

Teagasc Notes for week ending Friday 29th November 2019

'Attracting and Retaining Quality Employees on Dairy Farms'

John Kilboyle

Milk production in Ireland has increased by over 50% since the removal of the milk quotas in 2015 resulting in 1.5 million dairy cows expected to calve on Irish farms in 2020. On many dairy farms the herd size has expanded as a result leading to an increased requirement of additional labour on dairy farms. This has created a completely new challenge for dairy farmers employing labour as farmers becoming employers. A significant question among dairy farmers in this situation as to 'How can I, as an employer, effectively attract and retain employees?'. A recent survey was carried out with twenty dairy farm employers and twenty employees in the Kilkenny region. This short survey has identified a number of key areas dairy farmers should take into consideration to improve the attraction and retention of employees.

One of the main findings from this study suggests that there is a lifespan in relation to the period a staff member will remain on a dairy farm. 75% of employees stated they would see themselves moving on within 5 years. Interestingly, the survey highlighted that there was a close relationship between the duration of the contract and the working conditions they experience on farm. Employers need to consider adopting a more comprehensive approach to employment contracts with staff. This would include having set weekly working hours, with a clear structure for rewarding staff. Rewards for staff who work longer hours during peak periods, can be both financial and non-financial rewards. And both are equally important. Employers also need to discuss and agree with their employees: the start time and finish time for daily work; a fair allocation of annual leave/ paid holidays; weekly working schedule; and weekend work arrangements.

In relation to professional training and development opportunities for employees, a number of key considerations need to be factored into an employer's approach to training and development of their staff going forward. This would include discussing with the employee their training and development priorities. And this needs to be discussed as part of the overall employment package being offered to prospective employees. In addition, it's important to incorporate an agreed and structured process on the farm to review an employee's training needs on a regular basis. A set number of training days should be made available annually in order for staff to develop their skills, in areas of interest to them. Considering the potential challenges in retaining staff, there is a significant opportunity for employers to review their own employment strategies, to maximise the period of employee retainment on farm for as long as possible. It is important to keep in mind the needs and expectations of your employee, helping you achieve a good reputation as an employer. This will therefore increase the likelihood of

enticing new and enthusiastic employees to your farm, which will effectively attract and retain employees on your farm. It would also be worthwhile for farmers to consider how they can best prepare themselves for the scenario in which the employee leaves.

Environmental Sustainability Event

Teagasc Kilkenny will hold an environmental sustainability workshop for all farmers on the 3rd December at 11am in the Springhill Hotel. This event will give you the opportunity to meet with the experts on a one-to one basis and discuss the actions that you can take to improve environmental sustainability in your farm.

When we talk about environmental sustainability it's a 4 legged stool incorporating air, water, soil and biodiversity. We will address all 4 areas at this event.

After the event, you will:

1. Have a better understanding of what constitutes the greenhouse gases and what we can do about it
2. Make informed decisions about the use of protected urea and low emissions slurry spreading (LESS)
3. Be clear on the changes to derogation regulation in 2020
4. Learn about the new water quality programme (ASSAP) and how on-farm actions can impact water quality
5. Understand soil structure better
6. Learn how to manage the existing biodiversity on your farm

Date & Venue: 3rd December @ 11am in the Springhill Hotel, Kilkenny. All welcome

Award Winners in Waterford

Kieran Hearne and his family in Rathgormac was crowned the overall winner of the 2019 NDC & Kerrygold Quality Milk Award recently. In the same competition Pat Kiely was awarded the Model Business Collaboration Award. Both have worked closely with Teagasc over many years, Kieran Hearne with Seamus Kearney and Pat Kiely with Eamonn Lynch, and formerly Billy McCarthy. Congratulations to both award winners from Teagasc.

Award Winner in Kilkenny

In Kilkenny, Dara Walton was a deserved winner of the Zurich Beef Farmer of the Year Award 2019. Terry Carroll has been adviser to Dara for a number of years. Congratulations to Dara from Teagasc.

