

Dairy Worker Training

Noa Roman-Muniz, DVM, ILM, CSU

If we took a snapshot of the agricultural workforce of the United States today, this is what the picture would look like: several young Hispanic men and one or two women, also of Hispanic origin. A majority of them would be Spanish-speaking with limited English skills. Farm and animal handling experience would vary from person to person, as would also vary the degree of formal education. Many of these workers would see an entry level position at a farm as a temporary means of employment. A similar picture would be obtained when looking at the dairy workforce in this country.

With that picture in mind, it is not hard to understand why worker training has been identified as one of the issues of great concern among dairy producers, including Colorado producers. Language barriers and other cultural issues together with unknown level of farm and livestock experience, makes training this population a very challenging issue for English speaking dairy producers. Often producers lack educational tools and sufficient Spanish language skills to effectively train their employees on how to take care of cattle. Proper training on job tasks and animal handling is critical to improving herd health, production levels and human and animal safety and well being. Because addressing issues of concern to producers is one of the Integrated Livestock Management goals, we are in the process of developing several courses directed at dairy farm workers. We currently offer several training modules, one of which is Calving Management Training School.

The Calving Management Training School targets the dairy workers engaged in calving management. This bilingual course is divided into a 1.5-2 hour lecture and a 1.5 hour laboratory session. During the lecture, the student is presented with the different stages and progression of a normal calving, and is offered guidelines to decide whether the cow needs assistance. This learning session also includes the most frequently encountered calving problems and techniques to correct them and deliver the calf efficiently and safely. The last part of the presentation touches on proper care of the newborn and the cow immediately after calving. After the lecture, the instructor demonstrates different fetal presentations and techniques to correct the position of the fetus and deliver the calf. The students will also have the opportunity to practice these techniques themselves, working in groups or individually. Questions and comments are encouraged during lecture and the laboratory sessions.

Usually, interested producers contact ILM personnel at CSU and a farm visit is scheduled. During the farm visit, the owner or manager is interviewed and pictures are taken of the calving areas and facilities. It is important to understand the dairy's unique situation and capabilities and get a sense of what management's goals are in order to offer a customized training session in which real problems are addressed and achievable solutions are offered to workers and owners. During this visit, the training session is scheduled. The training takes place at the CSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital. Having workers away from the farm allows us to have their undivided attention and gives them an opportunity to manipulate dead fetuses and practice learned techniques before going back to the dairy to manage real calvings. It is our goal to integrate both workers and management to address managerial questions that may arise during the lecture and to make sure that everyone in the operation is aware of intervention guidelines and recommended procedures offered during class.

Because the content is presented in both English and Spanish, we can reach those individuals whose English skills are limited. The laboratory session reinforces concepts presented in the lecture and reaches those students that prefer practice over theory. A booklet with all the information presented is made for the dairy so students can review the material, and if desired, a CD with the power point presentation used

during the lecture is sent to the dairy for training of future employees or a review for those workers that attended the training session.

Training dairy workers is challenging but very rewarding. Each training session is a learning opportunity for all involved (workers, owners and instructors). Step by step we are transforming our approach to worker education to reach a greater number of people and to impact animal handling and job performance, in such a way that it benefits both herd health and production, and human and animal well being.

For more information on training courses offered, scheduling and fees, contact Dr Frank Garry (970-297-0371 or fgarry@colostate.edu); Dr Dave Van Metre (970-297-1299 or dcvanm@colostate.edu); or Dr Noa Roman-Muniz at inromanm@colostate.edu.