

## *ILM Dairy Worker Training Program*

Employees are the backbone of every good dairy. When the day is done, your employees will have been the primary determinant of whether tasks were successfully accomplished. In turn, this will profoundly influence the health of the cows and calves, the efficiency of the operation, the quality and quantity of milk produced, and in large measure the profitability of the whole enterprise. It is small wonder then, that employee issues are receiving increasing attention: communication and personnel management, recruiting, hiring and maintaining a stable and capable workforce.

A major concern for dairy producers is how to provide adequate training for their employees. Some of the needed training involves the specific rules and practices for a particular dairy and its equipment, facilities, and animals. Beyond this, there are general educational needs that are not easily met by the producer and on-farm staff. Such needs may include education about delivering baby calves, appropriate milking techniques that assure high quality milk, heat detection and breeding management, sick cow identification and treatment, and so on.

Where can producers and workers find this training? Unfortunately, there are few resources available. Until recent times the dairy industry has relied on having a pool of available candidates who already have a background or training in dairy production and animal management. As the available workforce has changed it is common for potential workers to arrive with little dairy background, or with little knowledge of the rapidly changing dairy industry and its needs.

Over the last couple of years the Integrated Livestock Management program has tried to get a better feel for the needs that Colorado dairy producers have for training their workers. We have conducted informal polls of dairy producers, and Weld County Extension agent Keith Maxey led an effort to gather producers in several meetings to discuss the details of an appropriate worker training program. Although there is a wide spectrum of opinions on the best method or content of training, there is almost unanimous agreement that a good worker training program would be very useful and important to Colorado dairy producers.

Faculty and students in the ILM have been involved in dairy producer and dairy worker training since the beginning of the program. Seminars and newsletter articles have generally targeted the educational needs of the producer. In contrast, our efforts in worker training have tended to focus on immediate needs where problems have arisen. Producer input suggests that a well formulated program would be more beneficial, and we have been working to meet that need.

The main purpose of this article is to inform producers about the opportunities currently available, as well as our plans for future development of the Dairy Worker Training Program. Well-developed training modules are currently available for teaching dairy workers about milking procedures, mastitis management, disease surveillance/necropsy of dead animals, and calving management. We will continue to develop additional modules in the future, and plan to include training in breeding management, sick cow identification/examination, and lameness.

At this time the calving management training module has been the most popular. Numerous producers have begun to realize how important it can be to improve their workers' understanding of calf delivery. Well trained people can substantially decrease the rate of calf death loss and postpartum problems in the dam following dystocia. Amanda Dye, of Dyecrest Dairy, felt that their rate of stillbirths was higher than it should have been. After participating in a calving management training session and implementing some recommended changes in their calving protocols, the dairy has reduced their newborn calf losses by 50%.

The intent of the program is to maximize the impact of the training for each participating dairy. In the calving management training, for example, all of the workers who deliver calves are brought together for a seminar and hands-on training session, so that they can work together, feel comfortable asking questions, and develop a team effort in adopting new techniques when they return to the farm. The training for this

module is conducted off-site so that the workers can take time without distraction to focus on their learning. It is important that the producer/manager, and the herd veterinarian also participate so that everyone can agree on a protocol to be followed, and have the same shared understanding of their approach. The training is conducted in both English and Spanish. Record-keeping sheets for use on the dairy are also written in both languages. Prior to the training session, ILM personnel visit the dairy, evaluate current practices, and then tailor the training to specific aspects of that operation. While some of the calving management training is conducted off-site, other modules are conducted entirely at the dairy.

The dairy's herd veterinarian plays a crucial role in helping maintain optimal animal health and productivity. Unfortunately, it is often difficult for the veterinarian and the dairy personnel to schedule time for training of this nature. It is the intent of the ILM Dairy Worker Training program to enhance the efforts of both the farm workforce and the veterinarian. Ideally, well trained workers will be better able to team up with the veterinarian to this end.

At present the training program is geared to improve workers' abilities to conduct certain tasks and job responsibilities. We have focused primarily on those issues that directly influence cattle health. In the long term, however, there are numerous other training needs, such as worker health and labor management skills. Injury avoidance and maintenance of worker health are very important as they influence not only worker productivity and welfare, but also a producer's insurance rates.

Dr. Noa Roman-Muniz, an ILM graduate student is integrally involved in the current training program, working closely with Dr. Dave VanMetre and others. In addition, her graduate program is focused on developing assessments of dairy worker injuries and the training needs for injury avoidance. As these efforts progress, we hope to develop a program that can improve productivity and health of the cows and the people who take care of them.

Many producers have advised that a certification program would be ideal. Therefore, another long term goal of this developing program is a system for certifying that an individual worker, or the dairy as a whole has achieved certification in one or several areas of training. Because it will be important to get further input from producers on the best certification strategy, this element of the program has not been developed. A dairy might benefit from reduced insurance rates with certification that their workforce is properly trained in injury avoidance and their facility is structured to reduce injury rates. However, this is a very different goal than rewarding a farm worker for achieving a certain level of training in their job responsibilities.

Your input is extremely useful to the ILM program to help determine the future directions of the Dairy Worker Training program. If you would like to assist us in this regard, or if you would like more information about the current program, please contact Bill Wailes or Frank Garry at CSU.