

Agricultura

By Greg Coffta

If you visit one of New York's mid- to large-size dairy herds, you would see many employees in the milking parlor who are immigrants of Hispanic descent.

This isn't a news flash — these employees have been working on some dairies for more than 10 years now. In recent years, the increase in immigrant labor from Mexico and Central America has become a hot-button political issue achieving national attention.

People make many assumptions about this workforce: It's uneducated, unskilled and suitable for only the most routine, tedious tasks such as milking. A closer look at our dairy farms proves those beliefs to be misconceptions. The Hispanic workforce on New York dairy farms is being promoted to higher positions and given more responsibilities.

Many dairy managers are learning that Hispanic employees aren't an *unskilled* workforce but simply an *untrained* workforce. They are discovering that these employees are a valuable resource beyond milking cows.

New tasks and responsibilities

Responsibilities vary from dairy to dairy, but in general Hispanic employees complete some of a herd manager's responsibilities. Dairies' reproduction programs have benefited greatly from Hispanic employees' taking on additional responsibilities. Heat detec-



"Soy el podólogo," [I'm the podiatrist] says Santos. He is in charge of identifying and treating hoof health problems in the herd where he's employed.

tion and the delivery of ovulation synchronization injections are now popular jobs for Hispanic employees. On some dairies, Hispanic employees are also performing AI. And they've been trained to identify lameness and often trim hooves.

The calf barn has probably benefited the most from Hispanic employees' being trained to work outside the milking parlor. Caring for heifers from their first day to their first service is an important job that many Hispanic employees now perform.

There are many reasons why Hispanic employees are diversifying in their job duties, but two of the biggest reasons for this change are:

1. The quality of the Hispanic workforce.
2. The decline in the number of trained herd managers. Dairy managers and owners are having more difficulty in finding trained herd managers, and vacancies can be empty for months. A dairy can't stop operating, so many managers have decided to fill the gaps with current Hispanic employees who have a record of competence and high performance.

Greg Coffta is the bilingual dairy support specialist based in the Genesee County Cornell Cooperative Extension office.



Eliodoro, a calf caretaker, is a valued on his dairy for his dedication to the calves and his ability to identify calves on the verge of getting sick.

To learn more...

If you or someone you know are in need of dairy employee training in Spanish, the Cornell Cooperative Extension offers a program to address that need. Please contact Greg Coffta at (585) 208-8546 for more information.