

HOURS OF WORK – FIVE AND TWO ROSTER, HOW THE SYSTEM WORKS

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Introduction

I am here to describe how we run our farm with a five and two roster. I would like to explain the farm systems that enable us to do this for the majority of the year; also the positives, negatives and costs savings as I see them to our farm.

I appreciate that it suits us and our farm and wouldn't suit many farms because of their set-up, but my staff and I love it, and would be very reluctant to not run a similar roster or farm system.

Background

I started sharemilking ten years ago on my parent's first year conversion. After my second year where we did most of the work ourselves; including logging, regrassing, fencing and water system, all three of my employees had not lasted longer than a year each. It was time to have a look at myself and my systems. I decided the only way I was going to have a life was to get good employees and look after them.

That year I employed three great new staff, we milked a 1000 cows through the 50 bail rotary and after calving, during weekends, started our five and two roster. We didn't have cup removers so we stood the second herd in the race while we milked the first herd. Certainly not best practice but that's what we did.

Five years ago when converting our current farm we set it up to be able to run with a five and two roster. We milk 1100 cows through a 60 bail rotary with cup removers that can be run by two staff over the weekends.

We started sharemilking my father's neighboring property this season also on a five and two roster with four staff; they milked 900 cows through a 54 bail rotary. Next year we will milk 1000 cows with 4 staff including a run off of 100 ha beside the platform (also lease 600 ha predominantly dry land 4kms away).

We do 1650-1700 solids/ha with about 600kg supplements added.

Notes:

Objectives for next season

Next season we will milk 2100 cows with eight staff including all wintering of cows, and all young stock on the leased run-off; if we get an irrigation project completed over winter on the leased run-off. I would like to have one more staff member as cover, but under these uncertain times we won't. We employ one or two calf rearers to help over calving. We might try once a day milking for the first three weeks of calving to help reduce pressure over this time.

Our System

Essentially we have four people on the roster; two people have Friday /Saturday off and the other two people have Sunday/Monday off. That means we have four people on for Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday. Wednesday is our maintenance day. One person each allocated to dairy shed maintenance, machinery maintenance, fence or power and pasture walk for the last one. That leaves all additional work to be done on Tuesday & Thursday. This is what the roster looks like.

Table 1. March 08 Roster (letter of name is who is up first or second, OO,ZZ,XX,## relates to days off)

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
30 ##	31 ##					1 OO
D XX	R XX					H ZZ
R	D					G
2 ##	3 ##	4	5	6	7 OO	8 OO
D XX	R XX	H	D	G	H ZZ	G ZZ
R	D	R	H	D	G	H
9 ##	10 ##	11	12	13	14 OO	15 OO
R XX	D XX	D	G	R	G ZZ	H ZZ
D	R	G	R	H	H	G
16 ##	17 ##	18	19	20	21 OO	22 OO
D XX	R XX	R	H	D	H ZZ	G ZZ
R	D	H	D	G	G	H
23 ##	24 ##	25	26	27	28 OO	29 OO
R XX	D XX	G	R	H	G ZZ	H ZZ
D	R	D	G	R	H	G

GK XX	Gary
DR ZZ	Darren
HW ##	Hamish
RC OO	Ryan

How the roster works is the first person on the list for the day gets the first herd in and milks them. The second person on the list gets the second herd in and milks them. The first person then goes away and feeds silage, shifts irrigation, feeds calves or has breakfast. He also gets the penicillin/ hobbles herd in. The other two staff either come in at 7.45 or have days off.

Over the four weekend days the two staff members have to work efficiently & be well organized to get through their work. Cups on is at 1.30pm and they can finish from 4.30 – 5pm. Or if they are not organised they can finish as late as six.

Calving Roster

Five on 1 off. They get one day off, then a sleep in the following morning till 7.45, which generally helps to keep them refreshed. First person up gets the first herd in; second person on the roster starts the shed. Third person checks the calving cows, treats milk fever and feeds calves etc.

Once we get to 600 cows calved we take the trouble cows (ones that kick cups off, had mastitis, skinny) and put them in the new second herd. Then we are back to just one up early again. We stand somebody at cups off position in the afternoons twice a week to find more trouble cows in the first herd. Once we get to 1000 cows we put trouble cows in the penicillin herd, and just have one person milking the second herd too.

We bring the the calving cows to the shed and put them on the platform to sort out calved cows. Once the heifers know what they are doing it only takes two people, plus they get teat sprayed to reduce mastitis.

Notes:

Table 2. Calving Roster

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1	2 ##	3 XX	4	5 00	6 ZZ
	T	R	T	H	G	R
	R H	T G	H G	T G	R H	G H
7	8 ##	9 XX	10	11 00	12 ZZ	13
T	R	T	H	G	R	T
R H	T G	H G	T G	R H	G H	R H
14 ##	15 XX	16	17 00	18 ZZ	19	20 ##
R	T	H	G	R	T	R
T G	H G	T G	R H	G H	R H	T G
21 XX	22	23 00	24 ZZ	25	26 ##	27 XX
T	H	G	R	T	R	T
H G	T G	R H	G H	R H	T G	H G
28	29 00	30 ZZ				
H	G	R				
T G	R H	G H				

HW ##	Hamish
GK ZZ	Gary
TP 00	Tim
RL XX	Richard

Mating Roster

We have somebody standing on a platform in the shed doing heat detection and drafting cows. Instead of having your normal weekend off every second week you have a Tuesday/ Wednesday or Wednesday/Thursday off. We try and organize AI for afternoons, as anybody can stay with the AI technician and it stops the person doing heat detection getting too tired.

Table 3. Mating Roster

19 XX	20 XX	21 ##	22 ##	23	24 00	25 00
G	T	H	R ZZ	T ZZ	G ZZ	H ZZ
T	G	R	T	H	H	R
26 ##	27 ##	28 XX	29 XX	30	31	1
R XX	G	T	H 00	R 00	H ZZ	T ZZ
T	T	H	G	G	R	H

HW ##	Hamish
GK ZZ	Gary
TP 00	Tim
RL XX	Richard

Table 4. The hours worked on farm from Dairy Exporter article December 2008 written by Virginia Serra

Days	Office Job	Prattley System
Working days	230	245
Statutory holidays	11	11
Days off (weekends)	104	90
Annual leave	20	20

LABOUR EFFICIENCY	
Labour cost	40c/kg milksolids (MS)
Cows/fulltime employee (FTE)	258
Kg MS/FTE	

Notes:

Labour cost = 168.000 paid labour plus 25% time of Mike 21.250(85.000/4) + 5000 calf rearer = \$194.250.

Is time off a problem?

Research from Tipples Hoogeveen & Gould (2000) had this to say about time off and hours worked on a dairy farm.

“Dairy farm jobs meet four out of the top five career objectives of younger people.”

1. Pay
2. Time off - not met
3. Stable
4. Close to family
5. Advance career

“The primary weakness of dairy farm jobs, for employees under the age of thirty, is the long hours of work.”

Positives of our system

- Time with family
- Everybody can have a life, if there is any social event on you can organize the roster to enable you to go or swap with your work mates
- Everybody does everything so they don't get quite so bored.
- Staff attraction- always had more than 20 people call up for a job.
- Motivation, they know they have good working conditions and are generally motivated
- Need better staff, all need to run the shed minimum
- Mistakes: hopefully fresher so less mistakes
- Reliability: they know the time off is good and we can employ new staff and as far as being late we run a three strikes and your out system
- Less staff, less complications, less personality clashes
- Less wages as employ less staff hammers & nails
- I can encourage people
- Housing less, fewer vehicles, less on move up and move on in the industry and actively help them do this. I know when they are planning on moving and generally they won't leave us short handed.

Negatives of our system

- Animal health. Suggest we end up with 5 more 3 titter in a year than if we had somebody on cups off side of shed. It's still relevant to your good guys in the shed as they find the new mastitis cases.

- Lameness, general health. One less set of eyes looking but generally just the good guys that pick out sick cows
- Wages. We generally like staff to have one year's experience, as they need to be capable of doing most jobs. This gives us a higher base level and with good staff retention our wage bill increases most years.
- Need to be organized for Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday as sometimes there is a lot that needs doing.

Costs

The extra expenses we had setting up our system

Cup removers for the shed cost	\$60,000
Underpass	\$10,000 may not have been put in
R&M bill	\$4,000

Savings

I believe we would need to employ one extra person if we had someone on cups off side of the shed. This costs you half a house \$60,000

Wages	\$35,000
Motorbikes, vehicles etc	?

Summary

We believe we save money with our roster, cup removers and farm system. It would be just as easy to argue otherwise through cow losses, loss of production etc.

Our objective when developing the roster and farm system was to be able to enjoy life while working and running the dairy farm. We believe we get major benefits in staff retention, staff attraction and motivation, along with hopefully less mistakes and happy environment. We would also like to think we save money.

Staff will always take the time off, and farm systems for granted at times, just like we take them for granted, but generally they appreciate our systems.

Having a good roster and farm systems along with the other things we need right as an employer, help us to live the life we want, and hopefully employees too.

Notes:

References

Tipples R, Hoogeveen M, Gould E. 2000. Getting employment relationships right. *Primary Industry Management* Vol3, No.2; 23-26.