



NUTS & BOLTS

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John Hest, Editor



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CONFERENCE

If you're like me, you're no doubt excited about going to the upcoming conference at Greeley, CO, June 12-15. And it's still exciting, even though I've retired and no longer actively working. Although the first one I attended in 1974 (I didn't attend the first one) didn't have too many instructors who weren't from MN, it was still inspiring to think how we'd be able to "pick the brains" of all the attenders. And as it turned out, that's exactly what I've been able to do every time I've gone, and that includes almost all of the 16 yearly events that have been held in many locations.

It's awfully easy to get in a rut doing all of the day-to-day things that need to be done if a management program is going to go ahead; and one can easily lose sight of "the big picture" that we've formulated in our minds. Every year I've attended I go home with a little better view of that picture. We sometimes think that our way is the best when in reality we probably need a shot of some other ideas to mix in with ours.

When you read the program for this year's conference, you'll see that you will get a chance to hear some other ideas on teaching farm and ranch management.

You aren't that far from the Rocky mountains when you arrive in Greeley so why not tie your vacation onto the end of the conference. Then you'll really come back refreshed and ready to go back to work! Get your motel reservations made and your registration sent in for the conference.

SET PRIORITIES

As the publication date for NUTS & BOLTS looms up on the calendar, I get more and more nervous that I won't have enough material to fill the space allotted. But the mail brought two excellent articles today and another came last week so I can put my bottle of Maalox back on the shelf.

Setting priorities is the subject of an article that was crowded out in our Feb. 1 issue. It comes from one who should know, Dwain Vangness, who has taught adult farm management since 1965. Dwain finished the U of MN after completing army service in Korea. He began teaching high school in 1959 at the school where he continues his present position. He received one of highest honors in Minnesota ag teaching circles when he was awarded the Vo-Ag Teacher of the Year in 1985.

SETTING PROFESSIONAL & PERSONAL PRIORITIES

Dwain N. Vangness

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What do you do when an "old" friend of yours (with the same national origin) contacts you and asks a favor? You try to respond, naturally; but it is with a humble feeling that I try to impart some words of wisdom to a dedicated, hard-working, experienced, professional group such as the Adult Farm Business Management Instructors.

I feel certain that most of you, as with my colleague and me in our department, are overwhelmed with the potential workload that we could take responsibility for in our communities. I do not mind putting in long days and many nights to try to meet this obligation, but it bothers me that I do not complete tasks on time, or at all. Restless nights, headaches, grouchiness, short temper and sharp remarks are what my clients and colleagues have to put up with--especially during the November through March time period. Is this fair or human to them or to me? I guess not.

Following are some of the areas where, by attrition or otherwise, we no longer take total responsibility. No order or rank will be attempted.

1. Soil sampling, soil test analysis and recommendations - once a very important part of our work load. We now have a former colleague of ours

who has a full-time business with several employees, doing this task along with other agri-business firms in our community.

2. Feed sampling and ration balancing - a favorite of mine, but again many feed dealers now have accepted this educational task and have specialists in dairy, hogs and beef to relieve our work load. We may still monitor some of these, especially when the farmers receive their year-end analysis and compare protein usage, corn fed, feed costs and all of the other ramifications.
3. Income tax preparation - again our farmers utilize several different tax practitioners to complete this necessary and complicated task. Although, as you realize, when the books are "closed" the tax job may be 99% completed also.
4. Weed identification and controls - local agri-businessmen and chemical companies have greatly assisted the farmers in this area. Although there are still new weeds to identify, controls to evaluate and self-education to keep abreast of changes.
5. Building design, ventilation and insulation - again we are fortunate to have excellent building contractors, electricians, plumbers and material supply businesses in our community to assist us and the farmers.
6. Secretarial and para-professional help - our state coordinator, John Murray has accomplished an unbelievable task in receiving funds through the Minnesota Legislature to enable us to hire staff help for office record keeping, key punching of FINPAK printouts, material duplication and computer depreciation inputs and printouts. These funds, along with local tuition and some direct charges, save us countless hours and in most cases the results are of top notch quality.
7. Computerized records - again, we have a local business that performs this task for many farmers. This is very convenient and time saving for us.
8. Credit agencies, elevators, county agents, soil conservation services, ASCS office, DHA, artificial insemination are other areas of service that assisted us greatly to better our agricultural communities, all with a common goal: TO HELP THE FARM FAMILY TO FARM BETTER SO THAT THEY AND THE ENTIRE AGRI-BUSINESS COMMUNITY MAY LIVE BETTER.

Again, I feel great remorse in not being able to accomplish all these tasks for my "clients." But, should I? Am I performing good education or will it eventually lead other people to "take over" our educational duties? What is there left for me to do on my job? Educational challenges that have evolved in recent years include:

1. For eons our thoughts have been on the "new" analysis. 1988-89 is the year of reality for this goal.
2. FINPAK, the computerized financial planning package put together by the U of MN, and all its various facets has certainly been a very useful and stimulating tool to enable us to assist our clients toward reaching their goals.
3. Marketing - Wow, has been a real challenge, in a large measure due to Lyle Phelps, one of "ours" who has been a real leader in this challenge! Hedging, option-calls and puts, charts, margin calls, mini-contracts, premiums, and on and on.
4. Debt restructuring - An almost insurmountable challenge. Farm Credit Services, FmHA, local banks. Will it ever end?

No, I don't think we will ever run out of work. We are supposed to be leaders - plant the seed, nurture it and maybe let other facets of the agri-business community assist us.

I sincerely feel we need a group session at our national conference to give us some insight in setting priorities.

We also need time for our spouse, children, grand children, church, professional organizations and community organizations. And how about some recreational time, vacation, neighbors, and just plain socializing!

Now, please, may I have some feedback or follow-up on SETTING PRIORITIES.

A NEW LOOK

Al Dalen, known by many Minnesota teachers as "Mr. Computer" sent me a letter the other day, expressing some thoughts in regard to computer software and a review of some that he's used. I'm sure you'll get some ideas:

INTEGRATED SOFTWARE

Al Dalen

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Operation of a home or personal computer in a low budget situation frequently causes us to use software that will do more than one thing. Integrated software is one of the areas where we can often get the most bang for the buck. Having cut my teeth in computer use on Visicalc, and later on Appleworks, I found the PC & MS-DOS arena somewhat lacking in the early years of my IBM-PC conversion. Now, literally thousands of programs are available and each has something special to offer. Given an unlimited budget and loads of time, it would be great to try them all. However, that is not the case for those of us in educational institutions, hence we can benefit if we share our experiences.

Lotus 1-2-3 has become more or less the standard to which one must compare spreadsheet activities, especially so if making templates that you might want to share with others. Compatibility or the ability to read and write Lotus 1-2-3 files may be one of the underlying considerations when buying some other brand of software. Even version 1A and 2 of 1-2-3 cannot exchange files. As a data base it leaves much to be desired and the ability to write and format text is extremely limited.

In an earlier article, PFS First Choice was described as a low-cost entry level integrated program. Since I was familiar with the 1-2-3 command structure, I resisted attempting to learn still another system of spreadsheet operation. Further, I found that First Choice would not read 1-2-3 files of which I had in abundance. (Editor's note: the new version does read 1-2-3 files in a limited way).

Since I had considerable experience with Appleworks, I asked a salesman in a computer store when someone was going to develop an Appleworks clone for DOS machines. He informed me that Microsoft had just come out with such a program with more and better things than Appleworks and its name was Microsoft Works.

I have been using it now for about a year and still have much to learn about its capabilities, but have become comfortable at being able to accomplish those things I wanted to do. It does read 1-2-3 files directly although the final product may need some modification, depending on your technique for drawing lines across the page as the 1-2-3 backslash routine does not fill the cell. The operating environment is entirely different from 1-2-3s command structure, and it does not follow the Appleworks procedure, but it's not difficult to learn.

I found one characteristic very frustrating at first and that's when I chose to print my report using compressed print that it also changed the lines per inch from six to eight at the same time. The company has since informed me that the newer versions (I have 1.0) have corrected this.

Microsoft Works combines a spreadsheet, a true database, a word processing program complete with a spell checker, and a communications program. It cannot sort columns in a spreadsheet independently from other columns. It can merge material from the database into letters created by the word processor. You can add new fields to an existing database without much effort, and you can create a report format, complete with built-in required sorts, sub totals, etc. which are saved along with the file, for future use. In short, it has a lot going for it for its list price of \$159. I have seen it advertised, however, for as little as \$89, a real bargain.

I've been noticing an increase in the list of shareware programs being advertised in the computer magazines and have been buying some of them. I just received my latest order for seven which I hope have some value. One of them As Easy As looks good and will read Lotus 1-2-3 files, version 1A and 2 with the same command structure. The advantage of shareware is you can pass copies along to your friends without shame or blame. You can evaluate before you buy.

CREATE AND MANAGE

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Do we ever ask the question of a farm family: "What would you like to know about your business?" Do we consider the topics that may interest the farm family or do we discuss those topics that interest us as teachers? Do we discuss the ideas that excite us or them?

The word excited brings up another subject that families relate back to us management teachers if we listen closely. If we as teachers are positive and excited about our jobs, then the farm family tends to get more excited about themselves and the workings of their business.

When I was going to college at NDSU in Fargo, a master teacher once told me: "When you work with people, as a teacher, you must be a listener, interested, excited, positive and create thought in people."

Once we have a handle on that master teacher's quote we then need to focus on self improvement for ourselves. We need to put fuel into our tanks so that we may burn it to create the attitude and excitement to motivate our families.

How does a farm management teacher get motivated, excited and filled with new ideas? That person needs to rub shoulders with different people in the profession, and in the process, store those ideas for future use.

We'll all get a chance to do that when we meet in Greeley, CO for our annual Farm & Ranch Management Conference, June 12. Here you'll get an opportunity to listen to management teachers from states that perhaps do things somewhat differently than you might be used to. We have a tendency to live in our own little world and forget that there are other ways to do things.

Maybe that "right" recipe for doing things next year may be some of the "old" ways mixed in with some of the "new" ways we learn in Greeley.

See you in Greeley!

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RUSTLING CATTLE (THE NEW WAY)

The next time you see cattle riding in the back of a compact car, you might suspect cattle rustlers at work.

Because that's exactly what happened in Hudson, WI, a few weeks back. Two men have been accused of taking a modern-day approach to cattle rustling, using a Chevy Chevette to bring home the bovine booty.

"They took the back seat out, I guess, and it must have looked like something going down the highway," St. Croix County District Attorney Eric Lundell said. He reported that between one and two dozen calves had been taken in this manner.

And I always thought one had to use horses, or at least a pickup, to get the job done. Yes, times are changing.

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