



Section 3

Work Organisation and Communication

by Marion Beecher, Paidi Kelly, Justine Deming, Bernadette O'Brien

Introduction

As farm businesses expand, skilled employees are hired to accomplish the goals of the farm business. All the processes of the farm must be organised and simplified, as different people perform different tasks each day. Good communication will result in improved work efficiency, increased employer and employee satisfaction and will increase the overall operational efficiency of the farm business.

- ① How can rosters be prepared and agreed on?
- ② How can employee motivation be enhanced?
- ③ What are the most effective communication methods on farm?
- ④ Are written instructions needed on farm?
- ⑤ What is the work culture on the farm?
- ⑥ Employer expectations - are they realistic?

Work Organisation and Communication

1 How can rosters be prepared and agreed on?

A roster is a list or a plan that shows when people who work on a farm will be on duty. It can be computer-generated (spread-sheet), written on a year planner, on a calendar, or whiteboard.

The key to the success of a roster lies in the planning and organization that has gone into developing it and the commitment of all involved to making the roster work. An employee needs to know that the roster is fair and that the employer will maintain the roster, unless in exceptional circumstances.

When devising a roster it is essential to consider how many hours each person on the farm is requested to work, and whether they are family members or employees. Extra people may need to be rostered rather than allocating too many hours to a few individuals.

A sustainable roster must take into consideration the timing that best suits individuals, providing for meal and rest breaks between shifts, start and finish times, and leave days.

Changes to the roster can easily be made once the initial draft is in place.

Issues to consider when making rosters:

- Personal circumstances of employee/family members
- Personal preferences of employee/family members, e.g. Do they prefer time off at weekends or weekdays?
- Age of employees; this may affect how much time off they need and when they would prefer to have it
- Amount of pay for the employee
- Skillset and level of responsibility of employee/family members
- The availability of relief milkers and part time staff
- The employer or manager's requirements for time off

KEY TIPS:

- Use a simple calendar chart showing all months/weeks/days
- Use coloured pens to highlight people and/or duties and time off

The most up-to-date roster should be circulated to everybody working on the farm including part-time staff to ensure that everyone has precisely the same roster.

Setting rosters in advance allows greater flexibility with the roster. A seasonal plan should include major dates such as the start of calving, mating start date, holidays, etc. This would then allow all people involved to see the work requirements for the months and weeks ahead. People can then plan their leave around this time.

Roster time examples include:

- 11 days on and three days off
- 10 days on and four days off
- 5 days on and two days off

Some farmers operate a six days on, one day off roster during the very busy spring period. All rest periods must comply with The Code of Practice on Compensatory Rest

KEY TIPS:

If employee(s) is required to work longer rosters, then incorporate a rest period during the rostered days. Examples include:

- A scheduled later start time or shorter working day,
- Scheduling one of the rest days into the middle of the period,
- Only completing essential tasks at the weekend e.g. milking.

If people are consulted at the early stages of roster development, then fewer problems are likely to arise later. Planning a year in advance makes it possible to ensure, at the start of the season, that statutory holidays and annual leave can be covered. This means that the employer knows the work will still get done and the employee knows they will get their fair allocation of time off. The yearly planner should be reviewed on a monthly basis.



KEY TIPS:



The more organised the farm owner/employer is, the more flexible they can be. Everyone knows their jobs/tasks, so it is easier to get a replacement for a defined job/task.

The more contingency plans that are in place, the more flexible the work routine on the farm. It is important to have a back-up team to call on in an emergency or at short notice. It would be helpful to have a list of contractors and farm relief services (FRS) for most tasks on the farm, even if the employee is normally doing those tasks.

Farmer quote: *“Rosters need to be discussed at the interview stage so as to outline the busy and quiet times and the importance of knowing when, and who, is working in advance as everybody needs time off and this needs to be structured.”*

Example of a roster.

2 How can employee motivation be enhanced?

People are motivated by different things. It is important to avoid making assumptions about what will or will not motivate different people. It cannot be assumed that what motivates the employer will also motivate the employee. Thus, good communication with staff and understanding what motivates them is important. For some people motivation is linked to the level of accountability given to him/her, particularly if they are ambitious and enjoy taking responsibility for a specific area on the farm. This can be encouraged by

increased interest shown by the employer and involvement of the employee in decision-making. Other people prefer not to have a lot of responsibility and get satisfaction from carrying out tasks well.

Motivated employees feel they have a stake in their job. They have greater confidence and want to be involved in decision-making. The benefits of having motivated staff include reduced costs, reduced stress, better productivity and a happier working environment on the farm. Motivation can also have a very positive effect on retention of staff.

Elements that contribute to employee/farm worker motivation include:

- While money is not necessarily the primary driver for most employees, people do need fair remuneration
- A sense of “belonging” in the work place where the employee is kept up to date on farm issues and are made aware of the reasoning for certain decisions on farm
- Showing employees they are valued by the farm owner/employer boosts morale and motivation
- Opportunities for growth and development - including education and training, and an obvious career path
- Control or autonomy for the employee over their work, e.g. the employee having clear responsibilities and the opportunity to meet them through planning their own work load, and subsequent recognition of achievement
- Employees getting some variety in their work
- A balance between work and other life; people need adequate time off the farm to recharge and to pursue their own interests
- A safe and healthy workplace
- The farm is growing and developing successfully, being part of a winning team

The challenge is to have rewards that match an individual's performance and motivate them to continue to improve their performance and contribute to the farm business.

Work Organisation and Communication

KEY FACTS:

In a UK study, one third of employees believed that a gesture as small as ‘thank you’ went a long way toward motivation, and 75% of the workers remembered a time they were verbally praised. Good managers are generally effective motivators and provide regular feedback both good and bad. They create an environment where employees have a sense of pride and pleasure in their jobs.

3 What are the most effective communication methods on farm?

Good communication leads to motivated and productive staff. Staff should know what is going on and what is expected of them, and feel that their ideas are valued and their good performance praised. Good communication creates strong working relationships. Open communication helps set expectations and coordinate actions. It builds trust, enables people to act on facts, not assumptions, and provides feedback on performance. Different methods of communication can be used between the farm owner and employee.

Informal verbal: This can be on a daily basis – when they go through the “to-do” list for the day. This could be held each morning after breakfast or over a cup of tea or coffee.

KEY TIPS:

Where practical, it can be useful for everyone to have breakfast together to informally discuss how things are going and to interact socially.

Farmer quote: “Encouragement is always important even if the job is not done properly initially, there are times where issues arise and clarification is needed but once that passes one needs to forget and move on. Being overly negative is bad for everyone. Including staff in decision making and explaining the reasoning behind decisions is important. Make sure everyone has a clear understanding of the reasons why a particular method is used.”

Structured meeting: For example, at the start of the week, where the tasks for the week are listed and prioritized for each person on the farm. Responsibilities are assigned, feedback and coaching is given (as required), and demonstration of jobs/tasks is carried out if needed. These meetings can be an opportunity to discuss different options and methods of carrying out tasks. They also provide an opportunity to discuss positive events and progress on the farm and also what improvements can be made.

Trying to communicate in an unsuitable environment leads to misunderstanding. Machinery noise, livestock noise, standing in a wet cold shed etc, create a difficult environment for people trying to hold a conversation. The reaction is that messages are shortened and there is no checking that they are understood. So make sure that these weekly meetings occur in a comfortable setting.

Farmer quote: “I find communication during meal times is great to get to know the person and understand the way someone thinks. After milking we discuss the jobs for the day, then we both go to breakfast and can discuss further if required.”

Informal written: This could include the use of notice boards, diaries, texts etc to note relevant work, information or material needed. This can be a very effective method of ensuring that everybody working on the farm is up-to-date with critical information, e.g. date of cow treatment with antibiotics or date of fertiliser application. It is useful to provide the employee with a pocket notebook.


KEY TIPS:

Have a large notice board in the office or in a prominent position where reports can be pinned so that all people on the farm can view.

Formal written communication: For example, the job description and standard operating procedure (SOP) manuals. It is important to keep a copy of the job description as a reference document. The SOPs provide step-by-step direction for detailed practices such as:

- (i) Cow hygiene (frequency of tail and udder clipping).
- (ii) How to carry out routine checks of the milking machine.
- (iii) The correct washing procedure for the milking machine and bulk tank.

Standard operating procedure manuals could also contain lists of types of antibiotics, detergents or fertiliser used. Such information is important for a new employee, for farm relief personnel or anyone not usually working on the farm.

A farm map with paddock names, numbers and hectares should be displayed on the notice board. Large laminated maps can be written on with a dry wipe marker.

Farm production performance: Communication about production performance of the farm should take place regularly (at least weekly). This communication should incorporate reports of performance from the employee to the employer. These could include:

- Herd production update e.g. current milk solids production per cow
- Grass growth rates, covers, pre and post grazing residuals, etc.
- Fertiliser type and application rate and date
- Milking performance and milk quality issues (e.g., SCC, mastitis events)
- Bulk tank records from the milk purchaser, e.g. milk solids and SCC levels

- ICBF reports e.g. fertility and breeding reports

- Financial reports where appropriate

Feedback: Recognition of a job well done is one of the most satisfying aspects of an employee's work and contributes to job satisfaction (positive feedback). Alternatively, when things are going wrong it is important to deal with the issue as quickly as possible to avoid small problems becoming more significant (corrective feedback). Corrective feedback aims to get the job done to the appropriate standard, making sure that a lack of training or resources is not leading to problems arising. It is important to listen to why the problem arose.

Understanding: The farm owner/employer should check to ensure that the employee has the correct understanding of all communication to him/her, e.g. the tasks to be carried out, method of undertaking of the tasks, etc. If the employee does not understand, then they cannot conduct the task, and if they misinterpret, then they will be conducting the task incorrectly or inappropriately. This is particularly important with regard to non or partially English speaking staff. Take extra care to communicate tasks correctly, speak slowly and if possible include a demonstration of how the job is to be done as part of the explanation process.

Body language: This can constitute 50% or more of what is communicated. Noticing the signals that people send out with their body language and being able to effectively read those cues is a very useful skill. Excellent communicators are aware that their body language is equally as important as verbal communication in conveying a message to others.

Listening: This is an effective form of communication. It means listening effectively to opinions and what employees or family members working on the farm have to say.

Effective questioning: Questioning people in a non-confrontational manner is a good way to commence communication. It invites people to express their thoughts and feelings.

Express directions clearly: If ideas are presented clearly it helps others to understand the

Work Organisation and Communication

message. The key points of the communication should be clear and easy to understand. Giving clear verbal directions makes it more likely that the job will be done properly.

Chain of command: Early communication should outline the chain of command on the farm. This is very important where multiple family members are involved and paid employees are in place. Need to avoid confusion of employees 'serving two masters'

Farmer quote: *"In the farm office wall there is also a list of essential and non-essential jobs that can be carried out during free time. I have them written on a post-it label and move them to the completed section when finished."*

4 Are written instructions needed on farm?

Standard operating procedures (SOPs) are descriptions of the way in which specific tasks should be carried out on the farm. Well-written standard operating procedures (SOPs) provide

- Help to ensure that a job is completed satisfactorily;
- An excellent guide for new employees;
- Reduced training time;
- Improved communication;
- Consistency when different people are doing the same job.

SOPs are not required for every task on the farm but where there are a number of steps in a complex task, they are very useful. Both the employer and the employee, together with the overall farm business benefit from consistent work performance and predictable results.

SOPs are particularly useful for procedures such as:

- Milking machine operation.
- Bulk tank washing procedures.
- Animal handling and movement.
- Cow drying off procedures.
- Administration and recording of animal remedies.

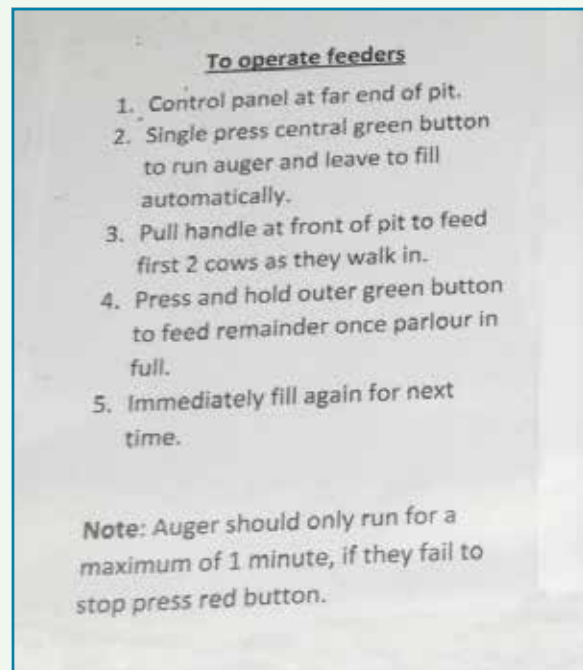
- Fertiliser spreader operation.
- Taking a grass cover.
- Mineral supplementation.

It is advisable to have a SOP manual that sets out generic operating procedures (including safety procedures) to use as a starting point, for different areas of farm work. The different sections can be modified to suit the individual farm conditions.

KEY TIPS:

Have a clear farm map with paddocks numbered – Place a large copy in the dairy or farm office. Have paper copies available to give contractors etc. Have paddocks tagged with a number at the entrance so that they can be recognized and referred to easily and without error.

Print and laminate the SOPs, and place in the area that they are required. SOPs need to be updated as products and technologies change.



Written instructions (standard operating procedures) for operating feeders.



Farmer quote: *“I think SOPs should be made for a lot of aspects of dairy farming for example milking routine, calf rearing, grass measuring should be made into a farm booklet over time. A simple one for grazing I use is GROW.*

Grass: *what cover is in paddock/quality?*

Ration of grass allocated: *do I need to set up a strip wire for cows (in spring/autumn)?*

Openings of paddocks: *is the opening closed? Check openings and use multiple gaps.*

Water: *is the trough clean and water flowing? A simple example if learnt once will become a habit and saves a lot of headaches.”*

5 What is the work culture on the farm?

The culture of work on a farm refers to the general way in which work is approached, and this has a big effect on how much people enjoy working on a farm and how effective they are at their work.

The term ‘work culture’ can cover a range of work practices and ways of thinking on a farm. A good work culture will assist in ensuring the smooth running of the farm and content employee. Practices that contribute to a good work culture on the farm include:

- Accepting easier alternative methods of carrying out tasks (not doing tasks by manual traditional methods, e.g. manual yard scraping)
- Respecting rosters and not changing them at short notice
- Having a good structure to the daily work, incorporating regular start/finish times, regular milking times and reasonable ‘break times’
- Ensuring that the employee has a clear understanding of their role and what is required of them
- Having good farm workplace policies in place (where everybody on the farm conducts acceptable workplace behaviours, e.g. honesty, confidentiality)
- Set practices for routine tasks and clear standard operating procedures for the more complex tasks

- Facilities and practices in place that make the farm a safe and enjoyable workplace, e.g. good animal handling facilities, general precautions in place to ensure farm safety
- Provision of an office area for the employee(s) to conduct their indoor work, e.g. grassland management data on computer
- Good communication and relationship between farm owner and employee
- Well conducted review meetings where feedback is given and training identified and provided
- An openness to increasing the responsibility given to the employee once it is evident that the employee is capable of carrying it
- Good, supportive management style by farm owner/employer, perceived as competent by the employee
- Sense of security about the work
- Have policies on internet, email and mobile phone usage, e.g. employees need to know that making comments on social media about their employer and their workplace can be against the terms of their employment contract
- Have policies for handling an emergency, accident, illness, injury or an unexpected event
- Have an option to help injured employees return to work, that is, to get back to work and stay at work while they recover from an injury. This can involve changing the kind of work the employee is required to do so that his or her injury is not aggravated during recovery.

KEY TIPS:



Show gratitude and appreciation for when a job is done well, this can be to an employee or anyone else that works on the farm. This appreciation can be shown verbally or financially, or by some other gesture e.g. a gift at Christmas.

Factors that can lead to a poor work culture of work are essentially the opposite of the above points. These include long working days, late evening milking, irregular milking times, poor planning ahead, poor organization of farm work, a lot of repetitive manual work e.g. scraping yards, taking safety risks. Some of these factors may not be recognized by some farmers; but they are important to employees and therefore should be addressed before employing.

KEY TIPS:



Your business is only as good as your employee(s), so take care of your employee(s).

6 Employer expectations – are they realistic?

Farmer (employer) expectations must be realistic. Otherwise retention of the employee will be challenging. The employer must consider that it was him/herself that selected the employee and that their expectations must be defined by the employee they selected. For example, if they selected a young person with minimal training, then they cannot expect this person to take on large responsibility immediately.

Expectations must be in line with the remuneration, age of the employee, previous training, previous responsibility, skills in e.g. computers, financial planning.

Expectations must also be realistic in terms of hours to be worked by the employee and a realization that the employee may not wish to work the same total number of hours as the farm owner/employer. For example, if the milking process takes five hours and the employee works an eight hour day, then there are three hours of work outside of milking for other tasks.

Everybody does things differently. Certain tasks have end results that can be achieved by different methods. Work practices may change on farm. An example is milking time; an employee may suggest starting morning milking earlier, so that evening finish time is earlier.

Farmer quote: *“I’m a big believer in sharing our targets and celebrating reaching these as a team. We constantly discuss what we are aiming for and how we can make this happen. Co-op performance reports are put up on the white board to keep targets in mind. I feel this creates a culture where we are really working towards something together.”*



Section 3

Developing an Employee

by Marion Beecher, Paidi Kelly, Justine Deming,
Bernadette O'Brien

Introduction

Once a person is recruited correctly (see section 1) it is necessary to develop that person through provision of appropriate training, so that they are able to progress and learn in their job. Creating a good learning environment will make it easier to recruit other staff (even if the current person leaves), as a reputation for good farming practice and good employee conditions becomes established quite quickly.

- ① How is the decision made regarding the training and development required by an employee?
- ② How can a mentor assist a new employee?
- ③ How does an employer retain quality employees?
- ④ What basic on farm facilities should be provided for an employee?

Developing an Employee

① How is the decision made regarding the training and development required by employee?

The employer should initially identify the role which he/she wishes the employee to fill, together with the skills required to fulfill that role. Thus, the employee should have the basic skills and knowledge to carry out the task that is expected of him/her, and if they do not have the skill set then training has to be provided. This is also relevant where the employee's responsibility changes.

Orientation

While the employee may have the basic skills required for the job, they will not have the understanding of how the employer operates that specific farm. Thus, it is essential that the employee gets varying degrees of training on operations, facilities and practices specific to that farm, e.g. animal health procedures, heat detection methods, cow roadway maintenance, calf management. The most effective training builds on what a person already knows. A good process to follow for training staff on-farm is the following:

- Explain to the employee why the skill is important.
- Break down the skill to be taught into simple components.
- Discuss with the employee what they already know about the skill and determine what knowledge is missing.
- Demonstrate and explain the skill to the employee slowly.
- Allow the employee to go through a skill step-by-step with the employer.
- Allow the employee to demonstrate the skill on his/her own without input from the employer.

Motivational training

Further training should be considered by the employer as it improves an employee's attitudes and motivation. If employees enjoy their job and are happy to come to work, they work harder and are more conscientious. Their satisfaction shows in their performance. A key factor is to correctly identify areas for further training that will be of benefit to the individual, relevant to their position, and match the needs of the farm business into the future. Training may be provided by the employer, or someone qualified to give instruction, or it could be a mixture

of on-the-job/ internal and external training. It is useful to know what skills the employee themselves want to improve. Examples of technical skills that would allow the employee to assume greater responsibility include:

- Ability to allocate grass to cows
- Decide when to move cows based on post grazing height
- Implementation of a good mastitis control programme at milking
- Record-keeping for the farm, computing skills

Specific technical training and up-skilling

As well as spending time with the new employee, there are also courses that can up skill and motivate the employee. These include

- Milking skills course (FRS)
- Cell check workshops (AHI)
- Hoof paring courses
- Health and safety training courses
- Manual handling courses
- Sprayer training

Continuous education is a requirement for all people in business; farmers and their employee are no different. Employees should be brought to discussion group meetings and open days where possible. Employers can also provide technical information such as farming papers each week, Teagasc newsletters/publications and industry newsletters.

Training people is a new skill that needs to be developed. The employer needs to have patience, give the employee time and review expectations.

Farmer quote: *"We all need training and development, including employers. Every day we learn something new. Areas of interest should be identified and courses or people with these skills should be identified to learn from e.g. hoof paring, A.I., breeding, farm maintenance, animal health, milking machine maintenance, health & safety etc."*

② How can a mentor assist a new employee?

Mentoring is a supportive and private relationship between two people (the mentor and the mentee) and provides the individuals involved with an opportunity to share and develop their knowledge, experience, skills,



wisdom and shortcomings. Mentors facilitate constructive discussion of actions, behaviors and learning. Mentoring can help individuals acquire and develop new skills, build confidence and self-esteem, accelerate career plans and test a personal or professional goal.

Other benefits include:

- o Mentoring encourages employee retention – the best employees are attracted to farms that offer them opportunities to develop their skills
- o Mentoring enhances professional development of employee
- o Mentoring reduces employee turnover
- o Mentoring improves productivity on the farm as decisions are more accurate
- o Mentoring improves communication and can increase knowledge of the farm business
- o Mentoring increases morale and motivation of the employee

Mentoring may be conducted by another farm owner or, alternatively by a friend employed on the same or other farm. It could be a neighbour or a discussion group member. It helps the mentee to approach situations with confidence, having talked through the various options and possible consequences with the mentor. It is crucial that confidentiality is exercised, particularly by the mentor.

3 How does an employer retain quality employees?

The farming/agriculture industry competes directly with other industries that have a high demand for good labour. Retaining skilled employees is important because high employee turnover results in a loss of knowledge and skills that can be expensive and difficult to replace.

Three key criteria in retaining good employees in the agricultural sector include:

- Good working conditions**
- Access to career development and promotion opportunities**
- Good occupational health and safety standards in place**

Farmer quote: *“I get great enjoyment from seeing people developing their skills on the farm and keeping in touch with them when they move on. I’m eager to see them progress their own career and am happy to be a sounding board for ideas. Keeping in touch with positive people makes farming more enjoyable for me.”*

Many international studies have shown that it can be quite difficult to retain good employees on farms. While the key criteria above are absolutely necessary in order to attract and retain a good employee, additional, more specific retention strategies and enticements could include:

- Offering a competitive payment package, not just covering wages but also benefits and bonuses or profit sharing plans
- Fair treatment and a variety of work with clear functions and responsibilities
- Limited weekend hours, limited long shifts
- An enjoyable work environment with good facilities
- A sense of performing interesting and important work
- Giving staff ownership of areas of work (e.g. calf-rearing) to increase personal responsibility and job satisfaction.
- Feedback and appreciation for a job well-done
- Flexibility with time off
- Having some social outlets to celebrate achievements
- Giving employees advanced notice of tasks coming up e.g. a herd test
- Effective performance assessment and accountability discussing the business plans, vision and direction for the following year
- Discussing the career and personal goals of the employee. It is very important that employers listen and understand what is most important to that employee

Developing an Employee

- It is useful to share the employer's goals for the business and make the employee feel part of the team working towards these targets
- Consistency in decision making and operational procedures
- A healthy and safe place to work
- Reassurance/reminders about job security.
- Appropriate facilities
- Continual development of people skills (by the employer)

A performance review meeting may be used as a chance to talk about the goals and aspirations of the staff member. When an employee is able to work towards their own goals as a part of their employment, this increases job satisfaction for the employee. Sharing the employee's goals and aspirations can improve the relationship between an employer and an employee and have a positive impact on employee retention. It can also help the employer or manager get an idea if the employee is happy with their role, and where they see themselves in the future.

Farmer quote: *"I try to concentrate work during the five working week days i.e. herd tests, milk recording, dosing, scanning etc. as I think it's important that only basics are done at weekends (as much as possible), I plan all these in advance."*

4 What basic on-farm facilities should be provided for an employee?

Consider the basic personal requirements of an employee in advance. Put them in place so that the employee feels comfortable. Also, it is necessary to find out if there are any personal or special dietary needs of the employee.

Essential personal facilities: A suitable area to spend break-time e.g. the area should include fridge, microwave, kettle, table, chairs. Also required are appropriate toilet/shower facilities. If part/all of these facilities are provided in the family dwelling, then this needs to be explained clearly to the new employee. Equally, this must be explained to all the family members who share these facilities.

Farmer quote: *"We have a small canteen facility on the farm – kitchen facilities, somewhere nice to sit together and this is where we have our team meetings also. I think it adds to the team feeling around the farm that there is somewhere we can sit down together and talk about farming and non-farming matters."*

Personal Protection Equipment (PPE): Any tools required by the employee to conduct his/her work properly should be provided for certain tasks e.g. ear muffs when doing jobs with loud noises, gloves and a mask if spraying etc.

A healthy and safe workplace: For the people working on the farm, there are some very busy periods, long days, a wide range of weather conditions and the requirement to handle large animals and work with potentially hazardous equipment, environments and substances. Thus, it is necessary to develop an approach to health and safety that is part of the overall management on the farm. This involves identifying hazards and assessment and control of risks, controlling hazards instead of dealing with a mishap after it occurs and putting facilities in place to reduce and (if possible) eliminate accident risks. An example might be to improve cow drafting facilities, cattle crushes and calving facilities. See chapter 5 for further information.



Section 3

Managing Employees

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Introduction

The quality of management by the employer has a very significant impact on the work productivity and on the working life of the employee, and consequently on the productivity of the farm business. This will be a new skill for many dairy farmers, but it can be learned and improved with experience.

- ① What is performance measurement?
- ② What is the best practice in handing over more responsibility to an employee?
- ③ What is the appropriate way of dealing with an underperforming employee?
- ④ What is meant by employee well-being?
- ⑤ What if an employee moves on?

Managing Employees

① What is performance measurement?

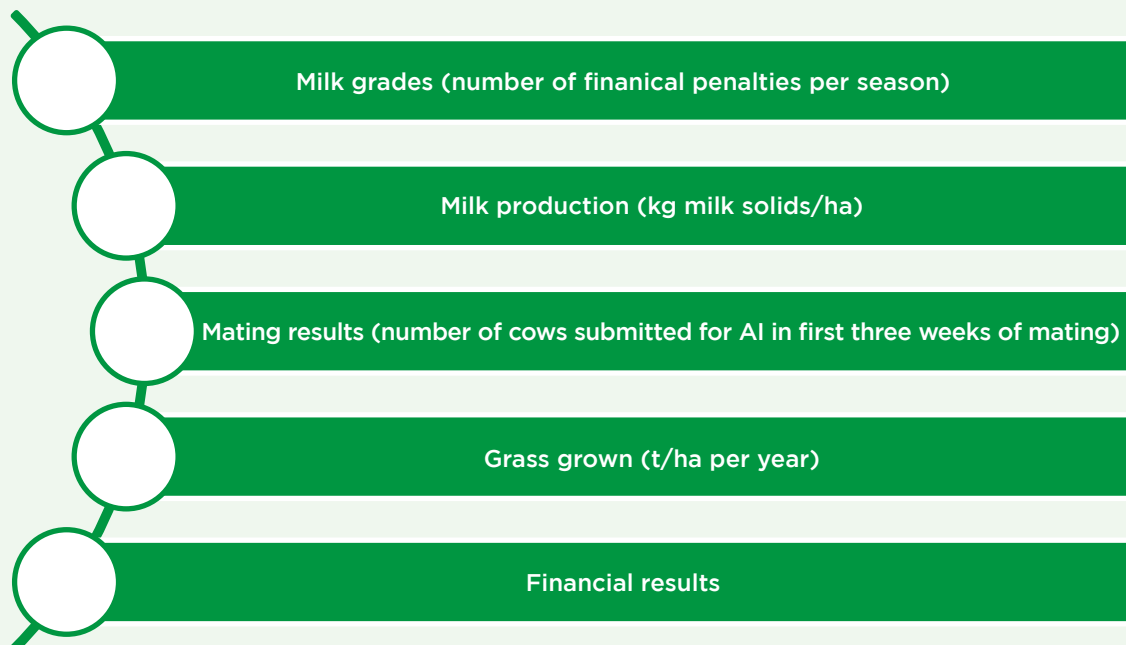
Expectations of the employer and employee must be established at the beginning and reviewed when necessary. The employer should take time to carefully explain why certain targets for farm performance are necessary.

Accurate measurement of an employee's performance can only occur if it is clear to both the employer and the employee what the job involves. Therefore the employer needs to have explained to the employee what is required together with the standards to which the tasks should be completed. This should be firstly outlined in the employment contract. It is vital that both the farm owner/employer and employee have agreed from the outset how the performance of the employee will be measured.

Communication and feedback on performance should occur every day where the farm owner/ employer and employee are working together, but regular structured meetings are also important to allow more detailed assessment of progress and identify possible training requirements.

When measuring an employee's performance, all aspects of the employee's job including their performance results and behavior need to be assessed against (i) the position description and (ii) any previously agreed criteria or action points.

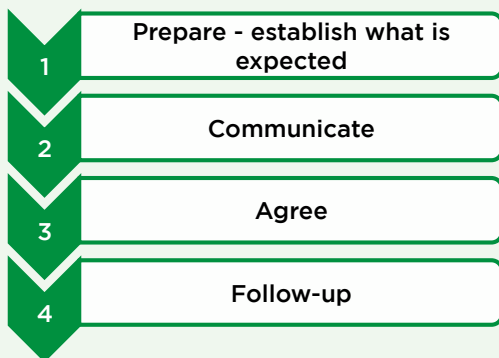
Performance measures can be objective or subjective. Objective measures have an easily identified result and can be compared to standards/KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) previously defined by the farm owner/employer. Some examples may include:



Only use KPIs for evaluation where the employee has a direct and significant work/management input to achieving the targets.

A measurement of the skills of the employee is also important. Selected skills could be examined, such as stockmanship, grassland management, animal management, milking management, financial management and time management. Each of these skills should be evaluated and described as, for example, good, adequate or needs support. This evaluation can be used to identify training needs of the employee to improve their skills and overall job performance. This evaluation can then be discussed at the performance review meeting. Alternatively, subjective measures may include abilities, such as practical capability and more personal traits such as teamwork, communication, enthusiasm, cleanliness and attitude.

KEY TIPS:



2 What is the best practice in handing over more responsibility to an employee?

Increasing responsibility or delegating more responsibility (by the farm owner) to the employee can represent a very positive move for both parties, including the farm business. Delegation is a crucial factor in getting the best from employees. It can be a win: win situation as it can free up the employers time to plan and supervise, and the employee will gain from the chance to make decisions and feel the pride that comes from a job well done.

HOW TO:

Delegate a job to employee



The process of delegating can be learnt. Start with small tasks that are easy to complete, these should be win:win scenarios and give the employer and the employee confidence. The steps of successful delegation include:

1. Define the task to be delegated and establish if it is suitable for delegation.
2. Assess the employee's ability and training needs - is the person capable of doing the task? Do they understand what needs to be done?
3. Define required results - what must be achieved? How will the task be measured? How is progress to be checked? These all need to be discussed and agreed from the outset.
4. Consider resources required - discuss and agree what is required to get the job done, e.g. premises, equipment, money, materials.
5. Agree deadlines - When must the job be finished? Or if it is on-going, will there be review dates? Will it be completed in parts or stages, what are the priorities?
6. Feedback on results - it is essential to let the employee know how they are doing, and whether they have achieved the objectives.

Delegation takes time and while the job may not be completed exactly to your liking initially, constructive feedback and encouragement will ensure desirable results are achieved.

Farmer Quote: *"To be honest I've found huge benefits in giving people responsibility as there are some jobs others do better than me. You will never find that out unless you give people responsibility."*

3 What is the appropriate way of dealing with an underperforming employee?

From the outset it is important that the correct person is hired for the position. (see section 1). It is very important from both the employer and employee viewpoints that performance targets are initially set for the employee and then evaluated by the employer at regular intervals. If there is an issue on the farm it is the responsibility of the employer to first question themselves whether they have carried out their

Managing Employees

own role properly e.g. was everything explained clearly, could the job have been made simpler etc. The employer should seek advice from a confidential friend or a trusted farmer to establish if the expectations are set too high.

HOW TO:

Deal with underperformance.

If the employer's performance targets are not being met then some actions need to be taken such as:

1. Review the key performance indicators for the employee and determine if they are realistic. Does the employee know exactly the results expected of him/her? Make sure that the employee has a clear picture of what they are expected to achieve and how well they should do it.
2. Check if the employee has been given adequate training/tools/equipment and support to allow that employee to do their job.
3. Focus on results, what are the measurable key performance indicators that show that an employee is under performing. Make sure the person is aware of the task that is required of them and that they understand the gap between the current situation and what is required.
4. Give the employee the opportunity to discuss the issue from their viewpoint. Listen actively and do not pre-judge. Stay calm and relaxed. Summarize to check understanding. Jointly commit to a resolution.

KEY POINT:

It is crucial that the process of determining underperformance is clear and transparent and that there is evidence to back up what is said. Above all, the employer needs to be fair and consistent at all times.

- If the cause of underperformance is identified as an omission or problem caused by the employer, then this should be corrected immediately
- If it is clear that the performance of the employee is not up to standard (through no fault of the employer), then the employee should be given a chance to correct his/her performance. A reasonable time limit should

be given for this with a date set for a re-evaluation

- Employer needs to be cogniscent of external events that may affect an employee's performance e.g. short-term personal family circumstances etc.

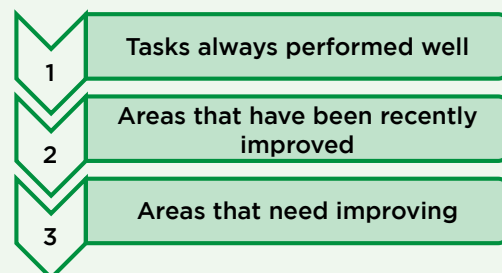
If underperformance is again recorded at the second meeting, written notification of employment implications should be given to the employee. See also chapter 2.

If under performance subsequently prevails, then termination of the employment may have to be considered. But this should only be considered when all legal requirements and reasonable chances have been made available to the employee.

Remember, put yourself in the employee's shoes – no one likes receiving or giving criticism. Be quick to praise and slow to criticise!

KEY TIPS:

Most people prefer to identify their own weaknesses rather than have them pointed out. Allow the employee to evaluate themselves by asking them to think about their performance before the meeting and tell them that you will do the same.



④ What is meant by employee well-being?

Good well-being can be described when a person is comfortable, happy and healthy.

Factors affecting the well-being of an employee will include:

- When that employee enjoys good job satisfaction
- Tangible benefits, such as good remuneration and bonuses
- Good working conditions

- A good personal work environment
- Good personnel policies, such as security in the job and pension
- Other positive motivational factors, such as the possibility for development, responsibility and progression in the job

The main stressors identified among farmers and farmworkers internationally are:

- Financial insecurity, unsafe working conditions;
- injury;
- ill health or disability.

Strategies to manage ‘bad situations’ should be in place for the employee as well as direction to further resources where needed. At a personal level, relationships (work and personal) are a major source of stress. An employer should watch for indications of high stress levels in employees. These may include:

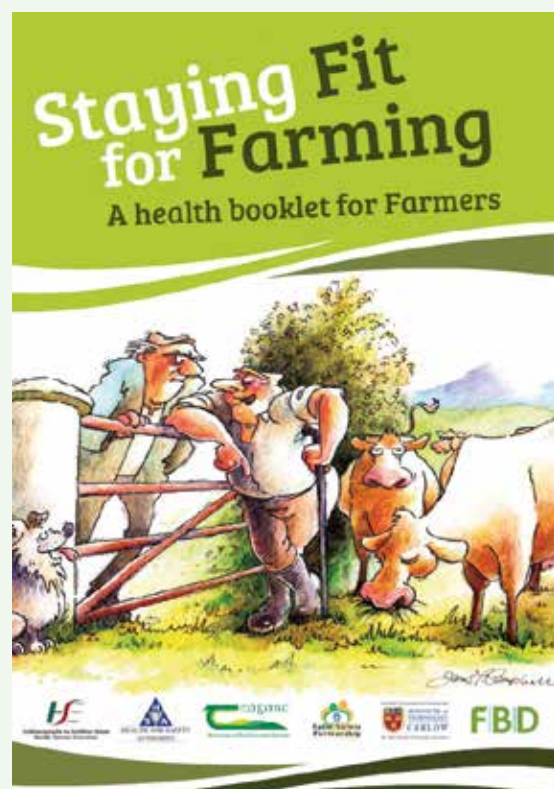
- Continuous tiredness
- Frequent sickness
- Constant irritability
- Mood swings
- Fast and noticeable weight loss or weight gain
- Dependence on caffeine to get through the day
- Frequent arguing with friends, family and work colleagues
- Low self-esteem, making self-degrading comments (e.g. I am useless, I cannot do anything right)
- Sudden changes in mood, personality or behaviour which lasts for several weeks
- Prolonged lack of interest in jobs or things which once created engagement and satisfaction

If someone is displaying some of these signs it may indicate that they need a rest period or they are unhappy with some aspect of their work life that needs to be addressed. Provision of information on medical resources in the local area and on health insurance would be beneficial.

Farmer quote: *“Everybody must help each other and work as a team, starting on time and finishing on or before time is good discipline, introduce him/her to local clubs and people of a similar age group, neighbours etc. Take a genuine interest in your employee. Thank them*

for their contribution and wish them well on their weekends off.”

Refer to the booklet: Health Booklet for Farmers ‘Staying Fit for Farming’ which is available at www.teagasc.ie



5 What if an employee moves on?

Employees may decide to move position for a variety of reasons. The person may leave for:

- Personal reasons
- A new position with more responsibility than the employee currently has becomes available: e.g. progressing to a farm manager position or to a collaborative arrangement
- Reasons relating to a bad experience on the farm or the management on the farm
- Retirement

International studies show that 70% of people who leave jobs state that their manager was the primary reason for leaving. So it is important to maintain this relationship to retain employees for a reasonable period of time. However, it is inevitable that employees leave farms or even retire. Each former employer would like them to

Managing Employees

Speak about their employment positively, such as:

- How they developed on the farm
- How well they interacted with the owner/manager as a person
- The skills they have learned
- The farming system

If the people move on and do well subsequently, it reflects very well on the previous employer. This will improve the previous employer's reputation and make it easier for them to attract good people in the future.

When an employee moves on to another position it inevitably places a burden to find and train another person for that role. A person leaving on the correct terms and giving adequate notice will allow time to source a replacement. Often the person leaving may actually source a replacement. Similarly an employee leaving on good terms is unlikely to leave in the busy season; they will allow time for the replacement to be sought.

If an employee has goals that cannot be met, such as wanting more management responsibility that is not possible in their current role, then it's best to help them develop the skills and allow them to move on.

Remember - internet and social media allow almost instant links worldwide. A potential employee on the other side of the world can easily tune into how good any farmer is as an employer. Employers also need to be aware of the legislation when employees leave, for further information see Section 2.

KEY TIPS:



Accept that an employee will move on or retire eventually. Keep developing yourself, your farm and your employee so when it comes to replacing the employee, your farm is a much more attractive place to work.

Farmer quote: "While one does not like to see good people move on there are positives. A lot of jobs are secured through word of mouth and contacts as opposed to advertising so a person moving on can help you find other good people or be a reference for you as an employer."

Checklist for managing employees

		Yes/ No
Rosters	Are rosters developed in advance and reviewed regularly to allow for flexibility?	
Communication	Have you decided on your communication methods e.g. daily basis, structured meetings, etc.	
Motivation	Have you the elements that contribute to employee motivation in place, e.g. good pay, time-off, responsibility, good team, good career pathway?	
Training	Have you made provision for the training and development required by the new employee?	
Mentoring	Have you identified a mentor for your new employee?	
Work culture on the farm	Would you describe your farm as having a good work culture, e.g. good timetables, structured day, etc.	
Written instructions	Are Standard Operating Procedures available for different tasks?	
Basic facilities	Have you essential facilities on your farm?	
Performance measurement	Do you know how you will measure employee performance?	
Employee well-being	Will the new employee be happy on your farm?	