

Retaining staff in the dairy industry

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Does the following statement sound familiar?

'Many employees struggle to find a path in the industry – with low, unmet or over-inflated expectations – and wonder which dairy career pathways are real.'

While there have been big changes in the work environment throughout society, one aspect of employment remains important: the long-term careers of employees.

The dairy industry is traditionally family owned and operated. There are many who believe this will change in the future, but at the moment it is an important characteristic of dairying. For family members involved in the farm business, effective farm succession is the key to a long-term involvement in the farm. Non-family staff, however, have a different perspective.

Most farmers and employees would like to think that the working relationship would be a long and productive one. We all admire those farm businesses that can attract and maintain workers for long periods. It is a measure of success to have low staff turnover, and it can be very expensive and time consuming if we have high turnover rates.

A rule of thumb is that for staff a member who leaves after 12–18 months, the cost to replace them and train a new recruit is 1.5 times their salary.

So, if we wish to attract and retain staff, how can we offer them long-term career prospects? Here are some tips from Rural Skills Australia:

1. Provide clear job descriptions and roles, and provide a formal induction process.

2. Have a method of appraising performance that provides both recognition and areas to improve.
3. Build a set of incentives and bonuses.
4. Ensure that the work performed by staff is challenging.
5. Include all staff in the decision-making process.
6. Develop career opportunities.

Primefact 640 discusses the work/life balance. This is critical for staff as well as for farm owners. Farm workers have a life outside the farm, and flexibility in dealing with issues such as family illness, children and other responsibilities (such as Rural Fire Brigade duties) can ensure that workers value and remain loyal to the farm business.

If workers are to be called upon to put in a big effort – for example, during the mating season in a batch or seasonal herd – discuss and plan this with staff, and provide for more flexible leave arrangements when the stressful time has passed.

More information about the People in Dairy program and future programs is available on the Dairy Australia website (www.dairyaustralia.com.au) or by contacting Michael Ison at Tocal College on 02 49398814.





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