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Kyle Fessler

# Knowing what we don't

Some of the smartest people I know have one thing in common: They know what they don't know.

Years ago, I was fresh out of college and back in the industry, and I didn't have a clue how much I really didn't know. I had the opportunity to attend a multi-day conference put on by Northwest Farm Credit Service for young and beginning producers. Looking around the room, there were a hundred or so other young farmers who, like me, had grown up and worked on the farm nearly their whole lives, but were all still very green in the ways of agriculture and business.

We had the opportunity to hear from several great speakers that focused on ag economics and farm-family dynamics. One of the speakers was Dr. Dave Kohl, professor emeritus at Virginia Tech and "certified smart guy." He seemed to have more knowledge and information than the rest of us in the room combined. Where did all this information come from? Most of it comes from conversations with actual boots on the ground.

Dr. Dave mentioned that one of his best sources for information on economic indicators could be found at any given truck stop across the country: conversations with long-haul truck drivers. What are the backhauls like? How quickly can drivers find the next load? What is the price of that next load? These conversations with truckers help the economist frame his mindset, and paint a bigger picture of what is truly happening in real-time.

**There is no end to the knowledge we can find if we really want it.**

How often do we stop and ask the simple questions? Do we ask the questions because we have a desire to build a broader knowledge base of our craft? Or are we simply trying to solve the immediate problems of today?

Today, it's easier than ever to find the answers we crave. I've got a dozen or so contacts in my phone that know more about growing great plants than I could ever imagine. There's a 90% chance one of them has had the exact same problem I'm facing, or they know who to call to get the answer. If that doesn't work, there's probably several dozen (or thousand) videos online that can walk me through the issue, step-by-step.

There is no end to the knowledge we can find if we really want it. Do we have the humility to admit that we don't have all the answers, and are we willing to continually ask questions?

My biggest takeaway from that conference years ago is that we'll never have all the answers, but we need to strive to be continual, life-long learners. Whether the knowledge is gained through institutions, industry seminars, or a short conversation with the truck driver parked at our loading dock, we must continue to ask the questions that will help us be better growers and business operators. ☺