Preventing insanity

Jeffrey Bewley, Dairy Tech Services Manager, PerforMix Nutrition Systems

"Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." - - Albert Einstein

Now, I have your attention. At first glance, you may not think you need to read on believing that you do not suffer from any symptoms of insanity. However, according to Albert Einstein’s definition of insanity, I would venture to guess that all of us fall into this trap periodically, if not regularly. Do you do your job differently than you did last month? Six months ago? A year ago? Five years ago? If you answered “no” to any of these questions and you see a need for improvement in tasks you perform, have you considered changing anything?

I attended the 2003 American Dairy Science Association annual meeting in Phoenix during June. I had not been to this meeting since 2000, and it was amazing to me how many things have changed during this short time period. Some of the most interesting research subjects covered were topics that I would have considered crazy (maybe even insane) as recently as five years ago. Sexed semen? Crossbreeding in the dairy industry? Organized human resources management in dairy operations? Milking cows six times a day? Eliminating or reducing the length of the dry period? Not feeding any supplemental phosphorus to dairy animals?

I attended presentations during the week to learn about each of these subjects. The insanity in all this is that all of these technologies are actually being utilized, and are practical in many cases. Granted, some of them will not be widely adopted, because of economic constraints; however, you may run into a Montbeliarde X Holstein cross cow or a group of heifers bred to carry only female calves at some point in the near future.

Some would argue that my personality attracts me to those non-conventional topics. When talking about the odd cliché of “thinking outside the box,” a former boss of mine quickly cried out, “Box!? What box? With you, there is no box!” But, the overriding theme that I gleaned from the ADSA meeting was that as the dairy industry faces increasing challenges in maintaining profitability, producers and researchers are seeking out ways to do things differently. Here is an industry that has historically been very resistant to change and new technology. Yet, those who will survive in the future will be considering these new concepts for use in their operations.

So, I encourage you to spend some time “challenging the process.” In every area of our job and our lives, there is always room for improvements. People are resistant to change. It is our nature to remain in our comfort zone. Yet, if we want to progress, become more effective in our jobs, or more profitable, we must look at new ways of doing things. Invariably, we will come up with some ideas that do not work, and will experience some failures. Thomas Edison said it best when he stated, “I have not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won’t work.”
“Don’t be hasty in searching for expensive solutions to problems that could be solved with inexpensive management changes.”