

Optimizing the Relationship of the Producer and their Nutritionist Panel

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The role of the consultant has increased in importance for the dairy business. The use of consultants probably started with the need for a nutritionist due to several factors.

- Advances in the science of dairy nutrition resulted in the need to utilize increasingly sophisticated programs for ration formulation
- The impact of dairy nutrition on productivity of the herd, health of the herd and labor needs for management of feeding programs.
- The selection of and management of feeding equipment and the design of feeding systems which preserve feed quality and promote delivery of rations as formulated has become more sophisticated.

Traditionally, the consultant was hired because of their perceived wealth of technical knowledge related to dairy nutrition and dairy herd management. Are we entering into a new phase in the role of the consultant which expands beyond the role as a “nutritionist”? Increasingly, consultants are utilized to provide advice and mentoring in the areas of labor and financial management and business organization. There has also been a trend away from the individual consultant to having “teams” of consultants which offer a wider perspective of expertise.

Ultimately, the success of the consultant/client relationship comes down to far more than technical knowledge but the ability of the consultant to establish an environment of effective communication where there is a recognition that each dairy is a unique business and the consultant effectively assesses the goals of the business and the challenges preventing them from achieving their goals, which extend far beyond nutrition. Likewise, the client must recognize that in order for success to occur, they need to effectively communicate with the consultant and feel free to question recommendations and work with them to “fine tune” strategies which will be more effective.

The panel discussion at the 2019 Western Dairy Management Conference will feature:

- Mr. Jim Barmore of GPS Dairy consultants from Verona, WI and his client Jon Lamer of Seven Oaks Dairy located in Kaukauna, WI.
- Dr. Mike DeGroot of Edge Dairy Consulting in Visalia, CA and his client, Adrian Diepersloot and Wolfe Creek Dairy in Severance, CO.



In 2004, I started DeGroot Dairy Consulting. In 2014, EDGE Dairy Consulting, LLC was established with two partners; Jordan Van Grouw and Aaron Highstreet. EDGE Dairy Consulting provides nutrition and management consulting on dairies in 6 states and care for approximately 100,000 cows. Mike focuses on milk production, cow comfort and transition cows. He also provides consulting in the areas of forage quality and team management on farms/dairies in California and Colorado.

Adrian Diepersloot is the owner and operator of Wolf Creek Dairy in Severance, Colorado. Wolf Creek milks approximately 4,500 cows 3 times per day. The dairy was started in August, 2017. Adrian and his dad and brother dairy in California and when he decided to start a dairy in Colorado we worked very closely as they transitioned into the new facility. All heifers are custom raised offsite. The challenges we faced in this transition are a great example of an excellent client – consultant relationship. There were several key factors that have made this relationship work. The first and most important one was communication. We were starting with all first lactation animals and knew that it was going to be a challenge. As the herd has grown, logistics are improving. We continuously monitor key performance indicators to ensure that we are on track with our goals. Once per quarter we review quarterly summaries which include production, reproduction, culling and nutrient analysis reports with all members of the management team. Establishing achievable and measurable goals is the second item that we insist on with all of our clients. Setting goals as to what we expect in the coming year with the cows as well as communicating what is expected from each of us is very important. Between communication and goal setting we are on track with where we want to be and are continually trying to improve and exceed the goals that have been established. Between emails and phone calls we communicate at least once per week. Adrian is one of the most knowledgeable clients that we have and I appreciate the way he challenges me and our relationship. All decisions are made together and if there is something in question, we can talk about it openly. The team approach is what we like to do on farms and this relationship is no exception.

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Building a Strong Working Dairy – Consultant Relationship

- Who & What We Are

Seven Oaks Dairy, LLC

Seven Oaks Dairy, LLC is a 4th generation family owned and operated dairy farm located in Kaukauna, WI. Seven Oaks Dairy, LLC started out as a small family farm in the early 1900's and has continued to grow and progress through the years. Today the herd has grown to over 1,000 cows and we look forward to more growth in the future. We use the best management practices known in our industry to provide a clean, healthy, and high-quality product for our customers. We emphasize working together as a team to accomplish our goals of being safe, efficient, and sustainable so we are able to continue to provide affordable and wholesome dairy products long into the future.



Growth | Profit | Success

Growth

GPS Dairy Consulting will work to help your business grow. Whether your goals are to realize an increase in milk production, profitability or size we have the tools to make those goals a reality. We believe that dairies with the best chance to succeed and thrive in the future will be "learning" organizations where owners, managers and staff continually grow their capacity to create the results they truly desire. The coaching mindset we bring to our customers creates a framework for providing personal growth, development and collaboration to empower themselves and their team.

Profit

Profitability is the cornerstone to longevity of any business. This is especially challenging in the dairy industry. Nutritional costs can equate to nearly half of the business's operating expense, and therefore have a tremendous impact on profitability. We know what nutritional costs should be and have the network in place to improve purchasing power. Additionally, we have the ability to assist with the decision-making process in improving risk management for your business, and offer financial CFO related consulting.

Success

We believe in the power of setting goals and achieving them; both for our own business and the dairy producers for whom we work with. GPS Dairy Consulting is made up of driven, successful independent consultants who have proven their ability to achieve repeatable, successful results. Our consultants are recognized within the industry as individual leaders; working as team, GPS Dairy Consultants help achieve success within your dairy business.

A Coaching Mindset

The coaching mindset is a shift in how a consultant or dairy owner approaches problems, individuals, and teams of people on the dairy. While every situation is specific, the coaching mindset creates a framework for developing collaboration and empowering members of the team or staff. Through empowering members of the team, it encourages employees to contribute to developing solutions and action to any number of issues or challenges. For consultants and owners with a coaching mindset, issues become a true opportunity for individual and group development as well as a broader-base for solving issues. A coaching mindset isn't always the most appropriate means of leadership, but it does broaden the consultant's, dairy owners, and managers capacity and effectiveness.

A coaching mindset seizes opportunities to invite collaboration to problem-solving and drawing on fresh perspectives from those involved. Approaching challenges moves from a situation of "attempting to listen" to truly being attentive and engaging with other stakeholders and guiding the process. Leading from behind, asking questions before creating solutions, and developing a sense of contribution from all key stakeholders is involved in coaching. Ultimately, the team owns the solutions, direction, and strategies to move forward which is a process led by the consultant. This in turn builds accountability at the team level.

Working together, we are dedicated to creating a mentoring culture in order to augment learning, maximize time and effort and better utilize resources. Through coaching and mentoring we help bring alignment, accountability for the goals, expectations and responsibilities of the dairy and better communication with the dairy team. We are also committed to continuous learning, and strongly promote participation of the entire dairy farm team in learning opportunities provided by both GPS Dairy Consulting and other organizations.

Key Points Shared – Owner & Consultant

- Every strong relationship is built upon respect and trust which has been instilled into the entire dairy team, and any allied industry working with the dairy team.
- Being committed to building a strong culture of respect, trust, and teamwork is key. This must be role-modeled on a daily basis with all involved at the dairy being led and held accountable by the owners to the culture. For clarity, "culture" might simply be defined as "how we do things around here". This includes things such as mutual respect for all employees, the level of cow care, keeping the parlor and dairy clean at all times, not having empty bunks, and feeding only quality forages to the cows.
- Building a stronger team has been key, including having a clearer vision for the dairy, understanding roles, having the right people on the team, and developing better standards, KPI's, and accountability. Performance of the people and the cows became the "norm" and culture of working together. Building a stronger team focused on having clearer common goals and understanding of the goals. This includes: combined fat/protein lbs. produced per cow, specific forage quality metrics, milk/stall per hr, ideal number of cows to milk in the facilities, calf KPI's, quality of heifers being raised, and specific cow health metrics. Providing regular feedback to the team became a key to better accountability and performance.
- Staying committed to developing the people on the dairy team is a regular weekly role of both the dairy owner, consultant, and veterinarian.

- Understanding the distinction between “managing” versus “leadership” needed to be built and become a common language and understanding for the owner, consultant, dairy managers, and veterinarian in order for the dairy to have both operational excellence and a strong strategic longer-term plan and vision.
- The leadership of the dairy always thinks of “the team” rather than “the employees”. This involves regular and daily engagement of the team’s ideas, listening, taking action as appropriate and needed, being proactive, providing a safe work environment, requiring all vendors and outside allied industry to recognize and support the culture of the dairy, and having a shared passion for success.
- The owner and consultant share the vision that part of their responsibility as leaders of the dairy is to “inspire” the best from each and every member of the dairy team, which includes consistent accountability.
- Regular communication by the dairy manager team through weekly meetings is key, as well as the dairy advisory team including the consultant, veterinarian, and breeder either in a meeting or email and sharing of records and data.
- Communication respects the difference between “prompt and important”, “high priority and now”, and “for future consideration and discussion”. Time is valuable, and thoughtful communication is priceless. This includes sharing and monitoring of herd and feeding data, as well as a weekly phone discussion with the consultant and veterinarian on behalf of the herd.
- The dairy owner and consultant have shared views that a business is better managed from the “front” rather than the “rear” meaning process control and standards for the dairy are set in protocols, well-trained employees, work is monitored and feedback provided to the dairy team often without waiting for herd or forage outcomes that are based on metrics which have a time-lag. We like to manage the “front-end” of the dairy rather than always looking back on what happened possibly several weeks ago. Of course, data and KPI’s are still used that do have some time-lag involved (forage test results), yet the focus is on the team, people, and getting their buy-in to the proper protocol and consistency of the job/work being done each and every day.
- Better process, team alignment, and reporting with the focus being on communication is a cornerstone of how the owner and consultant work together. This includes reporting and accountability on fresh cows, weigh-backs, weekly forage testing and regular ration updates, dairy team group email, weekly dairy managers meeting, weekly phone call with consultant/Vet, and weekly check-ins with the owner and consultant.
- Informally, we do a S.W.O.T analysis when we talk. Conversations about strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats are done regularly to make sure we have a mutual understanding of the “gotta haves” that are vital to the dairy, the dairy team, and the industry as a whole now and in the future.
- The dairy owner has built a “safe culture” where critical conversations can be raised and had whether on ideas of how to improve herd performance, calf or heifer management by custom raisers, working together as a team, troubleshooting the herd performance, or how the team communicates with one another. Having the respect and trust of each team member engenders the confidence and comfort that we are all working for the good of the cows at Seven Oaks Dairy and we are a TEAM.
- Technical expertise of the consultant, good people skills, healthy cows, and herd performance are a “given” and fundamental to a strong working relationship.

- Best of all, we have both a strong business relationship and with our spouses have become very good friends enjoying the journey and challenges of being successful in the dairy industry.

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