

You Thought You Could Get Away With What????!!!

By Danny Strite

A long time ago there was a king who needed a new chariot driver. One day he had three people apply for the job. The only question the king asked was "If we were running from the enemy in a battle and we had to drive beside a very steep cliff, how close could you get and still keep me safe?".....

The question is "Does it make a difference?" Does feeding a high forage (truly defined) diet make a difference? That is the question I hope to at least attempt to answer. With my job as a DHI Technician for Dairy One, I see a lot of cows in a wide variety of situations; therefore I, hopefully, can provide an *alternative* view of today's dairy world.

Personally, I only test for 2 herds using KOW's rules of feeding but there are other herds out there that feed reasonable rations. 1*

I will be the first to say that the best ration poorly fed and poorly managed still does not equal excellent production and reproduction. Shocking? It shouldn't be. The best feed with the best ration in the world is useless without good cow management and ATTENTION! Those dairymen who pay attention to their cows are usually well rewarded with the results. All dairymen SHOULD pay attention to their cows because we have been commanded to do so in Proverbs 27:23.

Some days it seems worthless to be feeding cows under KOW rules of thumb. Especially when your neighbor is getting 10lbs/cow more milk than you are. 2* (Thou shalt not covet) However you're not seeing the whole picture! For those of you who have been working with KOW for some time now, think about it.

When was the last time you saw a hoof trimmer?

There is nothing built into the cow that tells the hooves to grow faster when she milks more.

How big is your vet bill per cow? This is somewhat variable depending on how far the vet has to run to get to you and what drugs or any other remedies might cost, but if you think 25-45 dollars/cow is high, think again! How often does the vet visit your farm for anomalies? **Every** farm at some point in time will have some weird unexplained problem or occurrence. However, these things should be the exception and not the standard. Every month I hear from different farms about how something was wrong with this cow or *why* they *thought* they sold that cow.

High breeding and moderate feeding with easy, not forced, records, should be the motto with all breeders. -W.D. Hoard

How many cows have you sold/died in the last year that you just couldn't really put a finger on the reason? It should be a very small number in relation to all cows sold. Sub-Acute Rumen Acidosis, in my opinion, is most likely the cause of these cows being sold. SARA is costing dairyman a lot of money every day and the industry is too stubborn to admit it. At some point in time, probably every herd has a problem with SARA. Some herds define it as 'normal' and some herds 'nip it in the bud'.

What do your cows look like? Is the topline straight? Is there a lot of swelling or redness where the hairline meets the hoof? Are the rear legs relatively straight? (They *shouldn't* be U-curved) All of these signs indicate there has been a problem with acidosis (or, perhaps, mycotoxins) in the past.

The first chariot job applicant said "King, I can get within 1 foot of that cliff and keep you safe."

All that glitters is not gold. Trust me, it's much better to have a herd of healthy (properly defined) good looking *uniform* cows than a herd where the heifers calve in good condition and 2 years later *they look like a weight has been hanging on both ends*. 3* I see far too many cows that end up looking like the latter *provided they last that long*. Sure, these cows will still produce and *maybe* even reproduce - but they are cows that have had their death certificate signed, in advance.

There is no magical amount of milk that a herd of cows should be giving. If you're paying the bills and the cows are healthy why push them anymore? Healthy cows fed lots of high quality forage under good management *will typically produce more than most of us would expect*.

While there is no set amount of milk for a herd to be giving, there are benchmarks which have been established for milk production, fat and protein. Before blaming the feeding program for your milk production woes, make sure you check out all the other variables in your herd.

Ever wonder what the real reason for reproductive failure is? So have I. The biggest failure I have noted in most of my herds is the lack of time and attention spent observing the cows on a daily basis. The second is the lack of knowledge about which cows are due to come in heat and which cows should be coming in heat. There is no magic supplement which will make cows breed better. Granted, if you are having trouble with some sort of mold or toxin, there are supplements that *may* assist in the removal of those toxins, but that is a special situation. Better to quit feeding that forage or feed source. If your cows are eating a well balanced high forage diet and are healthy and *aren't* getting bred back quickly, try paying a

little more attention to them each day. A brief glance at DHI records will often reveal heat detection (or lack thereof) to be the problem.

The second applicant said "King, I can get within six inches of that cliff and keep you safe"

High milk production and even high components in a Holstein herd still doesn't mean the cows are healthy. I have noted a good many herds with high production and a relatively stable high fat test -and yet those older cows tend to look like they have been burned up. Do your cows look like that? Why do those herds *seem* to be doing so well in spite of it when you're struggling to maintain a moderate fat test? Yet your cows show no signs of acidosis. This question has bothered me for a long time and the only logical answer I can arrive at is those herds are living on the edge. The older cows that look foundered are the *feed sorters*. *When you're living on the edge, any feed sorting spells disaster for those cows*. The higher fat test in those herds is most likely a result of later lactation cows (slow breeders) increasing the test. The fresher cows may be suffering with a lower fat test or an overly high fat test. While the bulk tank does pay the bills, it cannot and should not define normal for the whole herd.

The third applicant, a man much older and wiser, said "King, I would stay just as far away from that cliff as I could possibly get. You are the king; if you are lost then the kingdom will be lost."

The third applicant was hired on the spot.

In practical application, we (the dairyman) could be equated to the king. The job applicants could be likened to feed salesmen or consultants. Far too many dairymen hire the first two applicants because the third applicants' story doesn't sound as appealing or enticing. I believe that by hiring KOW Consulting we have rightly chosen the third applicant. (In case you're wondering, that is a *voluntary* statement.) Feeding a high forage diet *doesn't* mean life will be a bed of roses and you'll *never* have another cow with a sore foot or retained placenta again. We do live in a fallen sin-cursed world. It does mean however that you have made the decision to climb back into the drivers' seat of your dairy and take an honest no-nonsense approach to herd management.

* * * * *
 Mr. Strite has worked as a Records Service Technician for Dairy One for the past 9 years. He has tested 37 herds, averaging 3000 cows monthly. You can contact Mr. Danny Strite with any questions or comments at 11917 Snug Harbor Lane, Williamsport, MD, 21795 or email cbdfarm@ifriendly.com. Thanks so much Danny for your input, thoughts, and *voluntary* endorsement! Appreciated! - TW

| Financial comparison by the University of Maryland on confinement and grazing farms 2000-2004 Average income, Expenses, and Profit per <u>COW</u> | | |
|---|-------------------------|--------------------|
| | Confinement 21 Farms | Grazing 9 Farms |
| Average number of cows | 108 | 93 |
| CWT of milk sold per cow | 195 | 140 |
| Farm income | | |
| Milk sales | 2,860 | 2,099 |
| Cattle sales | 180 | 230 |
| Other income | 241 | 152 |
| Total income | 3,281 | 2,481 |
| Farm expenses | | |
| Feed purchased | 822 | 625 |
| Seed, fertilizer, chemicals | 245 | 98 |
| Depreciation and repairs | 497 | 422 |
| Labor | 171 | 43 |
| Medical and breeding | 162 | 65 |
| Hauling and transportation | 185 | 129 |
| Rent | 138 | 90 |
| Interest | 103 | 100 |
| Custom hire | 122 | 46 |
| Other expenses | 401 | 307 |
| Total expenses | 2,847 | 1,925 |
| Profit per COW | 434 | 556 |
| Profit per CWT | 2.22 | 3.98 |
| Profit per FARM | 46,767 | 51,704 |

Editor's comments.
 1* Danny has got it right here. The KOWboyz do not *and never have* claimed an exclusive on good feeding programs. However, I do think our association's Mission Statement is quite unique.
 2* Let this not be mistaken to mean the *goal* is 10 lbs less than your neighbor! In context here and a complete reading of KOW literature would make it clear that the KOW school of thought is about *optimum* milk production for **profitability** –which is *not necessarily maximum* milk per cow in the short term measure. KOW advisors do work for some very high producing herds, but each individual dairy farm has their own most profitable / successful RHA that must take into consideration such things as individual business plans, genetics, facilities, and cow husbandry skills.
 3* Golly, I sure laughed when I first read this line! Some folks don't think I have a good sense of humor! - TW