



Be a better woof

You can strengthen the fabric of your dairy and its biosecurity program by tapping into many resources

By Bruce Dehm

In weaving, a woof is the thread that goes back and forth, holding parallel threads together. This long, continuous strand entwines the breadth and length of the fabric being created. Cut the woof at an end and the fabric frays. Break it in the middle and holes begin growing. The stronger the woof, the more sturdy the fabric.

As a dairy manager, you are the woof. Your role is to guide and bind together with a single purpose the threads of your business. These threads are all the things you need to coordinate and manage to make the dairy operate.

With knowledge, procedures and supervision, you connect cows with labor and milking equipment to produce milk. You bind soil, seed and equipment to produce forages.

Managing so much

Given the complexity of dairy operations, this question begs to be answered: How can a dairy producer manage all of this? How does one person control and improve everything from labor to biosecurity, income taxes, conception rates and a million other things?

The answer: By improving your woof to increase your knowledge and make better use of your time. And how do you do that? You use other people's knowledge to help you solve problems faster and fill in the gaps of expertise on your dairy. You use other people's time to do things you and others in your business don't have time to do.

Adding strength

Threads can be strengthened by braiding them together. To do this in larger businesses, owners may hire technicians and managers to provide more knowledge and supervision to help reach goals. Smaller businesses, including most dairies, don't usually have enough work to keep a technician or manager busy full time. So they hire part time any number of people – a nutritionist, veterinarian, business analyst, crop consultant, extension educator, lender or tax preparer.

When you combine the skills, knowledge and time of these people with your capabilities, you increase your woof. You improve your capacity to manage and control the many aspects of your business.

From theory to practice

These suggestions can help you put into practice techniques to improve your woof:

1. Write down a list of things that you need to improve in one column.
2. List all the people who have the knowledge, skills and time that you don't have in another column
3. Match up the your needs with the people by drawing lines between the two columns.
4. Pick up the phone and call the people on your list to see if there is a match between your needs and their abilities.

Another way to improve your woof is closer to home. Many people who can help you strengthen the fabric of your business already work with you. You just need to take advantage of their talents. These suggestions can help do that. Have you asked:

- Your veterinarian to help develop a written vaccination program from calves to cows?
- Your nutritionist to develop protocols and help body score your herd regularly?
- Your crop consultant to help you better time hay harvest to improve forage quality?
- Your bST supplier to regularly analyze production records for peak and persistency?
- Your business analyst to benchmark your farm and look for opportunities?
- Your lender to see if restructuring debt is advantageous?
- Your herd manager to report incidences of metabolic problems regularly?
- Your lead milker to develop a daily production chart?
- Your milk inspector to develop a set of quality milk procedures?

To monitor and evaluate all this activity, form an advisory team to prioritize projects and create accountability.

FYI

Bruce Dehm operates Dehm Associates, a provider of business services such as budgeting and benchmarking to dairy producers. Contact Dehm at (585) 243-4427 or www.DehmAssociates.com