

**G92-1114-A**

## Hiring Non-Farm Dairy Personnel

**Help for hiring is covered here.**

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As Nebraska dairy farms increase in size and/or the managers advance in age, we see more producers turning to hired labor as a way to maintain a viable farm unit. Hiring a traditional farm worker is easier than hiring an individual without farm experience because the farm worker in some way has experience with the hours required, as well as knowledge of the unexpected problems certain to arise on any farmstead. As the number of workers available with farm backgrounds continues to decrease, many producers are looking at non-farm background workers to meet their needs.

Non-traditional farm employees are not as aware of farm-related problems and are more familiar with the conventional eight hour/five day work week. Therefore, the dairy producer must adequately explain the expected job responsibilities and wage scale before the applicant is hired. This up-front frankness helps eliminate potential problems with new employees.

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

1. A listing of all major duties, position responsibilities and the acceptable lines of command. Make certain the individual applying for the position knows the chain of command.
2. A listing of normal work hours and the anticipated schedule. List all holidays that will be allowed during the year, along with your overtime expectations, sick leave and personal time off.

The items listed above are what you are providing for the employee. It also is vital to list your requirements for the position. They should include:

1. Education and/or training required.

2. Previous work experience. (If your only source of personnel is non-farm oriented, don't list farm experience required. You may want to be certain the individual applying has held a full-time position in the past.)
3. Skills required, such as a driver's license, or ability to drive a commercial vehicle.
4. Any other skill you feel will help the prospective employee meet your job expectations.

The next section should provide a very complete and detailed wage breakdown. The beginning wage and any bonus or incentive programs should be included. Any benefits, such as housing or health benefits, should be listed.

## Incentive Programs

There are a few very simple incentive programs that are relatively easy to provide. Remember, any incentive program should be specific enough to not warrant misinterpretation. It also is advisable to have incentive programs structured 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 is a listing of some common dairy incentives. You can alter the dollar amounts to best suit your individual farm's cash flow and income projections.

1. **Calving interval yearly bonus:**  
\$100 if 14 months; \$200 if 13 months; \$400 if 12.5 months; \$600 if 12 months.
2. \$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.
3. **Milk production incentives:**  
15,000 lb = \$100 per year  
16,000 lb = \$200 per year  
17,000 lb = \$300 per year  
18,000 lb = \$600 per year  
20,000 lb = \$1,200 or more per year

These incentives reflect the increase in management ability required to increase production beyond 17,000 lb. This extra time spent on fine tuning the management should be rewarded.

4. Somatic Cell Count (SCC) Average. Why not split the incentive with your employees that you receive for SCC from the milk plant? Remember, as the SCC decreases, you will see an increase in milk production that also will yield an increase in income. If you initiate an incentive program on SCC, your milkers will pay attention to the small details of the milking procedures that lower SCC.
5. Base an incentive on the percent of calves weaned. Place a certain dollar value on each calf weaned if the total calf crop weaned exceeds 90 or 95 percent on a yearly basis.

These are five simple ways to initiate an easy to manage and documented bonus program. A bonus

program to reward above acceptable levels of job performance enables an employee to try new management skills and maintain interest in attending farm-related meetings, such as extension or agri-business related workshops.

Now that you have clearly quantified what you want in an employee, be certain to design a good clear application for employment. This application should give you enough information to help in formulating your short list to call for interviews.

Remember, non-farm applicants will be familiar with completing an application form. They will not consider it a chore, but a sign that you are a professional and are treating your employees in the same manner.

The most important areas to address in the application for employment are:

- Personal information, such as, name, address, any health-related problems that may interfere with the job responsibilities, education and training. A prospective employee need not state race, creed, marital status, number of children, or age on the application form.
- Be certain to leave ample room for previous employment information. Ask for the employer's address, phone number, salary and length of time worked and job responsibilities. It is usually adequate to go back five years. Use these phone numbers to check out the former employers for references.

Be certain to ask for three references, along with their addresses and phone numbers. Check the references to screen your applicants. Be sure to have the prospective employee sign and date the application form.

After contacting the references and former employers, call the top candidates in for an interview. The interview should include a detailed breakdown of what is expected, line of command and other 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 tell the prospective employee you trust the other workers and treat them as equals.

Before making up your mind, talk to the other employees and ask them, "Can you work with the applicant? Do you feel the applicant will fit in with the group?" Not only will this help in the hiring process, it also will make your current employees feel a part of the team.

A sample employment application form is given in this NebGuide to assist you in formulating your own application. Feel free to take all or any portion of this example application for your personal use. Obtain a copy from your Extension office, or view the [employment application](#) in Adobe Acrobat's Portable Document Format (PDF).

To read, search, or print a PDF document, you'll need Adobe's *Acrobat Reader* or *Exchange* software. You can [download the Reader](#) from our website.

For more information on managing dairy labor, please refer to NebGuide [G91-1064, Managing Dairy Labor](#).



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