



Brockett's Ag Advice

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Geese are 'spring tonic'

Late last week I got my usual thrill in the spring. I was diligently working in my office at home when I heard a noise. It took me a few moments to sort it out in my mind. When I finally realized that it was indeed geese "squonking", I ran outside to try to spot them.

Lo and behold, they were flying directly over our house. It was a sizable flock for this area with nearly 100 birds in one big "V" and two small "Vs" inside of the big "V". For some reason geese flying north is like spring tonic to me because they, rather than robins or crocus, are my sign that spring is here. So cheer up, spring is here and as usual spring brings with it a renewal of spirit and hope.

You Can Succeed

The next five years will not be easy. It will make no difference what type of enterprise you as a farmer operate, things will be

tight. Those who really want to succeed will have a good chance, to not only weather the next five years, they will be able to enter the 1990s in a good position to be quite profitable through the 90's.

Notice I said "succeed," because a survival mentality will not do the trick. Success will not be easy to obtain. It will take some sacrifices.

As a farm manager, you will have to buckle down and be a manager first. You will have to allocate the time to do some of the necessary management jobs. In the past few weeks I have talked to several groups of dairymen and to individual farmers.

In these discussions, I have emphasized the importance of knowing where you are so you can decide how to get to where you want to be. One tool that can be used as a map is a good farm analysis.

It does take time and effort to compile the type of information that makes up a useable analysis. This time and effort must come from the 24 hours that make up a day.

Yes, many farmers will succeed without doing or using an analysis. However, an analysis will give a farm manager a little edge. Make a parallel with a person on a highway.

If that person wants to get from Lewistown to Harrisburg but does not know where he is now, he must do one of the following things: use a map with a red dot that says you are here; start out with the sun over his left shoulder and hope it is morning time; ask directions as he proceeds; or wait until dark and use the stars as a guide.

Studying the map may take longer initially, but the chances of reaching Harrisburg may be increased. A good analysis is that map.

It is frustrating to have people agree with me on the value of an analysis then add "but ----". Some of these buts are:

- I do not have time.
- My records are not good enough.
- Even if I had an analysis I would probably not use it.
- The last time I looked at my analysis, I thought the results were stupid so did not use them.

• Even if the analysis showed that what I was doing was wrong, I probably would not change, or
• I am doing O.K. now, so why should I do an analysis?

Unfortunately, many farmers feel that the only way they can overcome a financial problem is to expand. Expansion may mean more gross income, but it also means more expenses and probably more borrowed money.

The "expansion without analyzing syndrome" often compounds the original problem and may add some additional problems.

The Dairy Business

The dairy business is potentially the most profitable type of farm enterprise today for most of Pennsylvania. First it is difficult for large corporate dairy farms to compete with efficiently run family dairy farms.

If you are serious about continuing in the dairy business, then you should decide that records are the most important part of your business.

The main way those records will be valuable is if you use them for decision making, analysis, and

projection purposes.

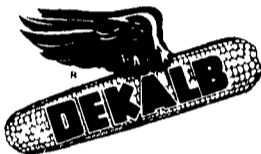
If you do not have time to keep and use good records, then you are really saying "I am looking for an excuse to get out of farming".

Second, until recently, the dairy business has been insulated from many of the "supply-demand" problems other farm businesses have faced for a number of years. Until recently the regular guaranteed milk check was taken as a "given".

The milk check may be less guaranteed now but, for the most part, it is still fairly regular. Instead of complaining about the present economic situation, dairymen should look at the even more severe problems other farm enterprises have.

Once they have done this, the next step would be to move ahead using their management ability to become more profitable. If one dairyman can produce milk with a cash outlay (not including interest or principal on debt payments) of less than 60% of cash income, then others should be able to do the same. Most dairymen who could operate on that level would be profitable.

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Dairy and Diversified Cropping
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Forrest Stricker, Wernersville, Pennsylvania
Dairyman
Advantage

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