

The following two pages are a reprinted excerpt from the Oct-Nov 2004 *KOW Ruminations* newsletter. This issue first introduced plans for our website –and its purpose. KOW Consulting's *Review of the Dairy News service* is also referred to. This is a service provided *exclusively / strictly* within the consultant-client relationship and is not available via the KOW website. *KOW Review of the News* service is an informal printed commentary that covers news clippings from various dairy publications. I produce this commentary every two months alternating with the *KOW Ruminations* newsletter (that is available for a \$36/yr subscription fee payable to Weaver Feeding & Management, LLC). *Review of the News* varies from 15 to 25 pages in length. -Tom Weaver

"We can't have it both ways. We can't expect God to protect us in a crisis and just leave Him over there on the shelf in our day-to-day living."
President Ronald Reagan, 9-9-82

KOW Ruminations

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

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KOW WELCOMES YOUR CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM.

Yours truly is *no doubt* a thick-headed, stubborn, and slow to learn Englishman (all behavior deficiencies have genetic causes now-a-days), but I do think I have *a little more* of this consulting job figured out. Let me explain. From time to time, if you can imagine, I've gotten myself into a *little* trouble (even fired) for offering *well intentioned* advice that was either poorly timed or poorly presented (too direct, abrasive) or even *never* desired. This advice I must explain, always comes from a *sincere* desire to **help** and to fulfill the KOW Mission Statement (if you'd like *another* copy simply ask). I, personally, have *tried* to make *every* effort to truly advise –whether it be via this newsletter or *in person at any farm* –because of the *assumption* that to be *hired* is a mandate for such. However, I do think I've *finally* been enlightened to the fact that just because one has been *hired* to *constructively criticize*, not every client is fully cognizant of the KOW Mission or *emotionally* prepared for its *rapid* implementation. While I do think the *goal* of any truly successful consultant:client advisory relationship needs to be eventual establishment of a **trustworthy** (mutual), **transparent** (mutual) **dialogue** (mutual by definition), I must recognize that each *individual* relationship develops (or disintegrates) these aspects *on a different timeline*. I have personally felt rather caught between the proverbial rock and a hard place from time to time. The difficult position / question being: How can I both advise *with integrity* and not risk hurting someone's *feelings* by speak-

ing up? (This, of course, is *not* to *assume* that what is on my mind at any particular moment is *without* error or faultless. Often by further communication I find I'm operating on *partial* or faulty information –and the more I learn, the more I come to the realization of how much I do **not** know [true education!]) I suspect that my associate advisors find themselves in this uncomfortable position at times as well. The KOW Mission Statement, is really a *flawed* but expanded version of the Golden Rule (Luke 6:31) and *professionally* we are all compelled to *absolute integrity*. I, personally, because of my Christian convictions (for which I'll offer *no apology**) **can do no less than let my yes be yes and no be no** (reference: 2 Corinthians 1:17). The option of "beating around the bush" is really not available if the advisor is truly intent on doing for you that which he wishes would be done for himself. Too often **silence can be misinterpreted as endorsement**. What, then, can be done to give Tom (and Associates) the freedom of enjoying a *clear conscience* in consulting relationships **and** the freedom of transparency and openness in communication? Well, if a guy is gonna dish it out, he ought to be able to take it –right? Communication is a two-way street –right? Eureka! The solution to this chronic problem hath now

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*If I do, you'll [and *should*] respect me *even less* and be persuaded *even less* –*especially if* you disagree.

been revealed! Effective immediately, I propose:

The Farmer's Criticism and Questions Page

So long as I've been producing the *Review of the Dairy News*, and as often as I've requested feedback from our clients, the consensus has been that most farmers don't have the time to *critically* evaluate all their papers and it's truly appreciated. I'd like to propose this additional feature. I'll place it immediately following my introduction. The purpose will be to act as a forum to *criticize* and critique KOW guidelines and positions on all topics related to dairy, or to ask questions that you may not feel comfortable bringing up to your local advisor. Of course, I will need to reserve the right to edit for length and offer brief rebuttal or answer—but I do pledge to keep it an open forum. If any dairyman brings thoughts and ideas forth that can improve our teaching, you are my *true* friend, you have my respect and you'll help a *lot* of people. Sincerely. The *option to remain anonymous* in both submittal or reply will be left wide open. If anyone would like to send a fax, email or letter from *somewhere other than home* because they feel it would grant them more liberty to be *critical* or ask an "embarrassing" question (none should be) that's okay. (However, I may then choose to reply with an alias identification such as Professor Vern Ledboggler or something of the sort .) Yes, this could prove to be very entertaining! If I or Associates are going to continue to "clobber" our dear clients by *acting like* we have a serious job to do (isn't your farm *serious business?*) and *daring* to consider *anything* open for discussion (*risking* offending you), **it's the least I can do to open up our consulting association to the same standard of scrutiny.** I do hope I can get *many* takers on this offer. If I and Associates are to perform our job with integrity, there has to be an understanding that the **motive** for questioning and criticizing is certainly not self-ish. While I'm convinced that our *general* recommendations as published in this newsletter are *generally* sound advice (else I would not print them), implementing and *tailoring* them to give best results on each *individual* farm **requires** a climate of free discourse and an understanding that the people hired to perform the advisory role must be *aggressive enough to occasionally disagree.* **The Sadam Hussein school of business management wherein advisors must fear being shot for bringing up any unpleasant or contradictory ideas has been proven to be a failure.** I do realize *emotions* can be stirred by open, transparent, and *sometimes confrontational* discourse—this is a fine line to walk! Please do consider that at the end of any *particular* dialogue or debate there will be three possible outcomes:

1. The farmer's position will be *solidified*—*proven the best.*
2. The farmer will learn something new—consider change.
3. The farmer will feel threatened (Why? I dunno), and say "KOWboy, you're fired!" Ouch!

Really, *all three* outcomes do result in discovery of valuable information (I'm serious!). Outcomes 1 and 2 help both the farmer and advisor learn more about the farm and/or KOW teaching (how to improve *both*), while outcome #3, though never desired on our part, allows both parties to

move on (both would have to conclude the relationship was not helpful and a waste of each other's time). Of course, well before outcome #3 would be chosen, there would *always* be room to call a "time-out" (to think or *accept* things as is) and ask your advisor to put the topic "on the shelf" until **you** choose to bring it back up for discussion *or, through circumstances*, it cannot be avoided. After all, we as advisors only have to know that we've done our duty (by thoroughly discussing the particular issue) and there is absolutely *no* joy found in becoming an *irritation!* **So, please, when you feel the urge to give us some advice or constructive criticism—don't hesitate.** After all, and in the end, there's nothing wrong with disagreeing in an agreeable way. I'm stubborn, *slow* to learn, but still teachable. Share your wisdom. Let's communicate.

The New kowconsulting.com Website

I pledge to *redouble* my personal effort to provide *trustworthy printed* educational materials. You can expect *continued* reminders and challenging, *direct*, thought provoking positions to be presented in the pages of *KOW Ruminations* and our *Review of the News* (*no* change promised here!). *What will be different, however*, is that a new kowconsulting.com website is being put together in which you'll be able to access *historical* position papers and up-to-date management recommendations for soil-crop-nutrition related decisions, as well as a technical reference section (that I've yet to complete work on). For those who do not have web access, a *printed* version of this website will be offered. Watch your newsletters for updates. The *reason* for such emphasis on printed educational material (both historically and via our new website / book) is because the *most successful* (profitable, trouble-free) farms we work for do *not* ask us to *make* every decision *for* them, nor do they hold us responsible to *control* every factor that affects the outcome of those decisions (they know we can't). The "just tell me what to do" *responsibility shifting* guys make me nervous. Successful farms use KOW Consulting as a *source of information* and a "sounding board" for ideas / decisions—and yes, do *accept* constructive criticism *well*. Some of these farms even *formulate their own rations* (utilizing KOW guidelines and principles) and then use our services to assist with critique and fine-tuning. *This is the model we'd like to continue building our consulting relationships on*—because this appears to be the best way to build lasting relationships *and profitable dairies.* We also are experiencing an increasing demand for our information and services beyond our human resources (farms too far away from our current Associates to travel to). By providing website access (or the same in a book format) we will be able to both *better* serve our personal contact clientele and help those that are too distant to regularly visit. The renewed emphasis on printed material assumes that our clients *do* read our materials and value them to guide management of soil-crops-livestock. Of course they can be taken or ignored in part or entirely without harassment. Implementing those same recommendations (*as they have always been*) are the sole decision (and responsibility) of the client (farmer). I do hope that these changes can help us *better* serve your farm.