



LEARN TO LOOK BACK, LOOK BACK TO LEARN

by Leandri van Niekerk

Are you a victor or a victim in your current situation? Mindset and outlook play a big role in determining whether you will be victorious.

Whatever the problem or goal may be, we can often look back at history for some ideas as to how we see and handle situations. This can also indicate what actions we may need to take to determine a positive future outcome. Our history shapes us ... so we should take control to ensure that how it shapes us is for the better.

Let us consider a few aspects about dairies throughout history to get the creative juices flowing.

TRANSPORT COSTS

There was a time when milk was transported by rail or horse-drawn carriage and feed trucks were still in the future. Cream was separated and transported in stainless steel containers by train to the processors. The skimmed milk would have been distributed locally or fed to pigs.

For the smaller dairies out there, getting milk to the processor at an affordable rate can be quite a headache. Transport and fuel costs are at an all-

time high and there is also an international drive for sustainability, including the push for a lower carbon footprint and local selling. In South Africa, this drive is most likely from higher income groups. In the northern parts of South Africa, our milk often has to go further to get to the processors.

While trains are not currently an option for transport, there may be a local market that could be developed. Could you sell a certain percentage of your milk as pasteurised milk directly to the public? Would the local supermarket be willing to sell your milk or the local restaurant be open to using your milk? Could you sell or deliver milk to local corporate companies on a weekly basis?

RAW MATERIAL COSTS

Many moons ago, dairy cows only consumed grass. Today's pressures require the breeding of cows with a higher production potential and, consequently, higher requirements. Raw materials and feed costs have spiralled with everyone wondering if it could get any worse. Running a profitable dairy is not easy and some farmers may be considering greener pastures. Could you move your dry cows or heifers to pasture or partial pasture to reduce input costs and overheads?

FERTILISER COSTS

Before synthetic and very expensive fertilisers became available, farmers used to repurpose manure to use as fertiliser. Nowadays households have worm bins, bokashi, and other composting techniques for their vegetable garden. Many technologies are available, and research is being

conducted in the commercial sector to speed up the composting process, add additional value, and remove certain unwanted compounds. Yes, it is an investment, but so is fertiliser. Organic fertiliser such as compost or chicken manure might not replace inorganic fertiliser but could potentially reduce some costs. It can also be an opportunity to diversify your business to add additional value.

PROCESSORS

Processors have made life convenient, supplying the consumer with a variety of processed dairy products, however, many consumers feel the need to be more in touch with the origin of the products. Younger generations also yearn to experience something, to learn about history and how products are made. The drive for craft brewing and coffee roasting along with the need for fresh farm-to-fork market produce demonstrates the need to create and acquire homemade products.

Though these enterprises have higher input costs, they can deliver a more premium product. Simultaneously, the consumer is often overwhelmed by the concrete jungle and in need of an escape and country life experience. There may be opportunities for agrotourism to allow people to experience life on a dairy farm and appreciate where their milk comes from.

Look back at the challenges of the past and compare them to current obstacles to derive potential lessons or opportunities ... and then formulate ideas of how these could benefit your enterprise in today's world to be victorious! **mpo**

