

Hiring Nonskilled Dairy Farm Personnel

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The number of workers available with farm backgrounds continues to decrease; many producers are looking at workers from nonfarm backgrounds to meet their labor needs.

As Nebraska dairy farms increase in size and/or the managers advance in age, more producers are turning to hired labor as a way to maintain a viable farm.

Hiring a traditional farm worker is easier than hiring an individual without farm experience because a traditional farm worker has experience with the hours required and knowledge of the unexpected problems that are certain to arise on any farmstead.

Nontraditional farm employees are less aware of farm-related problems and are more familiar with the conventional eight-hour, five-day work week. Therefore, it is important to adequately explain the expected job responsibilities and wage scale before hiring an applicant. This up-front frankness helps eliminate potential problems with new employees.

Before considering hiring additional labor, consider the income generated by the dairy. Can you afford to hire, given your current financial situation? NebGuide 2034, *Dairy Farm Income and Cash Flow Calculations* (www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/live/g2034/build/g2034.pdf) contains a worksheet that will help estimate your farm income, and cost-saving measures can be adjusted to see how your income will increase.

Job Descriptions

The process of hiring a new employee should start with a clear, concise, and inclusive position description. The description should contain:

- All major duties; position responsibilities; and physical requirements, such as the ability to lift a certain amount. In addition, it is important to explain the chain of command.
- The normal work hours and the anticipated schedule. List all holidays that will be allowed during the year, along with overtime expectations, and policies for sick leave and personal time off.
- Required education and/or training.
- Required previous work experience. (If the only source of potential personnel is nonfarm oriented, don't list farm experience as a requirement. It is a good idea to be certain the individual applying has held a full-time position in the past.)

- Skills required, such as having a driver's license or the ability to drive a commercial vehicle.
- Any other skill that will help the prospective employee meet the job expectations.

The next section of the position description should provide a complete and detailed wage breakdown. Include the beginning wage and any bonus or incentive programs. List benefits such as housing or health insurance.

Browsing the Internet is an excellent way to gather information on dairy-related labor questions and concerns. An excellent resource is the University of California, Berkeley. The most recent publications that may be of interest are listed below (many are available in Spanish also). In addition to publications on labor management, wage surveys, resolving employee differences, and other topics related to managing a workforce, there are several well-written publications on dairy incentive plans that relate to improving pregnancy rates, calf-raising practices, milk quality, feeding management, and hoof and health care. All can be downloaded for free from the website.

- 2003 Dairy Wage Survey — www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/7research/7res05.htm
- QDairy Incentive Pay (Fourth Edition) — www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/7dairy/7dairy.htm
- Employee Turnover: Reasons Workers Leave Dairies — cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/7labor/15.htm
- Farm Workers Positive About Their Jobs, but Suggest Improvements — www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/7research/7calag09.htm
- For Wages and Benefits, Bigger Dairies May be Better — www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/7research/7res01.htm
- Labor Management in Agriculture: Cultivating Personnel Productivity — cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/7labor/001.htm
- Party-Directed Mediation: Helping Others Resolve Differences — www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/7conflict/

Incentive Programs

A few very simple incentive programs are relatively easy to provide. Any incentive program should be specific enough to avoid misinterpretation. It is also advisable to

(continued on page 4)

Employment Application

Applicant Name: _____

Address: _____

Check all applicable for position desired.

- Full-time Permanent Seasonal
 Part-time Temporary Date available: _____

Type of position you are interested in (list in order of preference).

General Information

1. Are you legally authorized to work in the United States? (proof of employment eligibility will be required upon hire)

- Yes No

2. Current driver's license number: _____
 Issued in which state? _____

3. List all special skills, volunteer experience, and professional or occupational licenses.

4. List three persons (other than relatives or past employers) who have knowledge of your skills and/or character:

Name	Address	Phone

5. **Employment Record:** List your present or most recent employer FIRST. Include U.S. Armed Forces experiences.

Employer _____ Address _____ Phone _____ Job Title _____ Nature of duties (explain fully) _____ _____ _____ Immediate supervisor _____ Reasons for leaving _____	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <th colspan="4">Employed</th> </tr> <tr> <td style="width: 25%;">From:</td> <td style="width: 25%;">Yr.</td> <td style="width: 25%;">To:</td> <td style="width: 25%;">Yr.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mo.</td> <td></td> <td>Mo.</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;">Mo. full-time</td> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;">Mo. part-time</td> </tr> <tr> <th colspan="4">Salary</th> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;">Start</td> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;">End</td> </tr> </table>	Employed				From:	Yr.	To:	Yr.	Mo.		Mo.		Mo. full-time		Mo. part-time		Salary				Start		End	
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6. **Education:** Please provide your complete educational history. Transcripts of college courses should be submitted and will be returned after review.

Type of School	Name and Location of School	Circle Highest Grade Completed	Major Subjects	Degree, Certificate Diploma
Elementary, Jr. High		1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8		
Last High School Attended		9 10 11 12		
Post High School <small>(include college, university, technical and trade school.)</small>				
Other				

7. Have you ever been convicted of a violation of law other than a minor traffic violation? Yes No
If yes, please explain: _____

I certify that the information contained in this application is true to the best of my knowledge and belief. I understand that any willful omission of facts or misrepresentation is cause for dismissal. I grant permission for my prospective employer to investigate my work references and release my prospective employer from any liability resulting from such investigation. Upon my termination, I authorize the release of reference information on my work. I agree to a pre-employment physical if required.

Signature Date

structure the programs so only one person is responsible for the incentive. Group incentives sometimes can lead to tensions if the perception exists that one or two on the team are not doing their fair share.

Below are some common dairy incentives. Dollar amounts may be altered to best suit farm cash flow and income projections.

Calving interval yearly bonus: \$100 if 14 months; \$200 if 13 months; \$400 if 12.5 months; \$600 if 12 months.

Cows detected in heat: \$1 to \$3 for each cow detected in heat, plus an additional \$1 to \$2 per cow if she is confirmed pregnant to the detected heat.

Milk production: 19,000 lb = \$100 per year; 20,000 lb = \$200 per year; 21,000 lb = \$300 per year; 22,000 lb = \$600 per year; over 22,000 lb = \$1,200 or more per year. These incentives reflect the increase in management ability required to increase production beyond 17,000 lb. The extra time spent on fine-tuning the management should be rewarded.

Somatic cell count (SCC) average: Why not split the incentive received for SCC from the milk plant with employees? Remember, as the SCC decreases, there will be an increase in milk production that also will yield an increase in income. By offering an incentive program on SCC, milkers will pay attention to the small details of the milking procedures that lower SCC.

Percent of calves weaned: Place a certain dollar value on each calf weaned if the total calf crop weaned exceeds 90 percent or 95 percent on a yearly basis.

These are five simple ways to initiate an easy to manage and document bonus program. Programs that reward a job performance that exceeds an acceptable level enables an employee to try new management skills and maintain interest in attending farm-related meetings, such as extension or agribusiness workshops.

Application Forms

After you have clearly quantified what is desirable in an employee, the next step is to design a good, clear employment application. The application should provide the information needed to formulate a short list of candidates to call for interviews.

Remember, nonfarm applicants will be familiar with completing an application form and won't consider it a chore. They will consider it a sign of professionalism and that they will be treated accordingly.

The most important information to request includes:

- Personal information, including contact information (name, address, telephone number and/or email address) and health-related information related to the position (condition or injury that may interfere with the applicant's ability to carry out job responsibilities). *Do not* request information such as race, creed, marital status, age, or number of children. Also, do not ask for health-related information. Instead, clearly state physical expectations in the job description and possibly require a pre-employment physical.

- Education and training
- Employment history. Leave ample room for applicants to provide details for the jobs they've held in the last five years. Ask for the employer's name, address, and phone number, and the applicant's salary, length of employment, and job responsibilities. Phone the listed employers to check references.
- Ask for the names, addresses, and telephone numbers for three references. To help screen applicants, call each reference.
- Ask the applicant to sign and date the application form.

After contacting the references and former employers, call the top candidates to arrange a personal interview. During the interview, provide a detailed breakdown of what is expected, the line of command, and job-related functions.

Let the prospective employee meet all other employees. Plan a time when the candidate can talk openly with the other employees without you being present. This will convey to the prospective employee that other employees are trusted and treated as equals.

Before making a hiring decision, talk to the employees who met the candidates. Ask if they believe they could work with the applicant and if they think the applicant will fit in with the group. Not only will this help in the decision process, it will make current employees feel a part of the team.

Resources

A sample application form is provided on pages 2 and 3 of this publication.

Refer to NebGuide listings at www.nebraskadairy.unl.edu for additional information on dairy labor.

Other NebGuides that may be helpful to the hiring process are :

Examples of Job Descriptions for Major Positions on Dairy Farms (G1585) <http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/live/g1585/build/g1585.pdf>

Should You Consider Expanding Your Dairy Herd? (G1655) <http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/live/g1655/build/g1655.pdf>

Managing Dairy Labor (G1584) <http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/live/g1584/build/g1584.pdf>

This publication has been peer reviewed.

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