



by John Goeser

## Dairy is evolving — so should your team

**T**HIS situation has played out before and will happen again in the future. Your team's star player is holding out, demanding special treatment and creating issues for the entire team. The star may want a new and more sizable contract, input with personnel decisions, or to have greater control over the game-plan. The root of the problem comes from the star player perceiving that they bring incredible and unmatched value. The star player thinks of themselves similar to a solo rock star.



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This is a tricky situation to balance for ownership and general managers of professional sports teams. While opinions may vary on how much or what special treatment a star player should receive, the owner or general manager's focus should always be on building the team rather than a single player. Regardless of how talented a star individual is, many managers have recognized that teams can be put together in different ways to achieve success.

### Build out your team

The pandemic has shifted how we're working together in agriculture, and team building will take different forms in the future. We're already seeing it play out. It's historically been hard for one sharp lead person to carry the team, and the difficulty has only ballooned. With today's dairy business environment, building out your team differently may be crucial to your long-term success.

Dairy farming is a complex and competitive endeavor. Margins over the past few years have swung wildly. Indications are that these volatile economic trends will continue, as dry whey and nonfat dry milk exports are more and more important for domestic milk pricing.

Finding margin opportunities by soliciting the thoughts and guidance from consultants and advisers for new or different aspects of your dairy farm is a critical component for your long-term success.

There's been little debate around the value of many relative to one adviser; however, the approach to building out a dairy advisory team has been the subject of discussion as of late. I've typically recommended bringing the team around a table for discussion, but COVID-19 has

changed how we interact. Following this point, the aim is to help you consider different ways to build out and enable your team.

### Collaborate virtually

I remember discussing alternative ways to collaborate in team consulting for dairy farms with Neil Michael around 10 years ago. In fact, we co-presented a session at an American Association of Bovine Practitioners conference, demonstrating several different technologies that could be used to communicate and advise dairies. At that time, video chat or note-taking collaborative apps were becoming more popular.

As a dairy nutrition consultant, I began carrying my tablet with note-taking apps with me for all of my dairy visits. I would take notes, capture images, and present my summary and recommendations with the dairy owner and staff at the conclusion of my visit.

Here I was acting in isolation of my herd's veterinarian, crop, financial, and management advisers. However, after presenting my notes and consulting on action items, I'd send the notes via email to all of our team to keep them abreast of our shared client's progress.

In today's dairy business environment, we need to emphasize communication and sharing among the advisory teammates. There are many different cloud-based collaborative apps that your team can access and share in real time. Your dairy can benefit from structuring your team and communicating differently like this.

### Cover your cost centers

In the event that your dairy does not organize routine team meetings but values a team approach, ensure you retain key advisers for the major cost centers on your farm. Recognizing that feed and nutrition comprises 40% to 60% of costs on a per hundredweight basis, consider building out your team in this space.

Your nutritionist will have a great handle on your dairy's general nutrition program. However, most nutritionists I know and support are strapped for time due to their excellent capabilities and numerous clients to support.

Understanding time limits for most nutritionists, there are other areas to consider adding in other key teammates who can bring supplemental advice and value in collaboration with your nutritionist's lead. These include: transition cow care, forages, feed management software, feed mixing and delivery, feed cleanliness and hygiene, or feed digestion analysis. There is not one person who can cover all of

these areas effectively, so consider multiple advisers just like when a sports team brings in assistant coaches, medical professionals, and others to support the key players on the team.

I've worked with and learned a great deal from many different teams over the past two years. In several recent examples, the teams have not met regularly around a table but have adapted and maintained communication effectively using note-taking and collaboration apps. These new-age teams in the nutrition space, aided

by collaboration apps and technology, help both nutritionists and dairies refine their management or cleanliness in these key areas.

Coming back to the sports team analogy, the point here was not to analogize to a star teammate acting selfishly but rather focusing on finding new ways to build out your team differently and benefit your organization. There are nickels and dimes per hundredweight out there for your farm to find. Capitalize on these opportunities with support from a new-age team. 🐮



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