%
- b. 55%
- c. 75%
- d. **95%**

Yes, surely, if anyone can answer such difficult questions as this and possess a degree in an ag related field of study you should have complete assurance of competency – right? Finally, like they say, if you want the truth, just follow the money trail. The ARPAS website lists as “*Platinum Sponsors*”: Cargill Animal Nutrition, Arm & Hammer, Elanco Animal Health and Monsanto. There, if you still had any lingering doubts as to whether or not the best interest of your farm will be served, you can now know that reputable companies with a long history of putting farmers’ interests first, have voted with their checkbooks in favor of this certification.

I also possess an article from the Wednesday, July 2, 2003, *Country Today* newspaper here in Wisconsin. It’s sub-titled “Farmer wants to see more **regulation** of dairy nutritionists” and related a sad story of a dairyman who followed the advice of the Co-op nutritionist, destroyed his herd with acidosis / laminitis and filed bankruptcy (Yes, it’s a very common story –I know.). Would an ARPAS certified “PAS” have made a difference? Was the nutritionist a PAS? I wonder. The article only states that the advisor was a “trained” nutritionist. Is this the solution, to get every nutrition advisor on the “same page” -even “regulate” who can offer advice? Who’s “page” would these certified, *regulated* advisors follow? Should *all* dairy nutrition advisors be *required* (by law) to promote / teach *only* those things that are taught in our ag schools? If not in accordance to what is taught in our “land grant”, “*unbiased*” research institutions that are *purely* motivated by pursuit of the unadulterated truth, what standard *should* be used?

What other *incorruptible* source of truth could we rely upon. Should farmers lose their choice to employ *independent* advisors (like the *KOWboyz*) who may not agree with *all* the conventional wisdom? (How can one be *independent* if there’s no freedom to *think independently*?)

“I have sworn upon the altar of God hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man.”  
-Thomas Jefferson

The only *foundational* wisdom I can think of to judge this issue was spoken by he who was, without a doubt, the most learned man in all of history. This man was quoted as saying “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit” and “by their fruit you will recognize them.” Not intending to remove anything from its proper context, I do think it’s appropriate to consider the same criteria as we judge who / what should be recognized as a reliable source of dairy nutrition management advice. I don’t think it would be in the best interest of *dairy farmers* to *regulate* the rights (restrict the freedom) of dairy advisors any more than if Americans were compelled by law to accept or reject a particular religious dogma (what the “Congress shall make no law” part of our Constitution is *suppose to be* about).

KOW Consulting Association and/or myself have *never* claimed to have all the answers, nor have we requested any *blind faith* from our clients. However, I do hope we have influenced you to become better informed, *more thoughtful, skeptics*. This idea of *fruit inspecting* is something that KOW Association would like to encourage. We *ain’t* scared of scrutiny. We think *some* others, PAS, PhD, or not, deserve more. To be straight to the point, I cannot understand *how* those whom we’d all recognize as the leading dairy nutrition and feeding management scientists in our industry today maintain *any* credibility with farmers. While *some* folks may challenge me by pointing to the “fruit” of more milk per cow –my simple rebuttal is *nonsense*: any *dimwit* (PAS credentials *not necessary* ) can scoop more grain at a cow to get more milk per cow *short term* –but this isn’t milk production to keep *farms* in business (profitable) -it’s actually to aid processors / retailers with a *glut* of milk-keeping market prices low!! As recently as July 2003, midst record low milk prices, Ken Bailey, the dairy economist at Penn State was quoted in the *Wisconsin Agriculturalist* magazine providing advice to small dairies regarding *how* they could succeed. The number one point of advice was “achieve high productivity per cow” as *measured by RHA*. (I’d have no disagreement with Ken if the measure of high productivity per cow was over her *lifespan* rather than a single lactation.) To be fair to *Hoard’s Dairyman*, they do print things that are well worth reading and some that I can wholeheartedly endorse. For example, the article titled, “Take A Look At Costs You

Can Control" by A. J. Kunkel, DVM, on page 261 of the March 25, 2002, issue. A. J. reported the "startling results" that production level and profit are **not** strongly correlated. This was from *real* data (source: Northeast Farm Credit) not some economist, or other university "expert" who ought to run a private business for a while to complete their education.

"There are flaws in the university's formulas for costs of production and profitability," -Calvin Kraemer, former Wisc. UW-Ext Ag Agent and author of the book The Cure Is Worse Than The Problem.

**Our industry, operating according to conventional wisdom, provided via the university / agri-sales pathway, has managed to reduce the productive lifespan of a cow from 7 lactations to under 3. Replacement heifers are turning out *more like steers* when fed in accordance with current teaching. Hooves are being trimmed before they're being milked! This "*fruit*" stinks to the point it should *embarrass* us collectively.**

Since I've *lobbered* one ag economist (don't worry, they're used to it ), let me now be balanced and praise another. Bruce Jones of UW-Madison, Wisconsin, is quoted in *Agri-View* newspaper September 18, 2003, as noting the *significant* financial benefits of cow longevity:

. . . Keeping a cow just one lactation gives annual returns of \$560, in Jones' example. But her annual ownership cost amounts to \$1,037, for a loss of \$477. But, keep her two lactations and there's a positive annual return of \$507.

Keep her three lactations and the annual net returns from that cow climb to \$717. Add a fourth year and they rise to \$843.

In Jones' example, net annual returns peak at \$1,046.65 after 11 lactations . . .

Terrific news, but it *won't* be realized in the average herd with the average cow because common / conventional *feeding* management *is killing them*. Somehow (I really don't know how), farmers have been distracted and misdirected to look at factors other than nutrition to solve the problem of poor longevity. However, **the truth is, it's the recommendations for *ration formulation* emanating from the university extension / agri-sales pipeline that are *responsible* for 90% of the decline in longevity.** I realize that I've just made a significant accusation, but I'll stand by it. It's not the genetics people or the cement

contractors at fault. Not every farm has Page 3  
"stray voltage" lighting the cows up like a Christmas tree. The factor in common is *nutritional advice*. *Hoard's* is right, there are still too many people *without solid training* trying to give dairy farmers advice *or trying to sell them something* -**starting right at the very top of our ag schools!** The *ivory tower* teachers are *never held accountable* for the lack of profitability on farms that follow the industry advisors / sales people **they've trained**. Will requiring PAS credentials solve anything? Not so long as "the right way" to feed is *dead wrong* (*literally* -in an average of 3 1/2 years).

Is the *longevity crisis* merely an opinion / perception of KOW Advisors? I don't think so. Pick up your June 2003 issue of *Hoard's* and you'll find an article by Kent Wiegel and Roger Palmer on page 414. The sub-title starts with "Cow longevity is growing concern in all herds." The first paragraph states:

Longevity is a hot topic among dairy producers in part *because culling rates on many farms are unacceptably high*. What's more, replacement costs are substantial, particularly in expanding herds . . . There are *few* cows that reach mature production level." (Emphasis added.)

For most dairies, replacement costs represent the second or third largest expense for the dairy, right behind feed and, possibly, labor. - July 2003, *Midwest Dairy Business Magazine*.

While the authors *rightly* emphasized the importance of "investment" in cow comfortable facilities, unfortunately, *nutrition management* as a key factor, was not noted. Additionally, within an article found in the July 2001 issue of the *Wisconsin Agriculturalist* that focused on the longevity issue from a *genetics*

perspective (titled: Redesigning Holsteins) you'll find, "In Wisconsin, the average life of lactation is 3.7 years, which means most cows produce milk for about a year and a half after first calving . . . The longevity of cows has apparently decreased." Fortunately, within that same article the editor included commentary from a couple *experienced*, retirement age fellows that *weren't* afraid to point a finger at *feeding* (in addition to criticizing breeding cattle *by the numbers*). An excerpt:

Marlowe Nelson, a (highly successful) semi-retired breeder, also cites the increase in culling rates, from about 20% in the 1950s to more than 40% in many herds. "High energy rations and rGBH (Recombinant Bovine Growth Hormone) really push cows early," he says.

Harry Weier, who retired after a phenomenally successful career of breeding and selling good Holstein cattle was even more to the point. Harry is quoted:

"We want to feed cattle like pigs. It's like eating ice cream all day. It has to be hard on their systems."

In the April 25, 2002, *Hoards Dairyman*, Charles E. Gardner, DVM, was more specific on what it means to “push” cows:

“Pushing is to feed high levels of grain. You may see immediate production gains, but you will also immediately see higher feed bills. If you get starch levels too high, and fiber levels too low, you may soon see . . . Acidosis. Then health problems escalate. Soon *the higher production benefits are completely negated. And your profit is definitely reduced.*” (Emphasis added.)

**So what’s to be done?** I think that dairymen need to recognize *and continually be reminded* of the fact (hence – the reason I’m writing you –yep, Y.O.U. ) that advice on feeding that is coming from university / feed industry origins is, *at best*, the equivalent of taking your chore tractor to a mechanic who mistakenly thinks you want to compete in a tractor pull. What I mean is, while these institutions may know how to make a crowd say “WOW” by pushing your herd to its maximum *short term* potential, only a small, *carefully selected* amount of their knowledge is applicable to the “chore tractor” dairy -trying to pay the bills with milk and livestock sales. If you can envision in your mind’s eye the *sponsors* of the conventional “push” the cows program – Brand X Feed Sales, Brand X Drug Sales, etc. –can you see how completely contrary to the interests of the average dairy this is? Two completely different systems, as foreign to one another as the tractor pulling hobbyist when compared to the chore boy. *Method’s employed to be successful in one arena do not necessarily apply in the other.* Just because it’s *possible* to turn up the injectors and turbo, doesn’t mean it’s wise. My truck can probably do well over 100 mph –am I a *smart feller* to drive it like that? *Poor* advice from the same origins may also be due to *sheer incompetence* and/or the *love* of money. No matter the degrees or position *or certification*, it is this author’s experience (and yours too) that none of the above guarantees either competence or a commitment to the best interest of the farmer. (Don’t be fooled. Most folks that work for the government / university / *any* large corporation have one focus: to keep their job and/or gain a better one. They’re *not* going to take *any risks* to look out for *your* interests. While there may be exceptions, that’s what they are –and those rare individuals don’t stay “institutionalized” very long.)

**Dairymen must think for themselves and learn the fundamentals of feeding management.** Be your own PAS! If it’s true that feed and culling costs are the two greatest expenses incurred to produce milk, *can* it be too much trouble to get “in the know?” As a client of KOW Consulting, I don’t want you to think for one moment that it is our job to *tell you* how to feed / farm. The KOW Advisor’s role is to assist you with information that will, hopefully, be utilized to *make better decisions (for yourself)* on how to feed / farm. There’s a *great* difference between the two approaches. Getting an education will pay you back far more than *hiring* one (PAS or not).

For those who may interpret KOW’s non-conventional positions on feeding / farm management and bold disagreement with the learned scientists of our day as *arrogant* and say “*How* can Univ. Ext., Brand X, Brand Y, and Brand Z be wrong and you guys right?”. Gee, I dunno. Please look deeper into things and then let me know how .

I don’t fear any skeptic scrutinizing the difference between KOW recommendations / results vs. what I see from Univ. Ext. or Brand X any more than the Creationists fear their position being able to withstand the arguments / evidence presented by the Darwinian evolutionists (who have *zero* evidence and *faulty* arguments). *So long as both sides get equal time*, it’s a “no brainer” -as they say. The reason the evolutionists have worked so hard to **ban the opposition’s teaching** within the government school system is because *it was the only way they could win* (with the best arguments / evidence presented from both positions, just about any 6th grader would side with the Creator’s explanation ). There’s evidence of an un-American political agenda motivating the whole debate as well.

If you’d be willing to accept that point, I’d dare suggest something of a similar fashion motivating what gets taught as the “official truth” in our ag schools. *Alternatives* to the conventional model get little to zero endorsement because *special interests* and the money they provide dictate what becomes worthy of research. To adapt from one of Orwell’s expressions: some knowledge is more knowable than others. If what I see as an ominous trend in ag consulting continues, it *may* become *law* that there is an “officially correct” way to feed cows. (Don’t laugh. There’s now an official way to spread manure and fertilize. It’s called a NMP. What’s next?) If that does occur, KOWboyz will be *officially* called *hired hands* or truck drivers –but we’ll continue suggesting alternatives you may wish to consider . Regardless of what the distant future brings, I hope you’ll use the *immediate* future to learn everything you can about feeding for less money **and more longevity**. The KOWboyz are eager to provide alternative ideas. If you can find fault in those ideas you’ll be helping us to help others . If you reject them *before consideration*, *please* don’t accuse the KOWboyz of not knowing what we’re talking about. Rather, that’s your position. With your best interest in mind.