

Building a Dairy Farm Team

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Hiring employees for a dairy farm business is just like hiring employees for any other business. It is important to find the right team players that can complement the team to enhance your dairy operation. The first step in creating the right team is to develop a well-defined job description. Job descriptions help determine what skills the employee needs to have to be a successful team member. Role players are important to successful teams and the dairy farm operation is no exception. Writing a good job description may take more time than many farmers feel they have; but, in the long run a good job description can help save time by hiring the right person the first time. Most job descriptions list 8 major tasks or fewer. The tasks need to be written down using action terms or verbs, such as assist, operate, perform or maintain. With any job description, you will want to have one statement to cover anything else that may arise on the farm. There are several resources available to help write good job descriptions. One good example, of how to write a job description is located at the following website, from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln <http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/sendIt/g1585.pdf>.

Once a new employee is hired, it is critical to provide orientation and training. Many times, new employees find themselves in situations in which they are uncomfortable because they did not receive the proper training. Training employees is also important for the safety and welfare of everyone on the farm. Proper training also helps ensure that an employee will do their job the way that is specified in your standard operating procedures. Once properly trained, the employee should be a successful contributing member of the operation. If this is not the case, then the employer either needs to retrain the employee or find someone else for the job. Refresher trainings should be conducted on a routine basis to ensure employees are following established practices outlined in your standard operating procedures.

Encouragement is vital to an employee's wellbeing. Everyone likes to know when they have done a good job. So make sure to tell your employees on a regular basis that you appreciate them and the job they do for the farm operation. Your genuine appreciation will help them feel like a contributing team member and might encourage them to help when they are needed to go "above and beyond" as sometimes is asked on a dairy farm.

Another key to keeping good employees on the farm for a long time is advancement. A system needs to be developed for employees to improve their skills or move up in the organization. If this is not available in your operation, then they need to be aware of that when they are hired. Sometimes this may be as simple as more training in a certain area. For example, the employee may not be trained in artificial insemination when they are hired; but, after they are hired, they might attend a training session and later become skilled in that technique. This would be a new skill for them that could be added to their job description.

Most important of all is communication. Keep the lines of communication open between yourself, as the owner, and your employees. Make sure your employees know what you expect from them but also give your employees the opportunity to make suggestions for improvements

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to their jobs or other areas of the farming operation. Let them know that you value their opinions.

By implementing some of these simple steps your farm team could become one of the best teams. It is a matter of finding the right key team players and making sure they are performing the tasks that best suit their skills. As always, communication from both sides is the key to making any team a successful team.