

Standard Operating Procedures

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COOPERATIVE
EXTENSION
SERVICE



It is becoming more and more important for dairy farmers to see themselves not only as good cow people but as profitable business people. A standard operating procedure or SOP is a part of running a profitable business. Standard operating procedures are written instructions used to manage variation that is introduced in production systems when different individuals perform tasks in different ways. Each of us may have a different way of doing something but when you are trying to produce a high quality product it is very important that each step be done in a specific manner to ensure that high quality is maintained.

Some examples of areas that you may want to consider developing SOP's for are milking, feeding, or freestall management. A well written Standard Operating Procedure will provide direction, improve communication, reduce training time, and improve work consistency. The process of writing a SOP, can help managers, workers and advisers to feel like they are an important part of the dairy farm team and everyone will feel they are working towards a common goal.

Even small farms with no hired labor should consider writing down how tasks should be done. This can help lower some of your management risk. If your operating procedures are written down then it will allow someone to help out if an emergency should arise. Someone who has some experience but is not familiar with your operation could milk or feed without it being a huge safety risk or negatively affecting your dairy farm. This could also help you to realize some of those good management practices that you may not always follow due to time constraints which could really improve your production in the long run.

There are several formats for Standard Operating Procedures which include: 1) a simple steps format or list of steps; 2) the hierarchical steps format; 3) graphic format or 4) the flowchart format. The simple steps format is for things that take fewer than 10 steps and there are no decisions to be made. If you have something that takes more than 10 steps to explain, then you will want to move to one of the other formats. If you have decisions that need to be made, then you will want to use a flowchart for your standard operating procedure. Sometimes pictures can be very beneficial in making your SOP because it helps those who learn well visually to easily see what you want them to do. It can also help if there are any language barriers to overcome.

Once you have your standard operating procedures written down post them in places where they are easily seen by everyone. Remember these are not written in stone, update them as things change. Best management practices change, equipment changes and the needs of the farm may also change so make sure you update your procedures when these things occur. SOP's are a good way to help employees to remember what they should be doing.

If you are writing SOP's for the first time, ask employees to help write them. There are also lots of resources available to help you write standard operating procedures for the first time. Cornell's Pro Dairy website contains a template that can be used for writing a SOP which is available at <http://www.ansci.cornell.edu/pdfs/sop.pdf> . Even though writing standard

operating procedures for your dairy farm may seem like a very time consuming process, it can be very beneficial in the long run and help improve communication with your employees which can help everyone reach the goals of a high quality product.