



IMPACT STATEMENT

Communication and Understanding Help Dairy Managers and Hispanic Employees Weather the Economic Storm

The Need

Difficult financial times have forced businesses in nearly all industries to operate on leaner budgets and tighten their belts. The dairy industry does not escape this trend, and in fact, it may be even more difficult for a dairy farm to endure. In most business models the producer or seller can dictate the price for their product, yet dairy farms are basically doomed to cope with fixed pricing that is out of their control. At a time when every last red cent is vital, dairy producers must work with variables that are within their control and that do not raise the cost of production. They furthermore, must try to be more efficient and frugal, using fewer resources to get the same job done. In some cases, difficult decisions must be made about cutting time out of employee schedules and even laying off less productive employees. As if these obstacles weren't enough already, dairy producers have to additionally deal with language and cultural barriers when managing their Spanish-speaking employees. This has led to miscommunications, misunderstandings and mistakes which all cost money at some level. There is a continuing need for Spanish language services on dairy farms, especially when good employee management can increase efficiency, frugality and overall financial wellbeing.

Extension's Response

The NWNY team has offered a Hispanic dairy employee training for nearly 2 years now, and it has seen wide popularity across the nine-county region not to mention the entire state. Beginning in January 2009, the specialist employed by the team began to field requests for more than just standard training sessions or employee staff meetings. As the need for more intense employee management arose, so did the need for better training related to money-saving tactics. The bilingual extension specialist developed a talk on the economic woes of the dairy industry and explained to employees what is happening and how they can help. He also began helping managers to retain and motivate their best employees, to speak with employees about schedule changes/reductions and even dismissal of less productive employees.

The Results

Participating dairy farms are able to effectively deliver the difficult messages about the economic times to their Spanish-speaking employees. Although cuts in the number of hours worked and lay-offs are not inherently positive messages to communicate, dairy producers are able to be as forthright and realistic with their employees as they deserve. This has in turn garnered more teamwork and solidarity with the farm owners/managers from Spanish-speaking employees. It has moreover, inspired and challenged some employees to fully participate in training and to make use of that training for gains in overall efficiency. Fortunately, most participating Spanish-speaking employees have taken pride in tightening their belts right along with the farm owners / managers and in knowing that they can help the farm survive.



Dairy farm owners/operators discuss changes in sick cow treatment protocols with their Spanish-speaking assistant herdsman.