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How to Write a Dairy Job Description

This NebGuide leads you through the process of developing a job description for positions in the dairy industry.

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As dairy herd sizes continue to increase and the management of the herd can no longer be solely a family responsibility, labor management becomes more important. There are several areas to consider when going from a family operation to one that requires hiring off-the-farm labor. The most important point to consider is writing a job, or position, description for each employee you plan to hire, or currently employ in the dairy operation.

A detailed job description can help eliminate individuals who will not perform well on the job before the hiring process begins, as well as giving you, the employer, justifiable grounds for terminating an employee for not performing the job in a satisfactory manner.

It is important to let the employee know what is expected before starting employment so that if any problem arises over work responsibilities the herd owner can quickly refer to the job description. On most dairy farms the employees can be grouped into three categories: herd managers, feeders or outdoor workers, and milkers. Therefore, every large dairy should have job descriptions for these three groups of workers. A job description for each grouping of workers is given below.

Each job description is a concise list of the work that is expected to be done and the knowledge, skills and abilities required for filling the position. Each description also indicates the person to whom each worker will report. This is essential to maintain an orderly flow of information to and from the worker. The entire management operation will come to a halt if the chain of command is unclear. This is especially important when a producer is hiring a new employee to work with other long-term employees.

Long-term employees sometimes assume they can take advantage of new employees unless it is clear who is in charge. If you are planning on hiring employees, use the following three job descriptions as a

starting point in formulating your own descriptions. Please note when reading the job descriptions that each employee has a few areas described that do not need direct day-to-day supervision.

The main reason workers leave employment is not usually salary, but the common complaint is "I was not allowed to do anything without first checking with my immediate supervisor." This is especially true when the manager works directly under the supervision of the herd owner. Give the manager some slack and let him or her make some management decisions on their own.

I. Manager Job Description

Supervise and coordinate herd, technicians, and the day-to-day operation of the dairy and upkeep of the facilities at the dairy.

Characteristic Duties and Responsibilities:

Management of the Dairy Herd (50% of time): Supervising employees in all phases of the dairy, including

- Ration preparation and feeding
- Raising of replacements
- Milking
- Upkeep of facilities, grounds and equipment
- Pasture management
- Herd management

Herd Health and Reproduction (30% of time):

- Treat and care for sick animals
- Help with difficult births
- Heat detection
- Breeding
- Fill in for sick and vacationing employees

General Office Work and Procurement (20% of time):

Record keeping (herd health, production, reproduction inventories)

- Monthly inventories
- Payroll
- Order supplies, repair parts, and feed
- Discuss needs and problems with sales and service representatives
- Personnel evaluations
- Personnel recruitment and training, in consultation with herd owner

Scope and Effect of Work Output and Independent Decisions Made and Acted Upon:

Make decisions pertaining to day-to-day operation, such as when an animal needs to be treated, or bred, call veterinarians or service personnel. Decide whether a tank of milk must be dumped, when hay should be harvested, when and what feed to order, what repairs and upkeep should be performed. Solve problems concerned with herd health, failure of milking equipment or outside equipment, nutrition and

pasture management.

Make suggestions for budget; decide when to sell cull cows and bull calves; can sign for items costing up to \$500.

Minimum Qualifications (Education/Experience):

- Dairy management or training in the dairy industry (2-5 years)
- Supervising experience (1 year)

Knowledge, Skills and Abilities Required:

- Trained in artificial insemination
- Knowledgeable of disease and injury treatment and calf pulling
- Knowledgeable in dairy nutrition
- Ability to motivate employees
- Ability to work with all types of people
- Ability to communicate with a broad spectrum of individuals
- Knowledge of milking procedures
- Knowledge of and use for Dairy Herd Improvement Records

II. Feeder Job Description

Primary responsibilities (accounting for approximately 70 to 80% of daily work time) will be to perform the duties of feeding and caring for all livestock on the dairy facility. The proper care of dairy animals involves keeping the animal areas, lots, and barns clean and free from manure and extraneous objects. The job is to be performed in an efficient manner to allow the production of a high quality product and promote animal well-being and comfort. Examples of specific responsibilities are listed below:

Feeding Responsibilities:

1. Check all animals on a timely basis (3 to 4 times per day) to be certain they are receiving adequate feed. Be certain clean water is available at all times.
2. Feed cows and calves in a timely manner as outlined or directed by manager.
3. Be certain lots and barns are cleaned daily or as directed by the manager.
4. Routinely check freshening area and assist in birthing process as needed.
5. Check all lots at least 2 times per day (dry cow, heifer and calf areas) to be certain cattle are not under stress due to weather conditions.
6. Maintain all equipment as prescribed by manufacturer's suggestions. Be certain all machinery is in working order. Notify manager immediately if any malfunctions occur.
7. Take any necessary feed or forage samples for nutrient testing as required by manager.
8. Be certain all pastures and fencing are maintained. Repair these items when needed.
9. Maintain all equipment and tools in an orderly manner so they are readily available to use by any employee if needed.
10. Treat sick animals and administer appropriate prescription drugs only when told by the manager.
11. Perform routine vaccinations under supervision of the manager.
12. Assist in any special projects or routine maintenance of farmstead in coordination with the manager.

Other Responsibilities (approximately 20 to 30% of daily work schedule) as Assigned by the

Manager:

These responsibilities may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Daily maintenance of free stalls
- Heat detection, A.I.
- Record keeping
- Maintenance of grounds

III. Milker Job Description

Primary responsibilities (approximately 70 to 80% of daily work schedule) will be to perform the milking operation according to the State's Public Milk Ordinance in a professional and efficient manner to produce a high quality product and to promote animal well-being. Examples of some specific responsibilities are listed below.

Milking Responsibilities and Procedures:

1. Prepare milking equipment and bulk tank for milking.
2. Bring in cows for milking or help other employees bring in cows if needed or requested.
3. Wear gloves when milking to help prevent spread of mastitis-causing organisms.
4. Follow recommended pre-milking preparation of cattle before milking.
5. Milk all cows in an orderly, proper, and consistent manner.
6. Be certain to look at treatment records so that milk from treated cows is not put into the bulk tank.
Since all milk will be sampled for various drug residues at each pick-up, it is the milker's responsibility to guarantee that milk shipped meets the current State Public Milk Ordinance. If any question or concern is expressed about the safety of any shipment, it should be tested by the milker and the results discussed with the manager immediately.
7. Note cows that may have mastitis or other problems and inform the manager for possible treatment. (*No treatment will be done without permission of the manager.*)
8. Clean the milking parlor, holding area and bulk tank room.
9. Operate all milking equipment as recommended by the manager and factory specifications.
10. After milking, be sure all machinery and sanitation procedures are followed according to manufacturer's specification and Grade A Standards of the Public Milk Ordinance.

Milking Related Activities:

1. Help to get cattle in barn if necessary.
2. Maintain treatment records and identify treated cows with appropriate markers, such as leg bands, etc.
3. Assist in ordering supplies by making a list and bringing to the manager's attention any items in short supply.
4. If unable to be present at scheduled working hours, the manager must be given sufficient notice to arrange for a substitute milker.
5. Clip udders, freeze brand and perform other procedures that promote accurate identification and animal well-being.
6. In case of an emergency, you may be called to work on a vacation or regularly scheduled day off.

Other responsibilities (approximately 20 to 30% of daily work schedule) as assigned by the manager. These responsibilities may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Care of springers and cows at calving
- Feeding and care of calves
- Feeding, cleaning, and care of milking herd
- Maintenance of free-stalls
- Heat detection, A.I.
- Record keeping
- Cleaning and maintenance of office building
- Maintenance of grounds, pasture, fences
- Maintenance of vacuum pumps

Before hiring new employees, be certain to explain fully their benefit packages (if any), such as health, workman's compensation, or life insurance. Also be clear about the vacation schedule, regular days off, sick leave policy and notification of unexpected absences from work.

Try to have the entire work force function as a team. Plan weekly or monthly team meetings to discuss ways to increase production efficiency or other management changes that may be needed. If you encourage an open exchange of ideas and discuss the options openly with employees and encourage participation, then it is far easier to get the work accomplished.

Once a year sit down with all the employees and list short- and long-range goals for the dairy operation. Post these goals in a prominent location so employees are reminded of the goals that are expected during the next year. Attempt to have each employee responsible for obtaining one goal. This makes the employee feel more a member of a team rather than just an employee. If every goal is the responsibility of the team, then it may not get the attention it needs since the employees may all think that someone else is taking care of it.

Attempt to work on incentives for workers. This helps to maintain interest in a job that is mainly routine. In order to maintain interest, try to assign an extra duty to each worker weekly, or every two weeks, so the job does not become boring.

Communicate with your workers every day. Praise them when they do a job extremely well. Never discipline one employee in front of others; this lowers the self-esteem of the worker being disciplined and holds the employee up to ridicule from the other employees.

Conduct a yearly evaluation with each employee. List their accomplishments and discuss where they may not be performing up to your expectations. Give them the opportunity to respond -- remember to listen to their concerns. Your expectations may be greater than your employee's ability and these should be openly and frankly discussed. A yearly evaluation gives you the opportunity to reiterate your expectations and gives the employee the opportunity to discuss any concerns that he/she may have. Do not tie together a planned salary increase with the evaluation.

It is better to have the evaluation six months before salary changes. This six-month period will separate the evaluation from monetary concerns, thereby giving each of you the opportunity to discuss performance without having a pay increase directly associated with the evaluation process.

Hopefully, by following some basic labor management plans you will be able to foster an open, friendly, and supportive environment on the dairy facility. Having everyone know the expectations of the job, as well as feeling a part of the management team, will help the dairy enterprise prosper over time and employee turnover will be minimized.

References

For additional information on dairy management, please request the following NebGuides:

G94-1234, Should you Consider Expanding Your Dairy Herd?

G92-1114, Hiring Non-Farm Dairy Personnel

G91-1064, Managing Dairy Labor

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D-13, Business Management

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