

Iowa Heartbeat of the Farm: Human Resource Management 2015

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"It makes my job fun to be able to work with producers like Gayleen who are passionate about what they do and their industry," says Jenn Bentley, who helped develop the curriculum and teach the first course in Northeast Iowa.

"The new [worker's compensation] carrier required a safety manual, so I made one using the farm safety manual template provided in the class," shared Gayleen. She also secured a new umbrella liability policy for the farm after taking the course. "There is always so much to learn," says Gayleen.



Gayleen Moellers helps manage her family dairy and hog farm. Her prior experiences as an accountant for other businesses were invaluable. Gayleen feels good human resource management is one strategy that can help increase ROI and reduce debt. She participated in Annie's Project, Women Marketing Grain, and most recently Heartbeat of the Farm: Human Resource Management through Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. "I hope other farm women enjoy the classes as much as I have," says Gayleen. "The networking is wonderful."

When the creamery began requiring farmers to have SOPs for milking, Gayleen Moellers already had them in place. She adapted them from classexamples. "I even had them posted on the wall in English and Spanish," she recalls. "That was fun to say I already have this!"



The Moellers family had a big decision to make in choosing the design of a new transition barn. "I found the materials in the workbook on farm family decision making helpful," says Gayleen, "during the class, it was interesting to hear how other farm families interact."

Project Summary

Rationale

The heartbeat of every farm business is the people involved. Whether the focus is on family or non-family partners and employees, farm women must increasingly manage human resource risks for business growth and success.

Main Objectives

The objectives of the course were to teach women effective strategies on the key human resource topics of:

- 1) Labor supply, recruitment and laws;
- 2) Family and farm business relationships;
- 3) Employee supervision and retention; and
- 4) Health, stress and safety.

Methods

Four 12-hour multi-session courses were piloted throughout Iowa in 2015. Educators focused the learning by covering one key topic during each of four weeks. The Research Institute for Studies in Education at Iowa State University conducted third-party evaluation of the course. Data aggregated from the four classes were analyzed with pre- and post-course survey comparisons.

Results

Of the 32 women participating in the pilot courses, 26 completed pre-and 24 completed post-course surveys. Survey respondents helped manage 18,015 acres of land and 39,737 head of poultry, dairy and livestock.

Matched pre- and post-course survey responses demonstrated statistically significant ($p > .001$) gains in knowledge for each key topic taught. The greatest gains were for Labor Supply, Recruitment, and Law knowledge.

Respondents indicated some of the unexpected learning was: other women are also experiencing stress, new ideas about farm safety, standard operating procedures, terminating employees and hiring youth.

Conclusions

The course effectively increased participant knowledge and the number of human resource management practices taken on their farms. Extension educators have an important role in teaching farm women to manage human resource risks.

