

## The Next Generation

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It has come to my attention over the past year or so how involved the next generation is getting in the daily management of the dairy. For the past 20 years there has always been a few new guys sprinkled in here and there, but currently I would say 40% - 50% of the dairies we work with have those 20-30 year olds taking on meaningful responsibility. I hope you will agree that this is a fantastic direction for the industry, but it presents some new challenges that need to be addressed.

Few weeks ago at the DNMC Dairy Summit, Dr. Bernie Erven from Ohio State University, addressed this “generational” change from the standpoint of succession planning. Transferring ownership and the financial implications and complications that could arise as a result. As I looked around the room that day, I started thinking more about the day to day process. More specifically, how and when does the owner, (typically Mom and Dad) start letting go of a few areas of responsibility and let next generation, (typically son, daughter or in-law version) make meaningful decisions?

There is no denying the fact that dairying is much different now than it was 30 years ago. The size and scope of the operation, technology advances, government regulations, sheer amount of machinery involved, etc... It is also very similar in the fact that it is a dairy and needs to be tended to every day – no matter what. There are not weekends as most would describe them. There is no 40 hour work week. It is animal agriculture at its finest and there are few scenarios that demand more dedication to the lifestyle than owning and operating a dairy. So the mere fact that the next generation is willing to take on that responsibility, though different from 30 years ago, puts them in a very unique group of stewards.

This younger group of stewards that I have had the privilege of working with recently encourages my view of the future. Of course they make a few mistakes, sometimes they are a little over-confident, and it may seem like an endless game of 20 questions when spending time with them – But isn't that great? It certainly keeps me on my toes, and encourages me to try a few things that might be out my comfort zone because I just don't have a good reason for why we shouldn't try it that way.

It boils down to this – If you are fortunate enough to have some of this next generation in your employ, whether family or not, congratulations. Let them make you better, prepare them to make good decisions, allow them to make mistakes, feed off of their energy. If you don't have that next generation – should you? We all need a shot in the arm sometime, we are not going to be here forever, who is your next leader? We know becoming a top notch dairy manager/owner doesn't happen overnight, take time to start grooming now. Putting the time and effort, (and patience), in now will most assuredly pay off in the future and undoubtedly go Straight To Your Bottom Line.