



## January 2017 Newsletter

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### Save The Dates! 110th Annual Convention and Industry Trade Show

**110TH ANNUAL CONVENTION AND INDUSTRY TRADE SHOW  
MINNESOTA GRAIN AND FEED ASSOCIATION  
MARCH 1-3, 2017  
HYATT REGENCY MINNEAPOLIS**

#### Wednesday, March 1, 2017

- MGFA Board of Directors meeting
- Twin Cities Tour – 2:30 p.m. departure (separate ticketed event) - To include a tour of the newly renovated State Capitol building and dinner at *Tavern on Grand*

**Thursday, March 2, 2017**

**CONCURRENT MORNING SEMINARS** (separate ticketed event): 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

- Convention Seminar **for Grain Elevator and Feed Mill Managers, Owners & Key Employees** – followed by a joint lunch for seminar participants

1) "Impact of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) on Your Firm – Specific Focus on New Transportation Component" - Dave Fairfield, National Grain and Feed Association, Washington D.C. and Phil Cleary, Christianson CPAs and Consultants, Willmar

2) "Mobile Technology - The Direction of Agriculture" - Peter Schott, Myriad Mobile, Fargo, ND

3) "New Tool For Arranging Transportation and Logistics" - Tom Venable, Co-Founder CEO, Basin Commerce, Inc., Minneapolis - The session will explore how you can leverage the internet within the bulk commodities market to help reduce the complexities and costs of arranging transportation and logistics services for agricultural shippers.

4) "Preparing For The Potential of a Sales Tax Audit" - Presented by: Minnesota Department of Revenue

5) "Using a Protectant In Your IPM Plan for Stored Grain" - Paul Drache, Regional Manager, Central Life Sciences

6) \*Additional Presentation Pending (TBA)

- Convention Seminar **for Co-op Elevator Farmer Directors** – followed by a joint lunch for seminar participants

1) "Future Challenges And Opportunities For Cooperative Directors" - William Nelson, William J. Nelson, LLC, St. Paul - former Director of the Co-op Foundation and CHS Foundation

2) "Analyzing Financial Statements - A Fiduciary Responsibility" - Joel Gratz, Christianson CPAs and Consultants, Willmar

3) "Director Due Diligence in Cooperative Management and Significant Transactions" - Gary Koch, Attorney at Gislason & Hunter, LLC, New Ulm. The goal of this session will be to enhance each director's understanding of the kinds of information a director should seek in making decisions and how that information might best be used in the deliberative process.

4) "Strategic Thinking and Communication" - John Christianson, Principal, Christianson CPAs and Consultants, Willmar

5) \*Additional Presentation Pending (TBA)

**Luncheon** (for concurrent seminar participants) – Presentation by MDA Commissioner David Frederickson and a market analysis provided by Richard Jelinek, INTL-FC Stone Financial, Inc., Chicago, IL

**Trade Show Grand Opening/Silent Auction** - 1:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., followed by reception in exhibit hall – "Open Night" for vendor hosted receptions & dinners.

Hospitality Suites Open in Hyatt (evening)

**Friday, March 3, 2017**

## **Morning General Session – 8:30 – 10:30 a.m.**

- MGFA 110th Annual Meeting
- “Never Give Up – The Survivor Way” – Nobody can go back and start a new beginning but anyone can start today and make a new ending - Holly Hoffman, “Survivor Nicaragua Season 21 finalist and author of “Your Winner Within”
- “Effective Leadership – Generational Communication and Dealing With Difficult People - Kit Welchlin, Welchlin Communication Strategies, Minneapolis
- “A Career in Agriculture – The Great Adventure” - Greg Martinelli, Ag Sales Professionals, St. Louis, MO

## **Spouse (ladies) Brunch & Program – 9:00 a.m. -11:00 a.m. (separate ticketed event)**

- “Your Winner Within” - Holly Hoffman, Survivor Nicaragua Season 21 finalist. Her unique life experiences not only offer encouragement and optimism, but a roadmap for self-discovery and spiritual enlightenment, from a humble beginning in a small South Dakota town.

**Trade Show/Silent Auction** reopens and concludes – 10:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m. - lunch provided in exhibit hall

## **Afternoon Closing General Session – 2:35 p.m.**

- “Creating a Hall of Fame Culture of Communication” - Ben Utecht, former U of M receiver and member of Indianapolis Colts Super Bowl Championship Team.

**US Bank (Vikings) Stadium Closing Reception** - Mystic Lake Club Purple Suite (open to all attendees and included with convention registration). Continuous bussing from the Hotel starting at approximately 3:45 p.m. and running until 8:00 p.m. Stadium small group tours being offered every 15 minutes. A special prize drawing will also be held at the reception, provided by Mystic Lake Casino Hotel, site of the 2018 MGFA convention scheduled for March 6-8, 2018.

Hospitality Suites Open in Hyatt (evening)

**NOTE:** Please share this convention information with your fellow employees, co-op elevator farmer directors and your spouse, all of whom will benefit from the convention content and enjoy the experience. Thanks!

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## **ANNOUNCEMENT - MGFA Continues Its Popular Leadership Development Program for Emerging Leaders - "Achieve Results Through Leadership"**

The MGFA will be offering a second opportunity for members to attend our leadership development program, designed for key employees (emerging leaders) who seem destined to be the leaders of the future in your firm and in the industry as a whole. The MGFA is again working with Russell Associates based in Le Sueur and their unique intRAtrain leadership program, in bringing members a top notch leadership development experience. The program combines a workshop (**scheduled for March 16 in St. Cloud**), with **pre and post workshop learning components**.

**Why Should I Attend This Workshop?** Great leadership is often called an “art” because it appears effortless and natural. Great leaders who “inspire and create passion in others to accomplish critical objectives” simply tap into the emotional side of the people equation to bring out the best in their constituents. The great leader can enable others when appropriate; make tough decisions when appropriate, and create a compelling direction that brings clarity, sparks innovation and creativity, and sees solutions when

others see problems. The good news is that these skills can be learned and applied immediately to enhance results.

**Who would benefit from this workshop?** This workshop is ideal for current or emerging leaders in your company with high growth potential. All leaders who are accountable for maximizing the efficiency and productivity of others will certainly find value in the program. intRAtrain™ Blended Learning is a proven six-phase performance system that brings novice or experienced learners to performance mastery faster and with greater motivation than traditional training. intRAtrain Blended Learning Solutions is a highly effective and efficient system for training on many subjects, including leadership development.

#### **intRAtrain Blended Learning Solutions Combines:**

1. Pre-Knowledge Assessment- to establish the current level of knowledge and understanding of the learner
2. Performance Contracting- to set the desired behavior change; raise accountability
3. eLearning- that maximizes knowledge transfer
4. Live Learning Workshop- to increase interaction/involvement and optimizes skill development – **(March 16 in St. Cloud)**
5. Post-Knowledge Assessment- to ensure all participants learned the critical and need-to-know information and to establish the current level of knowledge and understanding of the learner
6. Reinforcement- which ensures an ongoing focus and extends the behavior and performance change process

Program Registration information can be accessed ([here](#)). Feel free to contact the association if you have any questions about this new member program.

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### **MGFA Convention Hotel Accepting Reservations**

The 110th Annual Convention and Industry Trade Show will be held at the Hyatt Regency Minneapolis (1300 Nicollet Mall) on March 1-3, 2017. The Hyatt is now accepting lodging reservations both on-line and by phone. For easy on-line reservations, go to: <https://resweb.passkey.com/go/MNGrainAndFeed2017> . If you prefer making a phone reservation, you can call 1-888-421-1442. The special MGFA convention room rate is \$115 single/double. **NOTE:** The room rate also “includes free parking” in the attached hotel parking ramp, at one vehicle/guest room/night, saving you another \$19/night. **2nd NOTE:** The MGFA room block for a Wednesday, March 1 arrival, is limited and filling fast. Once our Wednesday arrival block is full, rooms will still be available but the room rate will go up \$10/night, which is still well below the normal Hyatt room rate. **Final NOTE:** The cutoff date for making room reservations at the MGFA convention rate is **Wednesday, February 15**. Don't delay – make your reservation today!

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### **Convention Registration Is Now Open**

We are now accepting [registrations](#) for the upcoming 110th annual MGFA Convention and Trade Show. The registration form is available [here](#). General registration for members will be \$95/participant or \$45/spouse, which entitles you access to the trade show, general sessions, hospitality suites and the gala closing reception Friday afternoon/evening at US Bank (Vikings) Stadium, which will include stadium tours. A Pre-convention Tour, Thursday morning Manager/Employee seminar, Thursday morning Co-op Director Seminar, and Friday morning Spouse Brunch, are all “separate ticketed events”. Payment options include check, credit card, or we can invoice you. Please consider joining your industry friends and colleagues at this premier event. You won't be disappointed!

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### **Silent Auction Being Held During Convention to Benefit the MGFA Scholarship Program**

A silent auction will again be held at the upcoming MGFA convention, as a means to generate some additional funding for the MGFA "Commitment to Agriculture Scholarship Program", which annually awards up to four \$1000 scholarships for MGFA member students. The silent auction will be located in the convention tradeshow exhibit hall and its hours of operation will coincide, for the most part, with the hours of the tradeshow (concluding at 2:00 p.m. on Friday, March 3, a half hour prior to the close of the tradeshow). So far, we have received the following items available for bidding at the silent auction (and more are expected):

- Suite tickets to a Twins game on May 3rd – **12 seat suite on the first base line near home plate** (estimated \$2700 value) – donated by Dorsey & Whitney Law Firm, Minneapolis
- Two 18-hole rounds of golf at The Pines and The Preserve – donated by Grand View Lodge on Gull Lake
- One night stay in a junior suite and breakfast buffet for 2 – donated by the Hilton Minneapolis
- Two night stay in a king or double queen suite and 4 water entertainment passes – donated by Thumper Pond, Ottertail
- One night stay in a deluxe room and \$50 credit in the Green Mill Restaurant – donated by the Best Western Kelly Inn, St. Cloud
- Two 18-hole rounds of golf with cart – donated by North Links Golf Course, North Mankato
- One night stay, including breakfast for two – donated by the Hyatt Regency Minneapolis
- One night stay, including 4 water park passes – donated by Arrowwood Lodge at Brainerd Lakes, Brainerd
- A variety of unique grain bin bird feeders and coin banks – donated by Big Boy Bird Feeders, Jordan
- A Duluth stay and play package – donated by Visit Duluth CVB
- One night stay and \$20 casino credit – donated by Grand Casino Mille Lacs or Hinckley

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## Convention Speaker Spotlight - Ben Utecht

*Ben Utecht, former U of M receiver and member of the Indianapolis Colts Super Bowl Championship Team - Friday afternoon **Closing General Session** speaker - "Creating a Hall of Fame Culture of Communication."*

It is rare to find a true Renaissance man anymore, but that's just that you get with Ben Utecht. Ben has always chased his dreams, finding his way from a small river town in Minnesota to a Super Bowl championship field. Whether it was becoming a world champion in football, singing with major symphonies, serenading Muhammad Ali on his 70th birthday, or stepping into a national advocacy role, Ben has found success in many realms. He honed his already keen public speaking skills at the University of Minnesota, where he graduated with a degree in communications and even started a master's degree in sports management before being swept up into the NFL.

Ben has established himself as a prominent national leadership and motivational speaker. His programs stem from lessons he learned in the locker room with Hall of Fame coach Tony Dungy and in the huddle with future Hall-of-Famer Peyton Manning. His presentation spotlights and breaks down "The 4 Ls" of leadership: listening, learning, language, and love. He will also touch on his experience with concussions. It inspires audiences to truly care about their minds and to discover how integral memory is to identity. His presentation will basically illuminate dynamic ways to succeed in business and life.

*"I believe, as a speaker, that vulnerability equals connectivity. This is why I approach my keynote presentations with a mission of bringing you on an emotional journey through my life, into a hall-of-fame huddle, and onto a field of high-impact lessons. All our lives tell a story, and this is how I tell mine!"*

As an influential advocate for brain health, Ben served as the national spokesperson for the American Academy of Neurology and currently sits on the prestigious board of the American Brain Foundation. Ben was given the AAN's most esteemed honor, the Public Leadership in Neurology Award, in 2014. Also at that time, Ben released a music video for his song "You Will Always Be My Girls," written as a love letter to his wife and daughters with the goal of emotionally connecting people to the importance of their memories. The

video has impacted the lives of many, garnering over 1.3 million YouTube views to date.

Ben can now add "author" to his résumé, with the release of his new book *Counting the Days While My Mind Slips Away*, published by Simon & Schuster. The book is the first memoir from a former NFL player who left the game as a result of concussions. It takes the reader on a heart-felt journey through the ups and downs of Ben's life with faith, family, and football. Ben has a message of hope that has reached a nation-wide audience, inspiring people to value every moment to its fullest.

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## **Convention Trade Show Is 75% Sold Out**

The 110th MGFA Grain and Feed Industry Trade Show is scheduled for March 2 and 3, 2017, at the Hyatt Regency Minneapolis. We already have almost 70 exhibitors that have signed up to participate in this premier event, with its unique focus on grain elevator, feed mill and farm supply product and service vendors from around the United States and Canada. Nowhere else in Minnesota will you find a trade show of this size, designed specifically for the grain and feed industry. You are encouraged to see what's new in the industry and network with industry colleagues, while enjoying some delicious food and a few cold beverages. The list of exhibitors is attached. See you at the show!

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## **Announcement Expected Concerning the BNSF Switch Maintenance Issue**

As BNSF shippers will recall, a few months ago the railroad announced that it would begin enforcing lease language that will allow the railroad to begin assessing shippers for the maintenance costs on switches, costing shippers thousands of dollars in added operating expense. Many shippers, including the MGFA, had expressed concerns over this very costly and unfair imposition of switch maintenance costs. According to industry sources, the BNSF is reassessing the implementation of these switch maintenance charges and an announcement is expected shortly. Stay tuned!

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## **PSM Case Slipping From OSHA's Control, Rehearing Request Denied**

On December 20, 2016 the US District Court made a unanimous decision denying the Department of Labor (DOL) and the Occupational Health and Safety Administration's (OSHA) petition for a rehearing ([view here](#)). When OSHA issued a change to its guidelines that redefine what businesses are exempt from the Process Safety Management (PSM) standard in mid-2015, they picked a fight with all the Ag Retailers in Minnesota and across the nation.

The Minnesota Grain and Feed Association supported the Agricultural Retailers Association (ARA) and others, in their legal challenge to block enforcement of this misguided rule. Recently, Daren Coppock, President and CEO of the Agricultural Retailers Association was quoted as saying, "This decision effectively resolves the issue of process safety management for ag retailers. The agency, in its rehearing petition, hinted that it may unilaterally rescind or make modifications to the original "retail facilities" interpretive letter. Stay tuned!

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## **Member News - Industry Consolidation Continues**

\* Members of three farm cooperatives with facilities stretching from Sleepy Eye on the west to Randolph on the east, and from Darwin on the north to the Iowa/Minnesota border, will vote in the coming weeks on merging. The board of directors of Central Farm Service, or CFS, River Region Cooperative, or RRC, and South Central Grain and Energy, or SCGE, have approved taking the proposed consolidation of the three organizations to a member vote. The vote will be counted on Feb. 21. If approved, the effective date would be on or before August 1. If approved, it would create a huge organization geographically and financially, with

combined annual sales of more than \$1 billion. The three began a merger study in September on the belief that a consolidation would create opportunities to grow member equity, improve access to capital, lessen risk across a larger geography, and leverage economies of scale.

"It is essential our organizations grow to meet the changes and challenges of the future," said SCGE President Larry Dean. "This merger allows us to control the change we want to see in our organization, rather than having to react to changes out of our control." South Central, headquartered in Fairfax, has several locations west of Hutchinson, including in Buffalo Lake, Cosmos, Darwin, Gibbon, Hector and Stewart.

"Producers' needs continue to change, and it is our job as our members' agricultural cooperatives to meet them," said Bruce Kuelbs, board president of RRC, which operates in the Sleepy Eye area. "This merger will create new opportunities in services and innovations for our members, while providing advanced opportunities for our employee base." The RRC, offering grain, feed and agronomy services, was founded in 1890.

Central Farm Service is the largest of the potential partners. The cooperative, headquartered in Owatonna and Truman, has grain, agronomy, feed or energy facilities in about 30 communities stretching from Randolph, near State Highway 52, on the northeast, to State Highway 4 on the west, including a couple in northern Iowa, just south of the Minnesota border.

"Agriculture continues to dramatically change," said Eric Schrader, CFS board chair. "The global collapse of prices, volatility of markets, increased regulatory mandates, and overall increase in operating expenses have created an opportunity for three strong cooperatives to create a stronger supply partner for our members."

*Source: Hutchinson Leader*

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\* Patrons of the Farmers Elevator Company of Alvarado (with a branch in Oslo) voted overwhelmingly on December 19, in support of the sale of elevator assets to Markit County Grain, a BNSF shuttle loading facility located outside of Argyle. The sale was scheduled to close on December 30, 2016.

\* The merger between Crystal Valley Co-op and FCA Co-op of Jackson occurred on November 30 and was approved by 72% of the vote. The official effective date of the merger is set for March 1, 2017. The new co-op will be operating out of 13 locations in the region.

\* We want to welcome two new members to the association. Joining this month were: **Christianson CPA's and Consultants** based in Willmar and its managing partner John Christianson; and, **Central Life Sciences** based in Greeley, CO, with Paul Drache as its regional manager. We certainly appreciate their added support of the association mission and trust they will realize the value of membership as well. Thank you to these and all the members of the MGFA, for the continued support of an association looking out for YOU!

\* **Harvest Land Cooperative** is looking for an experienced Location Manager to join our Grain Division. The Location Manager will provide the leadership and management needed for growth and effective operations at our Morton, MN facility. **Major Responsibilities include:** Operations:

- Supervise location operations.
- Recruit and train personnel.
- Safekeeping of location physical product inventory.
- Maintain location assets effectively. Supervise maintenance program.
- Manage grain facility operations and quality control. Maximize blending opportunities.
- Practice and enforce safety policies and procedures.
- Maintain a clean and organized facility.

Grain Originations:

- Determine the best use of marketing strategies available for our customers and coordinate with our grain department personnel to promote strategies.

- Gain in market share growth of bushels purchased annually.
- Provide a level of customer service that promotes growth in sales and purchases.
- Effective communications with operations and marketing teams to accomplish volume goals.

The preferred candidate will have 3- 5 years of grain handling facility operations and management. An agricultural degree is a plus. We offer a highly competitive compensation and benefit package, including two premier retirement programs. For more information on Harvest Land, visit our website at [www.harvestland.com](http://www.harvestland.com). Qualified candidates should submit resume to: Harvest Land Cooperative 711 Front St Morgan, MN 56266 Attn: Human Resources Or email: [khenning@harvestland.com](mailto:khenning@harvestland.com).

## Nebraska Company Fined More Than \$500K for Worker's Fatal Engulfment

In May of 2016, a 52-year-old maintenance employee of Prinz Grain and Feed, Inc. was buried in grain after a wall of corn inside a grain bin collapsed. He was rescued by emergency crews, but died from his injuries two days later. According to Jeff Funke, Area Director for the Omaha area office of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), “a maintenance worker entered a bin containing a corn product, and one of the walls that had adhered to the bin collapsed and engulfed the employee.”

Following the incident, OSHA opened a comprehensive investigation. Investigators found multiple violations of OSHA standards for grain handling at the facility, including failure to issue confined space permits for grain bin entry, test atmospheric conditions in grain bins and pits, and provide training to employees on confined space entry.

Upon conclusion of the investigation, OSHA cited the feed facility for 3 willful, 15 serious and two other-than-serious violations. The agency also placed the business into its Severe Violator Enforcement Program (SVEP). OSHA has proposed penalties against the business in the amount of \$526,633. **NOTE: If you need help complying with the OSHA Grain Handling Standard, we have a safety program that can provide you with the help and guidance you need. For information, contact the MGFA office.**

## Your Feed Killed My Horse!

*Article Source: Greg Martinelli, Ag Sales Professionals. NOTE: Greg is scheduled to address the MGFA Convention on Friday, March 3 in Minneapolis.*

### Hang in the Pocket

Nothing can ruin a great day in your Ag sales territory like a phone call from a customer telling you that they suspect your feed killed their livestock. If you're in the feed business for long enough, it's going to happen. Said another way – If you feed it, you will eventually be involved in “killing” it with your feed. Well, hang in there and don't despair. You can handle it. It's going to take some discipline as these situations can get emotionally charged. When I say hang in there, I mean that sincerely. When coaching, I describe it like a quarterback hanging in the pocket. There's emotion, commotion and chaos going on all around you. However, you need to be the one to remain calm and keep your head in the game as you look for answers and solutions to this situation.

#### **Scene 1: Dead Horse phone call**

*“Greg, we had the vet out yesterday and she thinks Bailey died from bad feed.”*

*“Wow, what makes her think it was the feed?”*

*“Greg, she looked at everything and she examined Bailey before we buried her and the vet thinks it might have been due to bad feed”*



*"I happen to be near your place, can I stop out and take a look?"*

### **Scene 2: Dead birds phone call**

*"Greg, I got tumblers and star gazers on my hands and the chicks are dying on me since I switched to your feed. I've sent samples off and there's not enough vitamin E in the feed. When can you be out here? These chicks are worth a lot. I can't afford to be losing them like this. I have customers expecting them in 3 months. I'm not going to have enough if I don't....."*

*"I'm sorry. What is a star gazer and a tumbler?"*

*"When the birds get low on certain vitamins, they have brain development issues. Some develop into tumblers. They look down and tumble over, stand up and repeat the tumble, over and over until they can't stand up anymore. Star gazers do the opposite. They look up, tumble backwards and stand back up again."*

You can stop laughing now as you try to imagine what this looks like. Not funny at the time but now it kind of sounds amusing. It was definitely a difficult time for the owner. In the end, neither case was due to the feed. Fortunately, these two owners were looking for the real reason their animals died. After digging into the feed, the farm and the lab results, we found out what the problem was. In the case of the horse, it had eaten some noxious weeds that grew on the property. In the case of the birds, we were adding a vitamin/mineral pack that the customer provided to us. She had it tested and there was an issue with the amount of Vitamin E in the pack. When in emotionally charged cases like these,

#### **Do:**

1. **Remain Calm:** Remember, you are the Fran Tarkington, the Joe Montana, the Aaron Rogers in this situation. Keep your head in the game. For us older folks, I could say that you are the Colombo in this situation – "One last question?"

#### **2. Ask a lot of questions:**

- Number of dead, sick, out of how many total animals? How old,
- What pens or groups are dying, sick? Is it concentrated or isolated to one in particular?
- What other feed, medication, supplements are being used at this time?
- How much feed could they have consumed from the time feed was delivered? Was the feed mixed with other feed in the bin?
- Is the vet involved? Is the vet posting some of the animals? What other external testing is being done – university, etc.?

#### **3. Get on the farm and evaluate the situation:**

- Look at the general conditions of the pens, feed lot or pasture where the animals are at.
- Look at any and all feed & water sources to include creeks, water tanks, pasture conditions, weeds that are prevalent, overhanging trees, on-farm hay and grain supplied.

4. **Take really good notes** – these become part of your company records. Record the details from the first phone call all the way through the process. Dig through the details. Later on, these notes will help point the investigation many times in different directions. Look over these notes frequently while trying to figure out what went on. You will be surprised at the new questions and directions the notes will reveal

#### **5. Contact your internal people**

- **Operations manager** to verify formulas, mixer batching records, retained samples and follow regulatory process
- **Sales manager** because they need to know before they find out from **anyone** else
- **Internal office staff** – to find trucking records, load orders, verify delivery dates and what was hauled

before this load of feed and what else was on the truck.

- **Technical Department** – that might be your nutritionist, your staff veterinarian or whichever PhD is in your company to provide technical support on your products.

6. **Determine motive and intent** – By this, I mean it's important that you try to determine motive or intent. You are the sales person and are closest to the customer. This is where your company needs you to step up and help make this determination. What I mean is to determine if this customer is truly trying to solve the issue or are they just wanting a hand out/fix blame. Often, a customer will see deep pockets and figure that this will be easy to make a claim. Or, blaming the feed is an easier than trying to dig in and find the real reason. Doing so, might put the blame back on their own management techniques. It's a judgement call, but if I suspect that this is just a money grab, then I'm going to throw the brakes on and change my approach. I'm more inclined to jump in and work with an account that is trying to find out what happened, how to fix it and how to prevent it. Then later on, we can talk about compensation if proven to be the feed. If compensation is in the first several sentences of the phone call, pay close attention to the facts of what they are saying.

#### **Don't:**

1. **Admit anything that is not true/accurate/proven** – verify everything on your end and on the customer end. ***"We delivered your squirrel grower ration on Tuesday"*** ***"We shipped 4 tons of pellets on that load"*** are facts that I feel are open to sharing as they help you and the customer deal with the situation. They would be open for sharing in any legal proceeding. However, ***"We've had leftover feed caught in truck augers before and you never know"***, ***"We've had problems with that pellet mill operator before, I'll bet he made possum finisher instead of squirrel grower"*** are not fact nor do they help nor should you say or acknowledge them if said by the customer.

2. **Talk about it with anyone outside of your company and the customer** – rumors will start to fly. Friends and peers of that customer will find out and may ask you or just spread the rumor. It might even show up on social media or on local TV. Ignore any of those discussions. As much as you would like to set the record straight, don't. That's for later and that's probably for someone else in your company to do. There's plenty of horror stories out there of people who jumped on social media sites and started retaliating or commenting on their business. Let the professionals do that.

3. **Make a federal case out of one dead pigeon:** I've been on the receiving end from customers and from sales reps that are in a complete panic and want a CSI team on the farm with rubber gloves and a crime scene unit – all to understand why their pet sparrow has the sniffles. (That's a bit of an exaggeration but you get the point).

4. **Ignore the situation and hope it goes away:** This is the opposite of the last point. Apply the correct amount of concern and due diligence based on the situation. You get better at this as time goes on

**Epilogue** – I have had initial calls on sick or dying horses, rabbits, chickens, pheasants, quail, a rare Russian crane, an elephant, goats and I'm sure there were others I can't remember.

In all the years in the feed business, there were only several at most where we could definitely identify the issue as feed related. These were handled above board and I feel good about how we handled them and so did our customers. However, the vast majority ended up proving to be something else. Such as:

- Stray voltage in the watering system causing animals to dehydrate.
- Medication reactions that caused animals to go off feed
- Spouse fed the horses a beef feed accidentally – bet that was a great family night around the dinner table. ***"So, how was your day honey besides the fact that I poisoned your horse?"***
- We simply stopped doing business with a customer because they said our feed tasted too salty. No dead or sick animals, but if this was how they were going to operate and evaluate our feed, we really couldn't afford to risk killing one of their rare birds for a buck a bag. ***How many bags of feed would we have to sell to recover the cost of me flying to Kamchatka and collecting a rare bird egg,***

**hatch it and deliver it to our customer?** We thanked them and gave them the phone number to our favorite competitor.

- Horses were eating either some noxious weeds or poisonous tree leaves on the farm. The relief of not killing several expensive horses was wonderful to say the least. It also did wonders for our reputation as **rumors were starting to spread that we were the cause**. Blood and stomach content tests were critical in this case.

Good luck and remember that you can handle it. Hang in the pocket like Big Ben from Pittsburgh does. I know it helps that he's 6'5" and 250 pounds. But you're going to be 6'5" and 250 pounds by separating fact from fiction, real from rumor and g\_\_\_ from guessing. (I couldn't think of a good "g" word but you get the point).

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