

Dairy Employee Management: Evaluation and Selection of Job Candidates

Significant time and efforts goes into the employee recruitment and interview process. The dairy farm manager would (1) analyze labor needs; (2) write position descriptions; recruited candidates; (3) scheduled and conducted planned interviews. The next steps include: (1) checking references; (2) evaluating the candidates; (3) making a selection; and (4) extending a job offer.

Probably the most important category of resources in any business operation is human resources. That definitely includes the dairy operation. Labor costs are one of the highest categories, so it is vital to hire right and then train and retain those good employees. Here are a few notes on how to improve your hiring process.

Recruiting & Hiring Farm Employees: <http://agmarketing.extension.psu.edu/Business/PDFs/hiringemployees.pdf>

- Consider incentives for good employees: www.extension.iastate.edu/valueaddedag/info/Incentivesforkeyemployees.htm
- Confirm employment offer in writing (pay, benefits, hours, etc.) See Wages and Benefits for Farm Employees – Results of an Iowa Survey – ISU Extension:

www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/FM1862.pdf

First, review the needs of your farm and hiring practices that you have used in the past. Reviewing you're the needs of your dairy operation may require an analysis of costs and cash flow for your operation to help determine what labor costs you can afford. Analyze whether full-time or part-time employees are needed and perhaps more specifically when

the labor needs are greatest -- such as weekends, evenings or early mornings. There may even be times of the year – such as peak periods of freshening – where the labor requirement is somewhat increased.

Before posting that help wanted announcement, give careful thought to putting together a written position description. Don't just use a canned job description for a dairy farm worker. Sit down and make a list of all the different duties you may expect of this new employee. Then review the list and determine whether expectations are reasonable, or whether you need to prioritize some of those duties.

Be sure to include any physical requirements of the position, such as lifting, standing, reaching and stretching. Also list whether there is any knowledge, training or previous work experience you expect the new employee to bring to the job. Finally, describe the working conditions, such as days and hours to be worked, flexibility required.

With any farm employment, it is always important to determine whether the position requires a regular driver's license or CDL. There is information on the Iowa Department of Transportation website www.iowadot.gov/mvd/ods/cdl/cdlnut.pdf that can help an employer determine whether a CDL is needed for the position.

While it is not necessary to include a pay range in a job announcement or position description, a proposed pay range should be determined prior to starting the recruitment process. The pay range should be in line with what you can afford, but it is also needs to align with the expectations of the position. Consider possible incentive or bonus payments and benefits that may be offered with the position.

When you are ready to start recruiting a pool of possible applicants, be creative. Many of us come from an era of looking at “help wanted” ads in local newspapers or shoppers. However, many jobseekers these days never look in printed media. Depending on your needs, contact area schools who may have students seeking farm employment. Iowa Workforce Development is another source for listing your employment opportunities. Many local radio stations have on-air or on-line job boards or help-wanted sites. You may want to print a simple help-wanted flyer with contact information and post it on community bulletin boards. Finally, remember that word-of-mouth is one of the best ways to seek good employees. Ask your current good employees if they know anyone who may be interested in a dairy labor position.

Determine what information you want from potential job applicants. Obtain or prepare a job application form for this purpose. Be sure that the form utilized does not seek information that is inappropriate or even illegal to request from job applicants. You will want to ask job applicants for references.

Prepare carefully for job interviews. Make a list of information that you want to share with applicants, such as the position description. Remember that many of your applicants will be unfamiliar with how a dairy farm operates and the kind of hours and duties that are required. Describe the hours and working conditions, and outline the training that will be provided to the new employee. Share information about the pay structure and benefits that come with the job.

Make a list of the questions that you want to be sure to ask each applicant. Again, seek legal guidance regarding inappropriate areas of inquiry. ISU Extension offers some interview guidance at

www.extension.iastate.edu/valueaddedag/info/Hiringrightandretaininggoodemployees.htm .

Check references. References may be former employers, teachers, volunteer work coordinators, or even neighbors or community members. While persons acting as employment references may need to be careful regarding statements made about another, a potential employer can always ask a former employer to confirm employment dates and positions held. It is reasonable to ask the simple question, “Would you hire this person?” Ask the reference about the applicant’s former job duties.

When you have interviewed possible applicants, make your evaluation and selection(s) and determine the nature of the job offer you wish to make. While the initial offer may be by phone, it is a good idea to follow an oral offer with a written offer of employment. This written offer can confirm the details such as pay, benefits, hours, duties, and flexibility required in the position.

If the offer is accepted by your chosen applicant, be sure to contact the other applicants. Let them know of your decision. If this is a person that you might consider for other, future employment, let them know that you will keep their application on file for that purpose.

Once your employment offer has been accepted, there are a number of forms and procedures that must be completed to be in compliance with state and federal law. Those procedures will be the topic of a future article.

In the meantime, feel free to contact me with any of your employee management questions.