



J. Dairy Sci. 101:1–13
<https://doi.org/10.3168/jds.2018-14592>

© 2018, THE AUTHORS. Published by FASS Inc. and Elsevier Inc. on behalf of the American Dairy Science Association®.
 This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>).

Evaluation by employees of employee management on large US dairy farms

Phillip T. Durst,^{*1} Stanley J. Moore,^{*} Caroline Ritter,[†] and Herman W. Barkema[†]

^{*}Michigan State University Extension, Michigan State University, East Lansing 48824

[†]Department of Production Animal Health, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Calgary, Calgary, AB T2N 1N4, Canada

ABSTRACT

Employees, many of whom are not native English speakers, perform the majority of work on large US dairy farms. Although management of employees is a critical role of dairy owners and managers, factors that improve employee engagement and retention are not well known. Objectives were to (1) identify key dairy farm employee management issues based on employee perceptions, (2) evaluate strengths and weaknesses of farms based on employee responses, (3) investigate differences between Latino and English-speaking employees, and (4) investigate differences in perception between employers and employees. Employees from 12 US dairy farms (each with a minimum of 10 employees) were interviewed by phone following a questionnaire provided. Employees provided their responses to 21 Likert scale questions and 8 open-ended questions. There was a wide range in employee turnover among farms (<10 to >100%). Latino employees had much shorter tenure and were more often employed in milking and livestock care than English-speaking employees. Employee perceptions differed among farms regarding whether they would recommend their farm as a place to work, teamwork within the dairy, whether rules were fairly applied, availability of tools and equipment, clear lines of supervision, and recognition for good work in the previous 15 d. Latino employees (n = 91) were more positive in many of these measures than their English-speaking counterparts (n = 77) but less often provided ideas to their employer on how to improve the business. Employers, surveyed on how they thought their employees would answer, underestimated employee responses on several questions, particularly the interest of employees in learning about dairy. When asked to cite 3 goals of the operation, there were differences among

owners, managers, and employees. Although employees rated their commitment to the farm and their interest in learning as high, based on turnover, there was an obvious disparity between reality and ideal employee management. Consequently, employers should act on identified management shortfalls to improve employee retention.

Key words: employee, management, turnover

INTRODUCTION

Large dairy farms (>500 cows) constitute only 6.7% of US dairy farms but account for 64% of annual milk production (USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2014). Dairy herd size has increased in past decades and is expected to continue increasing (Barkema et al., 2015); consequently, the importance of employees will continue to grow. Dairy labor is increasingly provided by immigrants (Schenker and Gunderson, 2013), with 51% of all US dairy labor estimated to be foreign-born employees (Adcock et al., 2015). The ability of those workers to speak English may be limited (Maloney et al., 2016). Furthermore, they are less likely to understand farm goals or receive primary training from other employees compared with their English-speaking counterparts (Erskine et al., 2015). Compounding the challenge of employee management is that dairy employees, whether immigrants or locals, are increasingly likely to lack a farm background (Fuhrman, 2002).

The cost of employee turnover on dairy farms is high (Billikopf and González, 2012). Furthermore, high turnover on some farms makes it more difficult to hire new workers. Employee turnover is a complex issue but is affected by management of employees (Daouk-Öyry et al., 2014). Labor supply, including migrant labor, has tightened in the last few years. Based on US Census Bureau data, there was a 62% decrease in average number of annual arrivals from Mexico in 2010 to 2014 compared with 2000 to 2009 (Camarota and Zeigler, 2016). Due to immigration policies, birth rates, other job opportunities, and changes in what work people are willing to do, it is anticipated that fewer individuals will be available for dairy farm work in the future.

Received February 15, 2018.

Accepted April 14, 2018.

¹ Corresponding author: durstp@msu.edu

Staffing a dairy farm is more than just having an employee in each position; ideally, it is having productive, high-performing employees. Such employees have been termed “engaged,” dating back to the work of Kahn (1990), who started with the premise that employees can use varying degrees of themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally in the roles they perform. Billikopf (2003) described workers who were mentally absent or disengaged—that is, the worker was present but their mind was somewhere else. Managing employees is recognized as a principal function of farm management (Hadley et al., 2002; Hagevoort et al., 2013), but it is still an area in need of greater development by agricultural owners and managers. For farms to be successful in meeting quality, production, and profitability goals, employers must manage people well and employees must be performing their job to the best of their abilities. Relationships between employee management practices and measures of some aspect of herd performance have been reported [e.g., milk quality (Schewe et al., 2015) and milking efficiency (Rodrigues et al., 2005)]. However, relationships between farm employee management and measures of farm profitability have rarely been studied and only occasionally demonstrated (continued training and farm return on assets; Stup et al., 2006). Although farmers overwhelmingly acknowledge the importance of finding and retaining good employees and even of motivating employees with positive feedback (Bewley et al., 2001; Caraviello et al., 2006; Kayitsinga et al., 2017), interest in improving employee management has been limited. A survey of Wisconsin dairy farmers reported that employee management was of little interest to farmers who planned to expand (ranked sixth; Cabrera and Janowski, 2011) and of interest to only one-quarter of farmers who planned to expand.

Employee management varies greatly among farms and has implications on profitability and advancement of the business (Estrada, 2017). Success of dairy businesses will increasingly depend on the employer’s ability to develop a competent, motivated, and passionate workforce (Milligan, 2017). Farms that are more effective in employee management will have a sustainable competitive advantage over their peers (Stup et al., 2006; Muger, 2012). However, what motivates dairy farm employees to stay on the same farm and to do a good job has not been well documented. Objectives were therefore to (1) identify key dairy farm employee management issues based on employee perceptions, (2) evaluate strengths and weaknesses of farms based on employee responses, (3) investigate differences between Latino and English-speaking employees, and (4) investigate how employers and employees differ in perception.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Recruitment of Farms

Dairy farms were recruited by distribution of printed materials and verbal communications at dairy conferences and meetings in the state of Michigan and by personal approach in 3 other states: Pennsylvania, New York, and Connecticut. Dairy farm owners participated in the project due to their interest in feedback from their farm’s employees and how that feedback could improve their employee management skills. Participation was voluntary. Participation was limited to farms with a minimum of 10 employees to protect anonymity of employees and gather sufficient feedback on each farm. No distinction was made between full-time and part-time employees. Project personnel enrolled farms during a personal visit to the farm. Follow-up phone conversations and email were also used. Each farm owner signed a contract to participate in the project and was paid a project fee based on the number of employees on the farm. Thirteen dairy farms enrolled in the project between November 2012 and May 2014.

The Michigan State University Institutional Research Board reviewed and approved the study as “exempt.” The survey instrument was prescreened with extension colleagues and 2 farmers.

Questionnaires

The employee questionnaire (see Supplemental File S1; <https://doi.org/10.3168/jds.2018-14592>) included 21 Likert scale questions (scale of 1 to 5, with descriptors) as well as 8 open-ended questions. Likert scale questions were designed with the most positive response indicated by a 5 (with the exception of Q28, for which 4 answers were possible), and descriptors were used for high and low ratings in all cases and for each rating in some cases. On all Likert scale questions, employees were also invited to provide supporting comments to their answers.

Some questions (e.g., Q5, 6, 25, 26, 28) were about employees’ work attitudes, some were about their work environment (e.g., Q13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19), and others were about their perception of their supervisors’ attitudes and behavior (Q20, 21). Thus, the questionnaire attempted to capture various aspects that affected evaluation of the work environment, whether directly or indirectly affected by management, for employees.

A questionnaire was also prepared for employers (owners and managers). The employer questionnaire (Supplemental File S2; <https://doi.org/10.3168/jds.2018-14592>) had 21 Likert scale questions and 5

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/8500950>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/8500950>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)