



JANUARY 2020 NEWSLETTER

This isn't news, it is a true story, and I hope it makes you smile:

I believe it was January 1982 when three of the four Sundays in the month all the churches in town, and every other town were cancelled. The wind was incredible with -20 below actual temperatures and it was snowing. A true blizzard. My neighbor couldn't keep his house above 50 and took his wife and kids to his aunt's for a day and night.

I was on emergency duty; there were only two of us in practice. The phone rang three times that morning before I could get dressed and out of the house. All three calls were milk fevers, all down, all in stantion barns, and all in a completely different direction from my home. I took them in the order they called. The first was only a few miles from my drive but the drifts were rock hard and three quarters of the way across the road. If it had been dark, I wouldn't have been able to navigate.

I got to the first farm, the cow was in the gutter with two broken or dislocated hips and I knew she'd never get up. I helped Don get her on the walk after the IV calcium and jumped back into my truck. Thirty minutes later I was on Highway 26 near Burnett. I turned the corner onto a town road and there was a 3 foot snowdrift all the way across the road. I bundled up and grabbed a grain shovel I carried with me and attempted to dig out the drift, but it was pointless. I couldn't handle the cold and the snow was rock hard.

There was a house on the corner, so I ran there and called the farmer. I could see the farm half a mile away, but I would have frozen to death trying to walk that half mile. Actually, it was really stupid on my part to be out at all. I asked the farmer if he could drive a tractor down and pick me up, but he said none of his tractors would start, his barn was frozen and if I couldn't make it then so be it.

Reluctantly, I got back in my truck and turned around when a county plow emerged from the snow on Hwy 26. I flagged the truck down and there were two guys in the truck. I asked for help, all they had to do was break one single drift, I could see clean road almost all the way to the farm. I'll never forget because the county guys were eating jelly donuts and the guy with the beard had red jelly entangled in his beard.

At first they wouldn't help because it wasn't a county or town road, but eventually they agreed. It's important to realize there were no vehicles on any roads, only stupid people like me were out driving around. They broke through the first big drift and went all the way to the farm. I followed, there was another drift in the farmers drive that they broke through and then they were gone.

The next farm had another cow down in the gutter with a broken or dislocated hip that we dragged out after I treated her. At least there was hot water in the house that I could clean up with. At the end of the town road the drift was already getting bad but I got out and headed north to Ron's farm by Oak Center. I arrived five hours after he called and there was another cow in the gutter! I treated her, we rolled her onto the walk and I told Ron "We're going to your house for coffee and then coming back out and trying to get this girl up because I'm not coming back." We did get her up and into a box stall.

I headed home, through Waupun because it was 5 hours with my truck running, and I needed gas. On highway 49 north of Waupun there's a little hill and there was a massive drift almost across the road. The problem was that there was a Chevy Impala stuck in the only lane open between the snow drift and the ditch. That lane was actually the shoulder, and in the ditch was a big articulated loader stuck because the loader had tried to get around the Impala. The Impala had a driver in it and the guy was just spinning his wheels. It looked like he'd been there for a long time. The Impala had slid towards the ditch and the tires had burned the road as they spun. The drift was starting to incorporate the front of the car. My only way home was through that Impala. On a total impulse I drove up against the back of the Impala, put the truck in 4 wheel low, and pushed him up through the drift. He was spinning still and when he hit the pavement in front of the drift he shot down the road. A couple days later I checked my front bumper and there were a couple scratches, but it was worth it.

A Legend Retires: Dr. Andy Johnson, a pioneer in milking equipment monitoring and mastitis control, is retiring. For the last decade or so he has worked with Grande clients and had a busy schedule of international speaking. He will continue to do some consulting and I've used him as a reference and mentor for 35 years. He has been instrumental in assisting Kolby with milking equipment analysis. Dr. Paul Rapnicki (a fellow Michigan State grad) will be replacing Dr. Andy at Grande. In my opinion Dr. Andy Johnson and Dr. David Reed were instrumental in forcing milking machine companies to pay attention to the health of a cow's udder and of her teats when designing milking equipment. I think we took it for granted because he was always just down the road or a phone call away. The man is a legend, he was literally in demand all over the world at every major bovine event. I also think that Andy speaks to how important Wisconsin is to innovation in the dairy industry.

Calf care made simple: I read way too many articles by calf care specialist who make raising calves sound like some genius project. It's not. The best way to relate is to think about a cow out in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains in late winter ready to have a calf.

- First, the cow is going to separate from the rest of the cows into some secluded brushy area. This puts her calf at risk from the coyotes and wolves, but the rest of the cows' and mom's manure are a bigger risk than predators. A calf needs to be born in a clean uncontaminated (by other cows or calves) environment. Otherwise she's going to get exposed to all kinds of nasty organisms
- Second, the calf needs lots of colostrum. Beef cows don't have huge udders and nursing activity hasn't been bred out of them, but dairy breeds need your intervention to get lots of colostrum. You know the routine.
- Third (and it doesn't happen in Colorado) get the calf away from mom because she is still the biggest risk to her own baby's health.
- Fourth, feed the calf. A beef calf eats every few hours. It starts way smaller than a Holstein and ends up way bigger at four months, and then at two years is way smaller again. The more milk, the more frequent, and the closer to mom's milk the better.
- Limit exposure to other calves until the calf's immune system starts to kick in. That's a month or more out.
- Keep the environment like the Colorado hillside. The milk needs to have low bacteria counts like mom produces. That means everything the milk comes in contact with cannot be too clean. There are millions of tools to monitor this. Contact means pails, buckets, pasteurizers and colostrum feeding equipment.
- Almost every calf problem is caused by humans either being careless or trying to cut corners or trying to make the operation "efficient".

Crop market notes: An article in the Wall Street Journal recently recommended going long on winter wheat. The reason was that they expected an early warm spring followed by lots and lots of rain later in the spring and through the summer. Fall planting this year will be an issue. There also was an article on corn. The expectations are for total planted corn acres next year to exceed 100 million. It will be interesting to see if either of these prognostications occurs.

Cost of Production: Every farmer is a little competitive, it's just human nature. My herd average is higher than the neighbor. My cows score higher. I win at the county fair more often. I got more bushels per acre. It's all fun and good, but beating the neighbor has nothing to do with staying in business. Every farm is a business which is what makes farming so hard, especially now days with low prices and lots of debt. The first step every farmer should be taking is figuring out the cost of production for whatever you sell. Sell only corn, then it's really easy and you can play with all kinds of metrics. Sell only milk? It's more complicated because some costs are allocated to calves and cull cows sold, but it needs to be done. Without a starting point of cost of production, no business decision on the farm can be judged valid.