

# Archived Webinars

Hoard's Dairyman, in cooperation with the University of Illinois, began monthly webinars in January 2011. Each one-hour live presentation provides listeners with the latest information on timely topics to assist in business decisions. They are held the second Monday of each month at noon (Central time). For those unable to attend our live webinars at noon, we archive them for later viewing.

## 2012 Archived Webinars

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**January 9: "Milk's shrinking carbon footprint"**

presented by Mike Hutjens, University of Illinois

**February 13: "Preventing and treating ketosis"**

presented by Garrett Oetzel, University of Wisconsin-Madison

**March 12: "Save time and money in the parlor"**

presented by David Reid, Rocky Ridge Consulting

**April 9: "Choosing feed additives wisely"**

presented by Mike Hutjens, University of Illinois

**May 14: "Long-term impacts of calf feeding"**

presented by Mike Van Amburgh, Cornell University



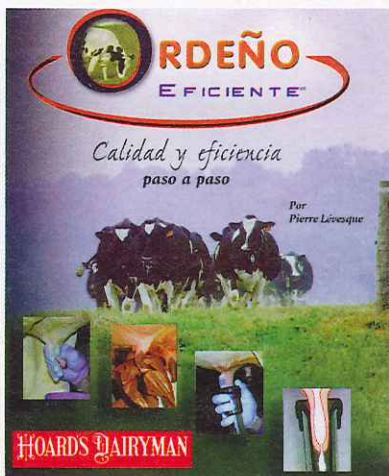
**Mike Hutjens**  
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## Western Watch

by Dennis Halladay

### Are we guilty of "white hat bias," too?

Catchy term, isn't it?

What it represents, however, are serious questions about integrity, objectivity, and, ultimately, credibility. It's a concept thought-provoking enough to keep a philosophy class engaged for a whole semester. I think of it as an ethics pregnancy test that has almost endless applications, although the test subject that inspired this column has big implications for agriculture and consumers alike: science.

"White hat bias" is both a metaphor and an indictment. The metaphor is the symbolic idealism of the Lone Ranger, Roy Rogers, Marshal Dillon, Ben Cartright, and other TV western heroes who wore white hats, told the truth, and always did what was right.

The indictment is a question by science itself about whether all researchers are equally honest and trustworthy. In fact, it's more than just a question. Two researchers at the University of Alabama-Birmingham, after studying childhood obesity studies, wrote an article in a scientific journal that shouted out the elephant in the room in their field of study. Its title was, "White hat bias: a threat to the integrity of scientific reporting."

#### Misleads readers

The authors defined the term as, "Bias leading to distortion of information in the service of what may be perceived to be righteous ends." They identified examples that "seemed to be consistently pushing conclusions in a single direction and systematically distorting the research record" and did so "in a degree sufficient to mislead readers."

Translation: They think some conclusions are fudged and some data sets are cooked. They think data which supports desired conclusions are hunted for and put up on a pedestal, negative data are intentionally ignored or discarded, non-scientific data are used, methods are selected to gather and measure data which will skew results, and findings are exaggerated or misrepresented.

The focus of the article was the role sugary beverages play in childhood obesity. Its scary implication is: what if white hat bias is also present in other research fields, as the authors seem to suggest in the first sentence of their introductory statement: "Like other people, scientific researchers have their own motivations."

The article stirred up things in

the scientific community, raising sensitive questions such as: How much of today's science is sound and how much is slanted? How much fact is being replaced with opinion? Are conclusions a facade for personal values and agendas? And is an attitude of "I know better what's best for you" behind them?

#### Normal human behavior

What makes you stop and take notice of the authors' claims is, they're just talking about normal human behavior. People tend to find what they want to find, and to pick and choose evidence that supports what they believe. They focus on positive things, want others to agree with them, and leave out parts that might cause them to not do so. Kids do it all the time. Be honest; so do adults.

The problem with white hat bias when it is applied to science is, it destroys trust over a wide area. Here are a few "what ifs" I made up to illustrate why this is so scary:

- What if a nutrition researcher who is a vegan does studies that conclude people who eat little or no meat are healthier and live longer than those who eat a lot of it?
- What if a scientist who is gung-ho about organics repeatedly does studies that conclude they are more nutritious than foods that are produced conventionally?
- What if a scientist who is an environmental activist believes climate change is killing polar bears, and does studies that says cattle are the largest unregulated source of greenhouse gases on the planet?
- What if any of these people is an EPA regulator?

All of this leads me to the title of this column: are we guilty of white hat bias, too? Are all of the findings by dairy researchers being presented, or just the parts that make us look good? Is the science they do real, honest, open, and objective?

The dairy industry portrays itself as wearing a white hat. Lets hope we deserve to. **WEST**

What do you think?

My e-mail address is [HoardWest@AOL.com](mailto:HoardWest@AOL.com). My mailing address is Hoard's WEST, 2462 E. Meadowgrass St., Meridian, ID 83646. My telephone is (951) 656-7320.

### Wash. dairy is a sustainability leader.

Werkhoven Dairy in Monroe, Wash., was a 2012 winner in the inaugural U.S. Dairy Sustainability Award contest presented by the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy. Operated by brothers Andy and Jim Werkhoven and their wives, Gloria and Dolores, the dairy milks 1,100 cows at one site and raises all replacements and operates a methane digester at a second location. The system currently produces more gas than their 450-kilowatt generator can use, so they are working with local offices to add a second generator and produce even more electricity for local power users.

Photo by Ryan Ebert, Hoard's Dairyman Art Director

