



MAY 2020 NEWSLETTER

I'm hoping this newsletter finds all of our clients healthy. The dairy industry is really rough and depressing right now and I'm filled with anxiety, so I'm not writing about any tips related to farming. I'm editorializing and my goal is to inject some humor into your day and hopefully give you something to smile about.

-Dr. Al Martens

More on the Corona virus:

It's looking pretty clear that the corona virus did start its journey around the world in Wuhan, China. It's very clear the virus originated in bats. Actually, it has been found to reside in the horseshoe bat and was first identified in bat feces in 2013. In 2016, Ralph Baric from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill studied the virus. He showed it attacked mice with a specific human gene inserted in the mice. His paper specifically stated that the virus was "poised for human emergence".

Bats make up about one quarter of all the species of mammals in the world. In North America we only have a few species. In Wisconsin we only have two and as we speak, a fungus called White-Nose Syndrome is killing the majority of these bats.

It turns out that several deadly human viral diseases reside in bats. Last month I mentioned that Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), a corona virus that humans catch from camels. The camels get MERS from bats. Rabies is a virus we are familiar with and bats are one of the perennial sources of Rabies. Ebola comes from bats as does SARS, another corona virus with 75% of its genome identical to Covid 19. SARS also arose in Wuhan, China.

Bats live in massive colonies similar to how people and rats live in New York City. They are tightly packed in caves breathing the same stale air, so diseases love them, particularly corona viruses. Virologists, people who study viruses, love to look for new viruses in bats because there are so many. This is why China had a major virus study lab in Wuhan where American researchers went to study.

The Chinese would have us believe the Covid 19 virus started in a wet market, which is a market where live wild animals are kept in cages until people choose the animals they want butchered. Supposedly some wet markets include fruit bats, a group of large bats that the Chinese like to eat. This wet market theory was used to place the blame for the SARS virus outbreak. Of course the Chinese did nothing about the wet market, but continued to let it thrive. The Chinese scenario has two major problems: There are no bats of any kind at the Wuhan wet market, and no one eats the horseshoe bat. However, it was a well-designed smoke screen.

I bring this up because not only were there no bats at the Wuhan wet market, but the viral study lab mysteriously disappeared immediately after the first Covid 19 cases arose in China. No one can locate any of the employees or researchers. This occurred while the Chinese and the World Health Organization were telling us not to worry because Covid 19 was not contagious between people. If you think Trump is an incredible B.S.-er imagine living in China.

So we have a deadly virus that escaped from a lab. I can see it happening easily. It's good to study all these viruses, especially bat viruses and especially if you are going to eat bats. Beyond that, there are always people being exposed to bat viruses, especially now that cave exploration is a growing sport. So a lab tech or researcher makes a mistake and goes home sick with a cold. Or maybe it's a young person who never even got sick. The research is important. Ignoring the warning from the researcher was another mistake, but there are always researchers telling us the sky is falling.

The unconscionable component of the story is the denial by the Chinese government and the WHO.

A Note from Monty: Something to think about. Infectious diseases love densely packed groups of genetically similar plants and animals. Covid 19 to date did the most damage in New York which is the densest populated city in the United States. The hog and poultry industries have had several devastating disease outbreaks and population density contributed as did the fact that we have bred chickens to be identical and we are close with hogs. Holsteins all trace back to a couple sires and so far we haven't had a major epidemic. But 9 months ago, if I had told you that the corona virus was coming you would have had me committed.

•**Some changes this country needs to think about.** My son in law when discussing the packing industry said, "The more efficient an economy becomes the more fragile it becomes." When 5% of the hogs butchered in the United States are butchered in one building, this is a risk. When a couple beef slaughter plants are shut down and there is a shortage of hamburger but the price for cull cows drops in half, this is a risk. A very close childhood friend that delivers meat in the Detroit area to small butcher and specialty shops has had the best month in 20 years but he can't get product. Every couple days, I call to get an update and as I write this pork is an issue as is beef rib cuts, like bone in steaks and rib roasts. In one day as dairy cow prices tanked, his cost of tenderloins went up a dollar per pound. He actually gets price updates every two hours. If I must pay five cents more a pound for meat, fine. I can eat a little less meat or have a meatless meal during the month. However, I want assurances that the supply is steady, especially if there are plenty of chickens, pigs and cattle to butcher.

•**Time Allocation:** When my kids were young, I taught them in life you are either making money, spending money, or sleeping. Even TV costs money, especially if you eat popcorn and drink a soda. I told them if you want more money, work more hours. That was before I got involved in agriculture. There is always something to do if you are a farmer, you just can't make any money doing it. And that is truer today than ever. I wish it wasn't so.

Dr. Al's Comedy Corner:

•The PETA rep pulled into the farmers yard just as the farmer was heading from the barn to the house for breakfast. Pointing to a pasture in front of the barn the rep asked, "Why doesn't that cow have horns," in a surly voice. The farmer calmly replied, "Some cows are genetically born with no horns. Others have the horns removed with a saw and some local anesthetic when they are older because they use their horns as weapons. But more commonly we remove the horns shortly after birth with an acid paste or an electric dehorner and some pain medication. Again, as a safety precaution. But the reason that cow you are pointing to has no horns is because it's a horse."

•**In Michigan:** First as a side note, there isn't a day goes by I'm not thankful that I moved to Wisconsin. Not a day. The Michigan Governor decided you couldn't fish or go to your cottage up north and she actually had the State Police stopping cars and sending them back to Detroit if they were licensed to a Detroit area address. To avoid the risk a lawyer from Detroit headed towards the Upper Peninsula taking backroads and enjoying the view. In a rural area he looked out the window and noticed a chicken running next to his car. He looked at his speedometer and it registered 45 mph. He pushed his speed up to 55, looked out the window and the chicken was right there. At this point he noticed the chicken had three legs. He shook his head in disbelief when suddenly the chicken accelerated ahead of the lawyer crossed into his lane and darted up a farm drive. The lawyer hit the brakes and followed. In the farmyard the lawyer approached the farmer. "I think I just had a three-legged chicken pass me at 65 miles an hour and run up your drive. Is this possible," he asked? "Yep" the farmer replied. "I breed them". "Why?" asked the lawyer. "Well" replied the farmer, "so many people only have one kid and we thought it would be perfect for a meal with three people. Everyone could have a drumstick." "Good idea" replied the lawyer, "but what do they taste like?" "We don't know," replied the farmer. "We haven't caught one yet."