

Dairy Farm Employee Management: Getting the New Employee Off to a Good Start on Day One

Dairy farm owners and employers spend a good deal of time to carefully recruit candidates, interview, check references, evaluate and select a new employee.

All that effort can quickly go down the drain without making the effort to get that new employee off to a good start on the very first day at the dairy farm.

When the employment offer has been accepted, a start date should be agreed upon as soon as possible. Inform the employee of what will happen on the first day of work. Clearly communicate when they are expected to arrive.

While it may seem fundamental to the dairy farmer, help the new employee by providing the answers to some basic questions common among new employees. Send the employee a letter by US mail, or an e-mail with the answers to what might seem like very elementary questions to the employer:

- (1) What should I wear? Provide guidelines on appropriate footwear, gloves, or other attire. More and more, new dairy farm employees do not have farm backgrounds and need guidance so that they arrive for the first day of work appropriately attired. Particularly in dairy operations, there are biosecurity guidelines and some attire may be provided. Inform the new employee that they will be trained on these biosecurity procedures. The key point here is – do not assume that new employees know what they should wear to work.
- (2) Should I bring my lunch or snacks and beverages? Some farm work sites provide a noon meal, or snacks and beverages. Others do not. Some groups of farm workers stop in town for lunch each day. Let that new employee know what the practice is at your farm and what they should bring to work.
- (3) Vehicles and parking questions: If the new employee is expected to have a vehicle to use in the position, this should have been communicated during the pre-employment process. Other employees may wonder something as basic as where they are expected to park (or not park) at the farm site. Provide this information.
- (4) What documents should I bring on my first day of work? The new employee will complete a Form I-9 as well as other basic forms on the first day of work. Inform the new employee of what documents should be brought to work on the first day to assist in completing these forms necessary for compliance with state and federal law. See the Checklist for Iowa Agricultural Employers on the Ag Decision

Maker website for a list of those forms and links to instructions.

- (5) What should I not bring to work? If the employee is expected to have a cellphone, that should be communicated. Some employees may need to be instructed that electronic music devices cannot be used on the job. Likewise, if the farm is tobacco or smoke-free, the new employee should be so instructed.
- (6) What will I do on my first day of work? Tell the new employee what they will do on the first day (or week) of work. Make sure that work hours (including break policies) have been clearly communicated. Provide a general outline of initial orientation and training activities. This will decrease the new employee's apprehension or confusion and help to get the new employee off to a good start with a planned orientation program as well as initial and ongoing training opportunities.

The new dairy farm employee should be promptly greeted on the first day of work. Introduce the employee to other workers and family members. Nametags can be very helpful to the new worker, as it can be very confusing when meeting multiple people in the early days of employment. Immediately show the new worker the location of the restrooms and other break areas. Until the dairy producer is certain that the new dairy employee has been thoroughly trained in farm safety practices and procedures, the new employee should be accompanied by another person who is properly trained.

At the end of the first day, the new employee should be asked if there are any questions or concerns. Offer the new employee assurances about how the first day went, and again offer information about what will happen in those early days on the new job. A future article will discuss guidelines for orientation and training programs.

Surveys show that employees find job satisfaction when they feel they are being treated with respect. Treat that new employee with respect from the very beginning, and the employment relationship will be off to a good start.

As always, feel free to contact me with any of your dairy farm employee management questions.