

# Agri*cultura*

By Greg Coffta

This month in *Agri*cultura** let's take a look at one dairy in western New York that has experienced positive results from Cooperative Extension program that offers Spanish language services for dairies. This program, supported through the New York Farm Viability Institute (NYFVI), employs me and makes *Agri*cultura** possible.

The management at Pankow Dairy Farm was feeling the strain. As with nearly all dairy operations, the workload surpassed the number of hours in the day, and management was always trying to catch up. With more than 10 regular employees, the problem wasn't lack of sufficient help but rather the lack of adequate communication with employees.

Nearly three-quarters of the employees speak Spanish and very little English. The management, on the other hand, spoke almost exclusively English, and this resulted in some confusing and difficult situations - with even more difficult outcomes. Dave, the dairy's owner, and Tuffy, its herd manager, were working well over 60 hours a week and worrying the rest of the time. They felt burdened by having to be on the farm all the time to oversee and to make decisions.

## Looking for a solution

Management needed to improve employee communication and training. They needed to know employees could do their jobs right. After an autumn full of difficult calvings, herd health issues and too many culled cows, a solution presented itself. The managers learned of the Cornell Cooperative Extension Spanish language services from another participating dairy.

Dave, Tuffy and I met to determine the dairy's needs and how my program could help. They wanted more than a one-time training session; Pankow Dairy Farm wanted to make an investment to make a difference on the dairy. We set up regular bi-weekly meetings to cover the gamut of topics from translation/interpretation to meeting facilitation and training modules, such as calving assistance, heat detection and herd health.

Six months later, the results are clear: the dairy has fewer calving injuries, stillborn calves and culled cows. The diagnosis and treatment of sick cows has improved. Newborn heifers are healthier; they test with higher blood-protein levels and get sick less. Somatic cell counts are consistently lower than last year's averages, and there is less mastitis.

These are the quantifiable results of working with the Spanish language services program. But the dairy's management earns most of the credit for improvements. Staff changed its management style, procedures, communication and attitude. Morale on the dairy improved, and employees seem to be more at ease. Management's frustration has lessened because it's now confident employees are competent to work alone.

## Help in times of need

Perhaps the most helpful service of the Spanish language services program has been consultation in a crisis situation.

Late one Friday afternoon, Dave called me. He was caught in a difficult situation: Three of his employees who were in a car accident were being detained by the police. Dave wanted to help, but he wasn't sure of the consequences. Would his workers be deported? Would the dairy face any consequences? How would he communicate with his employees?

It turned out the workers were not at fault and were in no legal trouble. They simply had to provide some basic information to the officer. Through a series of cell phone calls, translation and facilitation, the possibly dire situation was resolved.

This dairy has seen the positive impact that Extension's Spanish language services program can have. The owner and herd manager are continuing regular meetings and trainings, and as Tuffy said, "I could stay right here for the rest of time. My workers are performing very well, we're producing good milk, and everyone's happy- we're on a natural high."

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## To learn more...

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