

# How to Find and Keep Good Staff

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## 1. Introduction

With approximately two hundred conversions in the South Island our already tight dairy labour market is set to pressurize. The industry needs to find in excess of six thousand new recruits. Finding and keeping the RIGHT staff is critical to our success. You could poach the neighbour's young man with the promise of extortionate cash and push the problem onto someone else. This is however, a short-term fix, and generally doesn't bode well for building strong neighbourly relationships. It is time to think outside of the square to attract and keep our best people in our businesses and industry. These new recruits may not look like those we traditionally target. This paper will look at ways of recruiting people, shaping jobs and creating pathways in our new labour environment. Further we highly recommend using DairyNZ HR Toolkit for building up your employment processes.

## 2. How to FIND good staff

### ***2.1 First things first: Work out what you ACTUALLY need***

Traditionally we think we must employ a single person who will work an 11&3 roster 5am to 6pm daily. This is essentially true for key staff such as Farm or Herd Managers. However, when looking for junior staff you may find the opportunity to share the role between two or more people. This might sound like you are increasing your problem (you want me to find three or four people instead of one or two!?) but widening your staffing base can add the following benefits:

- (1) increases the productivity of your staff
- (2) is highly cost-efficient as you can target your labour to tasks
- (3) adds flexibility for planning annual leave and stat holidays
- (4) adds stability for unexpected illness
- (5) potentially creates a more varied and enjoyable work place

Creating multiple part-time positions on your farm widens the pool of people that you can recruit from, such as:

- Mothers with children in daycare or at school
- Retired farmers
- High school students
- University students

- Backpackers

## **2.2 Immigrant employees**

Some terrific hard working employees can be sourced from overseas. This is NOT a source a cheap labour. This IS a source of dedicated, hard working labour. Expect to pay the same as you would for a kiwi. Advertising on fencepost will generally generate interest from this group. You can assist foreign workers gain two-year work visas under the Department of Immigration short-term shortages list for skilled labour. The two categories are “Herd Manager” and “Assistant Herd Manager”. Both require 2-3 years related experience and/or a tertiary qualification. This method does not require proof of advertising.

Overseas employees require strong support systems. These employees often need help with language (a pen and notepad are useful communication tools!) and will require introduction to doctors and community groups.

## **2.3 Recruitment**

- Word of mouth – a traditional form of advertising and still holds a strong place in finding good staff
- Fencepost - One of the well used and highly efficient and free
- Newspaper advertising
- Recruitment agency – can cost up to 2% of total employment package (including accommodation and all allowances) reasonably costly, however takes much of the hassle out of the process

## **2.4 How to write your advert**

Before you start think about who you are trying to target. Is it someone who wants a pathway to farm ownership? Are you selling your position on lifestyle? What makes your farm special? Provide plenty of detail and in newspaper advertising choose a large prominent advert. Yes, it may cost more, but how much does failing to attract quality applicants cost?

## **2.5 Background check**

This is very important as one bad apple can spoil the whole bunch. Ask for references and make sure you ring at least two. The DairyNZ HR toolkit is extremely helpful and provides application form templates.

## **2.6 If in doubt, don't hire**

Follow your gut on hiring people. If something doesn't feel right, don't hire.... *even if you are desperate*. You will usually regret hiring the wrong person. As mentioned earlier, one bad apple can be very expensive. Take stock, try a different tact and re-advertise.

## **3. How to KEEP good staff**

### **3.1 Pay Peanuts, Get Monkeys**

It is well documented that the best people are not motivated by money. However, this only goes so far. While you do not have to be the wage leader, you must be in the ball park. Federated Farmers release average remuneration information periodically, and it is worth using this information to see if you are matching the market.

### **3.2 Regular time-off – planned well**

#### Rostered Leave:

Regular, well planned time-off is very important. Gone are the days where staff work all spring without a day off, or days off are rainy days (99% of you will have cringed at this; if you didn't then you need to look closely at your expectations). Even the 11 and 3 is becoming outdated compared to a 5 & 2 urban roster. Regular time-off is important and has the following benefits:

- Fresher brighter more capable staff
- Less accidents
- Makes the transition between urban and rural life easier

#### Stat-Days and Annual Leave:

Four weeks annual leave and stat holidays need to be well planned, firstly to ensure that they actually happen, and secondly so that staff can plan their holidays ahead of time. It is NOT good enough to give a staff member a couple of days notice for a week's holidays. Start early in the season. Ask your team when they would like their holidays. An effective way for planning is to keep a notebook in the dairy for staff to note days they would like off. You can then use this notebook to plan your roster.

### **3.4 Creating Pathways**

Creating pathways in your business can help keep your best staff. This becomes a win-win situation; you keep a high quality staff member, and they can progress towards their goals. Make sure however, you know exactly what their goals are; do not assume!

People are motivated by different things. Some people want the career path towards farm ownership, and are happy to work a traditional pathway of hard work getting there. Others have chosen to join the dairy industry for the lifestyle. Lifestyle for these people may not mean starting at 5am in the morning and working through to 6pm at night with a stop for breakfast and lunch. You need to create a sustainable system.

Sometimes it is hard to accommodate a career path within one single business. You can solve this by getting together with a group of 2, 3 or 4 other farmers and provide a pathway within your businesses. This system takes a lot of trust between the members.

#### **4. Conclusion and recommendations**

Our industry is in serious need of more staff. We need to look outside of our traditional labour pool, as looking over the fence is only passing the problem on to someone else while pumping wages to an unsustainable level. Part-time staff and international employees are two target groups that will widen your potential pool. Make sure you do a reference check on your applicants, and if in doubt, don't hire! Regroup and start again.

Keeping good staff takes a combination of good wages inline with the market, good time-off and creating pathways that help staff achieve their goals as well as yours. The best business agreements always create win-win situations.

The DairyNZ HR Tool kit is a valuable resource for developing your HR processes.