

Times change – can you?

OUR SAY

AT a labor management workshop last year, a couple who are milking several hundred cows in central South Dakota told the group that they might have to close their dairy because they couldn't find enough workers.

They weren't having any luck hiring local residents to milk cows, and they weren't attracting many Hispanic workers. They couldn't really cut back on the number of cows because they needed to produce a certain volume of milk or it didn't pay for the buyer to run a tanker out to their farm.

The strain on the couple was clear. They worked nearly around the clock when they were shorthanded.

"We really love dairying. Do you have any ideas on what we could do to attract more workers?" the woman asked.

I expected the answers from the other dairy producers in the room to be centered on incentives they could offer employees. Maybe they would suggest bonuses, cow ownership plans, housing or extended vacations.

But one guy popped up and said, "Move! Move where there is more labor."

No one said anything for a moment.

Key Points

- Sometimes drastic changes are needed to solve problems.
- Success may hinge on being flexible and willing to try new things.
- The most successful people are those who are good at Plan B.



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Move? That's not something many of us in agriculture do in the Dakotas.

"It can be done," the man continued. He had moved his dairy from England to South Dakota. Times had changed in England, and he decided if he wanted

to stay in the dairy business, he had to move to some place better suited to it, a place that offered more opportunity.

I doubt if I could be that flexible. After all, I have worked for the *Dakota Farmer* for 25 years. But the story illustrates how willing to change you might have to be to stay in agriculture in the future.

You want to raise hogs? You might have to move to an area where your neighbors won't object to a new barn. You want to continue crop farming? You might have grow a different crop, use a different type of tillage system or adopt a new marketing strategy.

Get good at Plan B

Gabe Brown — the subject of our cover stories (Pages 1 and 6) — is a good example of how it pays to be willing to try something new. After suffering through a drought and several years of back-to-back hail, he found he couldn't make it farming and ranching the traditional way. So he tried something new. He added cover and companion crops to his rotation and began using them in ways that few had considered before. Today, he says he can't believe how profitable farming has become.

"The most successful people" said James York, the U.S. mathematician credited with the coming up with chaos theory, "are those who are good at Plan B."

Hot Talk



Callee Bauman, Miss South Dakota 2006, whose family farms near Huron, S.D., recalling that judges in the Miss America contest last year asked her, "Did you ever eat a cow you knew personally?"

"We know that a box of corn flakes uses less than a nickel's worth of corn and a six-pack of soda uses only 10 cents worth of corn for production. This study solidifies what we've known all along: Corn is not the catalyst for the food-price increase." — Jerry Rubendall, Mitchell, S.D., president of the South Dakota Corn Utilization Council, on a new study that shows energy prices, not ethanol's demand for corn, are behind most of the rise in food prices.



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