



CONSULTANTS OR MANAGEMENT TEAMS?

The Western dairy industry seems to have an abundance of “consultants” available to producers in a wide array of specialties. There are numerous consultants in the areas of veterinary, facility layout and design, reproduction, financial and business management, nutrition, etc. Some of these services are provided at minimal or no cost by a feed supplement or pharmaceutical company while others are provided on a fee basis. And then there is always the neighbor who has a great idea or new concept they encourage a producer to try out.

According to *Dictionary.com*, the word “consultant” is derived from Latin: *consultāns*. It defines the word as “a person who gives professional or expert advice”.

I am one of those so-called consultants with an expertise in financial matters as they relate to dairies. I attempt to guide and direct clients in a manner which assists them in achieving their long term financial goals and many times am allowed to work with consultants from other disciplines of the dairy industry. Often, we come together and form a team to achieve the overall objectives of the dairy producer.

For a consultant or a consulting team to be effective, they must respect the knowledge of other consultants involved with the operation. In my personal experience, I have been part of many reproduction discussions on the dairy; however, I do not have the expertise to make recommendations as to various breeding protocols. Likewise, I would hope the reproduction consultant would not attempt to make financial recommendations to the client without someone with financial expertise involved.

On many occasions, I have found that a nutritionist will make ration changes or suggest some kind of group feeding that may interfere with the breeding protocol of the dairy from a facility and efficiency standpoint. Likewise the inverse may occur. And then you have the financial consultant attempting to prepare a

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projected twelve month cash flow required by a lender without any involvement or feedback from nutrition or reproduction side. The financial consultant may also fault or criticize the dairyman/producer that his feed expense is too high or the breeding expense category is high compared to a benchmark range without digging further into the operation. Bottom line conflicts begin to arise, limited progress (if any) is made by the producer and all of the consultants are ignored.

In the past five years I have encouraged a team approach with the consultants. That team usually includes the veterinarian, nutritionist, financial consultants to the dairy and the owner. By having all of the disciplines at the table, it makes for spirited conversation, debate and most likely a reasonable goal setting. Using this type of setting, I have found that the team is working towards one or two goals in a given period and success is usually achieved.

Some recommendations or guidelines I have found beneficial in these types of meetings are as follows:

- Schedule the meetings when and where all parties can attend in person. A site away from the dairy is helpful as it keeps distractions to a minimum.
- Make sure the various attendees have the information needed prior to the meeting. (Herd records, feed and inventory tracking, financial information).
- Make certain all of the appropriate parties are in attendance. I tend to favor only the actual producer and his consulting team. There may be times a herdsman or banker may be

involved; however, sometimes it may be beneficial to omit these parties as the appropriate parties can disseminate pertinent information after the team reaches consensus.

- All the parties should be open and honest. If a consultant feels there is a problem in their area of expertise it should be expressed to all parties. Egos need to be checked at the door and the fear of losing a client or offending a member should not be considered by the consultant. If a consultant is doing their job they are calling it how they see it, not simply appeasing a client.

- Use a whiteboard when possible to write, erase and track issues in an effort to prioritize the goals for the period.

- Keep the meetings to 2 hours - everyone is busy and interest will wane if lengthy meetings occur.

- Keep the goal setting to two or three goals for the period, and keep the goals doable for the period established.

- Establish monitoring and procedures and try to get consensus among the parties.

- Schedule the next meeting at the end of the current meeting. □

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