

Dairy Farm Business Management is a Plateful

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A dairy farm business manager's plate is almost always full. There is management involved in all the production tasks on a dairy farm. That long list of daily tasks may include:

1. Feeding of calves, heifers or the milking or dry cows
2. Milking the cows and preparation and cleanup associated with milking
3. Care of sick animals
4. Vaccinations
5. Maintenance of the cow housing facilities
6. Heat detection and breeding animals in heat, whether with AI or even bull breeding
7. Supervision of timed AI protocols, if in use
8. Observing and assisting (if necessary) cows calving
9. Animals being sold
10. Herd health check or veterinary calls
11. Mastitis detection and treatment
12. Machinery or equipment maintenance or repair
13. Herd recordkeeping

During the growing season, there can also be tasks associated with the growing and harvesting of forages and/or grain. In addition to these tasks, there are other tasks which are part of the financial aspects of the dairy farm business. These can include financial recordkeeping and purchasing decisions for dairy inputs such as feed, semen, equipment and supplies. Marketing decisions for the sale of cull cows, breeding animals or crops may also be required. No wonder dairy farmers are tired at the end of the day.

All the tasks just outlined have a labor element associated with them. Regardless, whether the tasks are performed by the dairy producer, family labor or hired labor, the labor and management elements remain the same. Most often, prior planning is involved. Decisions and judgment are a part of the management element which accompanies each task. If that decision-making or judgment is required of the person performing the task, training may be required to assure that good decisions and judgment are exercised. That is the responsibility of management.

The table below outlines the labor and management elements of each production task. For each task performed satisfactorily, there is a likely reward. Collectively, these rewards can be healthy, well-grown heifers and productive, healthy and long-lived cows.

Financial record-keeping requires the labor of collecting financial records or the financial information for purchasing or marketing decisions. The management aspects of financial record-keeping are the generation and review of financial reports such as balance sheets or income statements. The rewards on the financial side can be cost control, a profit and a reasonable return on the investment in the dairy enterprise.

Task	Labor Element	Management Element
Feeding	Feed collection, delivery and distribution	Amount of each feed needed to provide nutrient needs of the animal being fed
Milking	Milking system preparation, milking and milking system clean-up	Milking procedures which harvest milk in a timely, efficient and sanitary manner complete with prevention of mastitis
Care of sick animals	Providing feed, water and administration of treatment or therapy	Determining appropriate treatment regimen and developing relationship with veterinarian so they can provide proper care
Vaccinations	Animal restraint and vaccine injection	Selection of appropriate vaccine, age or status of the animal
Housing facility maintenance	Physical removal of manure; stirring of compost bedded pack material or addition of bedding material	Knowledge of proper techniques and amount of new bedding material to add
Heat detection and breeding	Observation for heat and insemination	Choice of AI sire and use of correct insemination procedures
Supervision of timed AI protocols	Collection of animal(s) and administration of shots	Determining animals to be enrolled and setting schedule
Cows calving	Observation of animals before, during and after birth and providing physical assistance if necessary	Tracking expected calving date, assuring observation is conducted, and training labor in proper techniques
Animals being sold	Collection and/or delivery of animals to be sold	Determining which animals are candidates for sale and on what basis; adherence to dairy quality assurance standards
Herd health check or veterinary call	Collection of animal(s) for examination and recording results of examination	Determination of which animals are examined
Mastitis treatment	Physical infusion of antibiotic	Determination of appropriate drug, assurance of sanitary procedures for infusion and adherence to prescribed withholding time before milk collection for human consumption is resumed
Machinery or equipment maintenance or repair	Physical lubrication and repair or replacement of parts	Establishing need for and scheduling maintenance or repair
Herd recordkeeping	Handwritten or computer entry of records	Timely collection of records and examination and review of reports

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