

DAIRY PIPELINE

Volume 37, No. 9 November/December 2016



Be careful when cutting corners

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"I suggest we look for ways to improve profitability while maintaining all the best management practices we know are effective in maintaining herd health and profitability."

When we fall upon hard economic times, many dairy producers start to cut corners. This could include anything from discontinuing the use of teat dips to reducing bedding in stalls to eliminating expensive ingredients in the ration. All of these will help cut costs, but can also have negative long-term effects. For example, discontinuing the use of pre-milking teat dipping can increase the incidence of environmental mastitis and contribute to an increase in the bulk tank SCC. These effects will cause more economic loss than the cost of the teat dip itself. I suggest we look for ways to improve profitability while maintaining all the best management practices we know are effective in maintaining herd health and profitability. We can improve parlor efficiency and milk quality without any monetary inputs. Milking equipment function has a direct impact on milk quality. Therefore, now is the time to focus on ensuring a properly functioning parlor. I suggest you call your equipment dealer and make sure your parlor has had a full evaluation done within the last six months. This includes, but is not limited to, graphing every single pulsator during milking time, testing teat end vacuum at the claw, and ensuring there is adequate air in the system. A visual indicator that the system is not working properly is damaged teat-ends. Hyperkeratosis, or the 'cauliflower' appearance of the teat end, indicates there may be problems with the function of the equipment (vacuum too high, improper ratios on pulsators, improperly functioning pulsators) and/or improper preparation procedures. Testing the equipment, making necessary adjustments and re-testing should in turn improve teat ends, reduce machine-on time, improve parlor efficiency, lower the bulk tank SCC and improve profitability. All of which, required

little, if any, monetary input.

Furthermore, I believe there are far too many mastitis tubes being used to treat chronic *Staph. aureus* infections. By 'chronic' I mean, older cows in late lactation that have mastitis on and off throughout the course of the lactation and it never seems to really 'clear up'. Often these cows contribute more milk to the drain than to the bulk tank. These cows may or may not have been cultured in the past, but I strongly encourage you to culture these so-called 'chronic' cows to get an idea as to what bug(s) you are dealing with. The likelihood of successfully treating mastitis caused by *Staph. aureus* goes down significantly with every episode of mastitis a cow suffers. Once you have the results, I suggest you visit with your veterinarian to determine which cows warrant treatment and which cows do not. I firmly believe we can save a lot of money by reducing antibiotic usage in cows that are not likely to cure. However, this does mean working closely with your veterinarian to ensure appropriate treatment (right drug to the right bug).

Bottom line is this...cutting costs is something most producers are attempting to do during the current economic times. However, there are things we can do to improve profitability while not compromising cow-health. I strongly encourage you to consider the options discussed in this article. Please feel free to contact me if you would like further information.



Upcoming Events

See [VTDairy](#) for details.

November 9-10, 2016

Penn State Dairy Nutrition Workshop, Grantville, PA

November 10, 2016

Manure & Nutrient Management Program
Contact cmartel@vt.edu

November 16-17, 2016

[Southeast Quality Milk Initiative](#) Annual Meeting
Tifton, GA

November 18-19, 2016

100th Anniversary of the [Virginia Holstein Association](#)
Banquet and Annual Meeting

December 3, 2016

Virginia Tech Dairy Science Open House, 1810 Litton-Reaves Hall, Blacksburg

December 6, 2016

Nutrient Management for Animal Operations
Southern Piedmont AREC Blackstone.
Contact 504-561-2481 or laurab08@vt.edu.

December 8-9, 2016

Holistic Management and Risk Assessment Workshops for Dairy Farmers
University of Nebraska

January 16-20, 2017

Area Dairy Conferences
Details TBA

February 15-16, 2017

[VSFA & Virginia Tech Cow College](#), Hotel Roanoke

If you are a person with a disability and require any auxiliary aids, services or other accommodations for any Extension event, please discuss your accommodation needs with the Extension staff at your local Extension office at least 1 week prior to the event.

For more information on Dairy Extension or to learn about current programs, visit us at VT Dairy—Home of the Dairy Extension Program on the web at:

www.vtdairy.dasc.vt.edu.



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Making the Tough Call

—Andy Overbay, Ph. D., Extension Agent, ANR, aoverbay@vt.edu

The past year has seen some interesting, and frankly troubling, developments in the world of commodity pricing.

Ordinarily, when one commodity is down another is trending upward to help soften the blow, but now it seems that most every Ag commodity is suffering a downturn. Downturns are also signaled by farm owners seeking answers, asking “What am I going to do?”. This is a good question, but the answer should actually be determined during the good times. Some say good times make for good managers, but I think the opposite is true. Good times can cover poor decisions or alleviate the pressure to make a decision at all.

So what AM I going to do? Recently, I helped with the Holistic Management and Risk Assessment Workshop for Dairy Farmers in the Southern Region conducted by Drs. Gonzalo Ferreira and Alex White of VT’s Dairy Science Department. While the program was focused on dairy farmers, the principles of business and enterprise evaluation could be applied to most any scenario. One slide in the second session struck me in particular... “BE BRAVE...Be a Manager!” Under that heading Dr. Ferreira had four bullet points that should be given serious thought.

Move Forward. Moving forward may seem impossible, but one thing is for sure, standing still in the face of economic ruin is not an option either. Change is a scary thing, but it is also the only certain thing in business and in life. As a farmer, I have no love for the word “quit,” but I also agree with the statement that “quitting while one is ahead isn’t the same as quitting”. It isn’t retreating if you decide to move forward in a new direction. Not making a decision IS a decision; you have decided to not decide.

When analysis is done, half the work is done. Difficult decisions are easy to put off or ignore altogether, but once a clear pathway forward has been decided, work is not only easier, it is more efficient. For example, many dairies have decided to purchase forages rather than grow them. Once that deci-

sion is made, many other decisions fall into place. Equipment replacement or repairs, manure handling and nutrient management, or storage needs all follow the decision to not grow forages anymore. Making the call also makes life easier for those around you. Family members and employees can see the vision and direction of the farm, so can move with purpose in the same direction. One thing my Dad instilled in me was the necessity to be positive on the job. Gripping about decisions is like injecting poison into your operation and everyone involved in it. Not only is it unproductive, it is downright tiring! Pulling together makes the workdays more efficient.

Avoid paralysis by analysis. Sometimes one can have way too many choices. A good manager cuts through the clutter, makes a decision and rolls on. It may be wise to set some time limits on decision making. The longer a decision—no matter how crucial—is postponed the more likely an equally crucial call will roll up against it. The trouble with paralysis by analysis is that it mimics negativity in that it spreads. It damages your outward attitude as seen by others. If you are stymied by making a decision, the chances are high that your family or staff follow suit. Being tough-minded and making sound decisions in a timely fashion will draw others to you.

Avoiding failure is to avoid progress. Benjamin Franklin said “Nothing ventured, nothing gained.” That said, being “adventurous” doesn’t give you a blank check to act recklessly. John Wooden explained it this way, “Failing to prepare is preparing to fail”. Let’s just get this out of the way. Not every decision you make is going to be correct in the long run. You are not perfect; you will make mistakes. A good manager doesn’t second guess themselves, knowing that even if the decision proves to be wrong, corrections lie in the future not in the past. If you are unsure what to do, look for solutions that offer flexibility. An all-in, go for broke option may lead to just that. Any management decision that risks your family living carries too high a price tag in my opinion. Taking calculated risks is not the same as being risky.

2016

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DASC-92NP

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