



Recruiting and Retaining Employees: What Matters Most?

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The most valuable resources that a dairy business can have are reliable and productive workers. Today's tight labor market means that workers have many employment choices. Dairy producers need to do all they can to keep their best employees and attract other excellent workers to their team. An April 1999 study by Cornell University researchers found three factors that are most important to employees' job satisfaction: **good working conditions, good wages, and job security.**

Is your dairy a good place to work? Make sure that the working conditions on your farm are comfortable, and that the atmosphere is pleasant. Provide a workplace that shows you care about employee needs, such as a clean bathroom and a break room. Keep your equipment in good repair, this not only pleases workers and helps them to be productive, it shows them that you care about their safety.

Other factors contribute to good working conditions. You should have an organizational chart showing the positions in the business. All employees should appear on the chart, so that there is no question about where they fit and whom they report to. All employees, including you, should have a job description detailing the responsibilities of the position. Do not underestimate the importance of training; it helps employees to be confident about their work. Try to foster an atmosphere of respect and teamwork in your farm workforce.

What are good wages? Be realistic about the compensation you offer. You will have to offer a package of wages and benefits that is competitive in your market. The days of paying low wages for enthusiastic and hard-working people are over. Start paying attention to the wages offered by convenience stores and other retail merchants, they are direct competitors with farms for entry-level employees. Make sure that employees and potential employees are aware of the monetary value of all benefits, including housing, farm products, and use of farm equipment.

Be sure that your employees know how they are doing; they look to you for signals about their job security. One of the most common complaints from farm employees is that they don't know what the boss thinks of their work. Praise those that do well and let them know how important they are to the farm's success. Retrain and coach those who need help, but be sure to praise them for what they do right. Make it a regular practice to find workers doing things correctly and praise them specifically for what they've done.

These are only a few of the things that contribute to retaining and recruiting employees. Keeping these points in mind when interacting with current or potential employees will help you to understand their needs. Retaining your star workers and attracting great new employees will help deliver your farm's future success.