Sharemilking – a Dairy Career Path

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ORGANIC VALLEY

Family of Farms

KRUSEN GRASS FARMS, LLC
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Let’s Rock and Roll!
Current situation
Current situation

- It is increasingly difficult to find an entry into dairy farming
- More and more entrants are from non-farming backgrounds and need to acquire skills and equity
- Potential entrants from farming backgrounds might be bound in tradition, lack capital or a positive outlook
Grazing and its opportunities for training new farmers

- Profitability
  - comfortable living
  - fast equity growth
- Less start-up capital
- Improved quality of work
- Seasonality allows for bundling of management tasks and time off
Interns
Interning

• Great way to learn basic and advanced labor and management skills
• Intern needs to be highly motivated
• Live-in situation advantageous for intern
• Ideally a full year
• Trial period recommended
Mentor farms

• Mentor should be well qualified
• Good people skills
• Mentor farm business should be mature
  - experience
  - equity
“Break-in phase”

- Mentor and intern work side by side
- Intern needs to gain an overview and learn daily routines
- Avoid information overload
“Transition phase”

• Slowly formalize curriculum with seasonal tasks as a focal point
• Offer more formal class room setting if available, i.e. “Wisconsin School for Beginning Dairy and Livestock Farmers”
• Offer “Field trips”, pasture walks, conferences
“Implementation Phase”

• Implement and deepen learned skills by gradually delegating more responsibility
• Encourage initiative and independent thinking
• Leave farm for a vacation
Potential pitfalls

- Money- interns often do not value the training and don’t see the intern mentor relationship as symbiotic
- Risk of exploitation of relationship by mentor
- Inability or lack of will to transfer responsibility to intern
- Lack of communication
Sharemilking
Mentor farms

- Established, mature grazing operations have to take responsibility for helping the new generation getting started
- Same criteria apply as for training interns
- Low culling rates in most grazing operations allow for equity sharing in form of livestock
- Find line between mentoring and giving independence
Sharemilking agreement

- Has to be negotiated between both parties
- In our case:
  - Sharemilkers provide most of labor and management related to the livestock and pastures
  - Farm business owner provides all forage, that can be produced in an average year on existing land base and all necessary machinery as well as ongoing mentoring
  - Farm business owner carries most of the risk
- Agreement term is several years
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• Sharemilkers receive:
  - 16% of the milk (they get their own check)
  - 16% of all steers sales
  - every fifth heifer calf born alive in March through May
  - they can raise these heifers on the farm
  - free housing, 1/2 steer milk and veggies
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- Sharemilkers are responsible for:
  - 16% of most variable expenses
  - the utilities for their housing
Forging a Dairy Career Path

My vision is:

• To create a model which can be replicated by other grazing farms
• To coordinate these efforts with more formal classroom studies (universities, technical colleges)
• To achieve regional, maybe national, acceptance for a defined Dairy Career Path
Let’s put our heads together…
…so a new generation can search for the pot of gold…
...and do good to the land and humankind
Thank you!

www.krusengrassfarms.com