

Welcome to [ASK] - Always Seeking Knowledge! No 24
Written and Published by Bruce Ward, Holistic Results Pty. Limited

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Dear «Salutation»

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1. Quick [ASK]

Whatever the scale of your business, keep it flexible. It will win every time in the long run. And the best way to retain flexibility is to keep overheads very, very low.

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2. Welcome and announcement

This is the last of what will be known as "Series 1" of [ASK], which has been sent under the banner of Holistic Results for more than five years. The next issue of [ASK] - Always Seeking Knowledge will be the first of "Series 2". It will be published by my new company, The Farm Business Gym Pty Limited – <http://www.the-farm-business-gym.com> A major announcement of the facilities to be offered by the Gym will be made on the morning of September 30.

The Gym will gradually become the vehicle I will use for much of my training and support services. Under development at the Gym at the moment is a brand new training program that will be run on the Gym website. The program uses some of the world's most advanced educational software, and combined with CD/DVD and telephone interaction, heralds an entirely new phase of my training program and the level of support that I make available to practitioners. You will soon be seeing more of the Gym.

During the recent Ag-Quip field days at Gunnedah there was an announcement about a new satellite based broadband service. I do not have all the details, but the noise at the time was that it is a new, very specialised broadband satellite, with 10% of its available space (about 700,000 connections) dedicated to rural Australia. The remainder is destined for use in China and India.

At the announcement the proponents made two points:

- The new service has no relationship to Telstra
- Costs are \$39.00 per month

PS: You need to check what you get for that price. I strongly urge that you shoot for 512k download speed i.e. the speed from the satellite down to your computer, and 128k upload speeds i.e. the connection speed from your computer back up to the satellite. There are many cheaper plans based on 256k download/64k upload speeds, but they are poor value in my opinion. Basic services such as internet banking still struggle on 256/64, as do any files involving video images. In addition the upcoming Voice Over Internet (VoIP)

services also are dodgy at these speeds. VoIP will become increasingly important as Telstra disappears over the T3 horizon (despite your friendly federal governments' assurances to the contrary).

Talk to your local computer provider for full details.

Property for Lease

Andrew Zilm tells me that he has 1,200 acres available for lease at Gravesend, (Between Moree and Inverell, northern NSW). There is a house, and good sheds. Give Andrew a call on (04) 2989 4508 or email him at wombatrun@bigpond.com

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3. SunCountry Tours to Hawaii and Patagonia

Can I remind you also of the next Sun Country Ranch tours, which are run by Jim and Daniela Howell. Everybody who has done one of these trips returns gushing about the experience. Forget the cheque book, and get on the web to book in!!

Hawaii

The first trip is scheduled for November 12-20, visiting holistically managed ranches in Hawaii. You will be joined by veteran Holistic Management Certified Educator and world-renowned consultant Kirk Gadzia, who has been working with several operations on The Big Island, Maui, and Molokai for many years. He will co-lead this fantastic trip as the local expert. This is an incredibly valuable opportunity to interact and learn from Kirk as well as with holistic management practitioners in the islands. Several of the ranches on the itinerary span nearly the entire brittleness scale, from lowland semi-arid savannas at sea level to cool season perennial pasture on the high slopes of 13,000 foot volcanoes. These unique features of the islands climate and topography will provide a rich and priceless learning experience.

Several operations are highly diversified, with enterprises ranging from organic beef and lamb, to wineries, to tropical flowers, to mushrooms, to elk to pineapples and papayas. These ranches are among the most well-managed, scenic, and interesting of the state of Hawaii, and are all long-time practitioners of Holistic Management.

See the Sun Country Tours website to review the itinerary <http://www.scranchtours.com>

Patagonia

The Howell's will then embark on another new excursion into the bottom end of South America...Argentine Patagonia. This is the first tour they have offered exclusively to the Patagonian region of Argentina - a trip they have dreamed about and have been planning for a long time. They have finally put the pieces together to offer a truly extraordinary experience. This trip will be a combination of ranch visits (to large, organic, well-managed Merino and Corriedale sheep and Hereford cattle ranches), fly-fishing for sea-run brown trout on the amazing rivers crossing the Patagonian steppe, and exploration of the peaks, glaciers, and massive glacial-fed lakes of the southern Andes - arguably the most dramatic landscape in the Americas.

This trip is loaded with luxury, but in the midst of some of the world's most pristine, isolated wilderness. Accommodation and food will be simply exquisite, and the ranching operations unreal in their scale and accomplishment. You will also have several days in the awesome city of Buenos Aires. With its sophisticated, lively, Latin population, world-class restaurants, art, shows, luxurious landscaping, and elaborate architecture, Buenos Aires is a city with a soul. Argentina combines Old World, European civility with the abundance and possibility of The New World. It will take place December 1-12, meeting in Buenos Aires on Dec. 1.

See details of the trip on the Sun Country Tours website at <http://www.scranchtours.com>

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4. Suzie expands her web

Suzie has expanded her business life by recently forming "Australian Job Specialists" (AJS). AJS focuses on employment opportunities for highly qualified business people seeking to migrate to Australia (Please note: she is NOT working with meat workers and McDonalds staff - the ones in the news at the moment!).

Suzie is working closely with Business Migration Australia, a company owned by Florence Borshoff. Florence has a big track record, with more than 17 years of experience in the arena, and the unique purpose of the entire project is to encourage an increasing number of highly qualified people to move to rural and regional Australia.

Of course, Suzie retains her very close connection to her passion, agriculture and agribusiness by continuing to provide contract services to Agricultural Appointments, as she has for the past 4.5 years. In fact, if anything her creation of AJS has added a new dimension to her agricultural capability.

If you have friends overseas who are looking for an opportunity for business migration to Australia, you should give her a call on +61 2 9818 5539 or email her at suzie@ajsward.com.au

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5. Flexibility v's Overheads

Just recently I saw some figures that showed yet again that farmers who have invested the most in overheads have a tendency over time to do the worst, economically. Caveat: This is clearly a tendency and not an absolute statement, but you will recall I have been bantering on about this for a long time now. If you want a refresher on why I do so, go to www.the-farm-business-gym.com/overhead-expenses.html and check out the two graphs on that page to see what can happen.

The figures I saw the other day suggest that in the USA the return on assets managed is seriously lower on high input farms when compared to more extensive, low overhead businesses. What this is saying is that there is often a very poor economic gain flowing from well intentioned 'capital improvements'. If the development is not in synch. with the short and long term biological needs of the land under management, then frightening consequences can be expected. By that I mean, if the capital improvement does not improve the biological wealth of the land, it will send the business backwards, financially. And guess what - more often than not the high input farms are sending ecological performance into a nose-dive, relying increasingly on high inputs of salt based fertilisers to maintain or increase yield. In short, farmers end up "buying" their yield improvements.

Now of course, not everyone is in that boat, and some people we work with are kick starting their biological capital by applying considerable amounts of money and technology. However, without exception these people are also knowledgeable about and focused on the biological aspects of their business. We all know that unfortunately, not everyone is so focused or knowledgeable.

So why do people keep on down this high input path? What is the seduction? Well here are three common reasons:

Firstly, the farmers' involved do see a physical increase in productive capacity for their effort. As they are paid per kg of product (meat, milk, wool, grain etc), they naturally think they will make more money if they produce more of their product. Sales-people certainly encourage this viewpoint. Nobody ever asks the farmer to assess exactly what the increase in productive capacity will do to their bottom line, especially if the increase in production will be created by heavy investments in overheads, just like in the graphs.

Secondly, they are told that by increasing their technology they will be more able to match their output to market demands, and perhaps be able to gain some price premiums along the way.

And finally, farmers are human. Bigger is better. Having more cows, ewes or nanny-goats feels better than having less of them, even if the less are more profitable. Growing bigger crops is better for the ego than lighter crops are. Size does matter!

In recent months people have struggled with very difficult seasonal conditions on both sides of Australia. It has been the people with low input, biologically sound farming practices who have weathered the storm far more easily than those dancing the high input jig. Why? High inputs, and especially high overheads, dramatically damage ones flexibility. During the July Telebridge some of the WA farmers were describing the process they went through before concluding that entire herds of stock had to go to market. Because these people are relatively low input producers - virtually no overheads these days compared to five years ago, they could easily (financially) make these decisions, even if they were emotionally difficult at the time. None of the low input producers have spent money on expensive pastures and fertilisers, and they have timed the construction of fencing to match their weak-link indicators. When feed was abundant new fencing slowed or stopped.

Such massive sell-offs create a vacuum in the business. It's like cleaning out the wardrobe in order to make room for new clothes. Nature abhors a vacuum, and you can be sure that all sorts of unexpected opportunities will come up for those who "cleared the decks" early, and gave themselves time, space and flexibility. Time will tell what opportunities will come their way, but we can be sure they will come.

Unfortunately over the same few months I have watched over the fence as some high input producers have really struggled, because without realising it, their lack of flexibility has stolen opportunities from underneath their feet. Almost without exception these people saw themselves by what they do - Hereford producer, merino producers, canola growers etc, rather than by what they wish to create - their true 'quality of life'.

Whatever the scale of your business, keep it flexible. It will win every time in the long run. And the best way to retain flexibility is to keep overheads very, very low.

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6. Update your Diary

We launched a new series of our popular Teleconferences last month. The first was the highly successful practitioner led: "Now that it has rained a bit - what now?" Teleconference in July, and the recently conducted August Teleconference on Dowsing, led by Dr. Pauline Roberts of Bundella, NSW. You can download the audio of both these Teleconferences from the Gym site. Go to www.the-farm-business-gym.com/sound-tracks.html and select the link for either file.

BOOK NOW FOR: three Teleconferences scheduled in the next three months. They are each 'no-charge' and feature outstanding speakers from within our movement.

Sept 26 - Jim Howell talking on setting up spring performance of perennial grasses in the autumn period
12:00 noon EST, 2:00pm NZ, 10:00 am WA, 8:00pm on 25th RMT (USA)

More details and Book at <http://www.the-farm-business-gym.com/teleconferences.html>

Oct 24 - Mark Gardner addressing family succession issues from a holistic viewpoint
12:00 noon EST, 2:00pm NZ, 10:00 am WA, 8:00pm on 23th RMT (USA)

More details at <http://www.the-farm-business-gym.com/teleconferences.html>

Nov 28 - Micahel Kiely addressing the opportunities for graziers through Carbon Trading
12:00 noon EST, 2:00pm NZ, 9:00 am WA, 6:00pm on 27th RMT (USA)

More details at <http://www.the-farm-business-gym.com/teleconferences.html>

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7. Notices - French student looking for a place

French student seeking 6 months of experience - can you help please?

I have recently received an email from Francois Tourne, a 20 year old male student from France, who is looking for work in Australia. I have also heard from a referee, Janine Ford. Janine (an Australian) and her husband employed Francois' brother. Janine said the elder Tourne was a big hit when they employed him on their Kwa Zulu Natal, South Africa, property, about 2 years ago.

Francois has written to me, saying:

"I am a 20 years old French student in the north of France (Lille) and I am in my fourth year of studies. I have done two years in an agricultural school (higher education diploma) principally for breeding. Nowadays, I am in the third year of a technical-commercial Engineer degree for agro-food business.

I have already worked in lots of farms in France (sheep breeding, milk cows, beefs, pigs and poultry farm too) but I prefer big farms of sheeps or beefs. I would like not to be too far from a city as Melbourne, Sydney or even smaller cities because I want to visit the country when I will have some free time.

You can see my English level is not so bad but I have still some progress to do. I can be understood and I can understand too but I will have to adapt to your accentuation and your culture. It is one of the aim of my trip."

If you can help Francois, drop me a note blward@holisticresults.com.au or email Francois himself at: toune.roger@voila.fr

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8. Books and Materials you can use

"Real Medicine, Real Health"

Dr. Arden Anderson
ISBN 0 9752523 0 5

Dr Arden Anderson is probably best known in rural Australia and in NZ for his leading work on soil nutrition and overall agronomy. You may recall that in his earlier book, 'Science in Agriculture' he talks about how the energy levels of plants can be easily measured using a simple device, a refractometer. Plants with a low energy (sugar or carbohydrate) level - ie less than 11 brix using the refractometer are highly susceptible to insect and disease attacks - he regards insects as "natures garbage collectors", whose job is to remove low energy plants who have no place in the food system for healthy crops, animals or humans.

In this book he expands on the subject of human health, and brings to our notice a wide range of logical, reasoned discussion points regarding human health, based on his wide experience of practical clinical practice as both a civilian medical doctor and in his military capacity within the US army. He discusses a wide range of human health issues - Autism, ADD/ADHD, diabetes, cancer, heart disease, endocrine (glandular) systems, arthritis, and much, much more.

If you accept that we are what we eat, then what we eat is now giving us a big sickness. This is a book that is big on facts - Anderson beautifully balances soil science as it applies to us as land managers with medical science, also as it applies to us as humans.

I highly recommend this book as a reference you need in the bookcase. It will help you deal with a wide range of situations in a logical, scientific manner

COMING SOON

After years of waiting for it, the new Holistic Management Handbook is about to make it to the bookstores! The book, written by Allan Savory, Jody Butterfield and Sam Bingham, will be available on October 30th. The Book Connection in Dubbo has 50 copies on order - so give them a call and get in the queue. It is very good.

By the way:

Most books we recommend are available at The Book Connection in Dubbo, NSW
Ph: 02 6882 3311 Fax: 02 6882 3311 or email orders@bookconnection.com.au

(Also ask David Pankhurst about their Mail Order Catalogue - it is terrific)
or
Scorpio Books in Christchurch, NZ
Ph: 03 379 2882 Fax: 03 379 2886 or email scorpbk@ihug.co.nz

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9. Quotes that mean something

"The less you know, the more you believe".
-- Bono

"Ultimately there are no global issues. They are all local issues".
-- Wendell Berry

"If you think for a moment that a government that should never be allowed to choose our religion, should have the right to choose our food system, you're wrong".
-- Joel Salatin

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10. Joke

A bear, a lion and a chicken were having an argument about who is the toughest.

The bear says, "If I roar, the forest is shivering with fear".

The lion says, "If I roar in the desert, the entire desert is afraid of me".

The chicken says, "Big deal. I only have to cough and the entire planet panics!"

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This publication is intended as information and not advice. You should test any ideas contained herein towards your own holistic goal.

Regards, and keep well
Bruce Ward