

Improving Your Relationship with Your Dairy's Consultants



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As with any business, consultants can provide a valuable resource. Examples of dairy consultants include feed nutritionists, veterinarians, county agents, and milk co-op field personnel. These individuals can provide valuable information to help you better manage your operation, and make your dairy operation more profitable. To provide for a positive and productive relationship with your consultants, it is important to establish a two-way dialogue and make sure that both parties really listen to the needs and questions presented by both sides.

Establishing a good line of communication begins with understanding the expectations of both parties towards one another. What does a farmer expect of his or her nutritionist or other types of consultants?

- **First**, as a farmer you expect your consultant to provide you with sound advice on a timely basis which is based on scientific research and not just what is working for another client. Research is routinely conducted on various ways of improving the nutrition, reproductive performance or health of dairy cattle to name a few. This research shows if a practice or product can improve various aspects of an operation. Consultants should be able to take this information and find a practical way to implement it on your operation.
- **Secondly**, consultants can suggest changes in various aspects of an operation that can help improve profitability. For example, a nutritional consultant can not only balance a ration for your herd, but also provide tips on how you can improve cow comfort and the overall management of your nutritional program.
- **Third**, farmers should insist that their consultants not only provide them with the information needed to make decisions, but they should also explain why certain practices or ingredients are being or are not being recommended.

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This dialogue is important for farmers to understand why certain practices are recommended and then provide you with information needed to make a sound decision on whether you want to implement a practice or utilize a product.

- **Fourth and just as importantly**, your consultant should understand the goals for your operation and want to help you achieve these goals. To make this relationship work, farmers need to make sure they truly communicate with their consultants.

They need to provide their consultants with information about the cows and various relevant aspects of the operation. For example, during herd pregnancy checks information regarding calving date, breeding dates, and results of the previous reproductive exams is important for a veterinarian to assess how many days pregnant a cow is and if she is not pregnant the best course of action. Nutritional consultants need to know information regarding the milking herd and the quantity of forages that are available to be feed to provide the best balanced ration for the farmer to feed his/her cows the most profitability.

Consultants do not always expect their clients to incorporate all their suggestions, but ask that they listen to their comments and evaluate the options presented. Once these options are presented, farmers need to communicate what suggestions they have and have not incorporated and the impact these suggestions have had on their operation. This two-way communication helps farmers and consultants provide an environment that fosters ways to accomplish the farmer's goals.