Worker Safety Training on Dairies

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Over the last decade, the population of workers of Hispanic descent in the U.S. dairy industry has increased dramatically. The background experience and work-related training of Hispanics in entry-level positions on Colorado dairies is variable. Hispanic dairy workers, a majority of whom are foreign-born and Spanish speaking, may or may not receive training about the tasks they perform or safety measures necessary.

Across the dairy industry, worker training is inconsistent in content, scope, and extent and may lack relevant cultural and linguistic considerations. All these factors, in the context of an industry known for its high rates of fatal and nonfatal work-related injuries, may explain why Colorado dairy producers have consistently identified more efficient worker training as a priority.

Workers and Owners Surveyed
In 2002, the Integrated Livestock Management (ILM) team conducted a study entitled “Worker Safety Training: Current Status and Future Needs of the Colorado Dairy Industry”. Its goals were to define the existent training practices on dairies in Colorado; identify factors in the workplace to which producers and workers attribute work-related injuries; and define the safety and task-related training needs of entry-level dairy workers.

Experience and training varied tremendously among the interviewed workers. A majority of the workers were Mexican-born, Spanish-speaking and male. The extent of the training reported by workers ranged from no training at all to a combination of verbal and formal instruction, demonstration and written materials. Some workers reported having received safety training along with task-related training, while others reported having received only safety training or task-related training, but not both.

The training reported by the workers frequently differed from that reported by the operator or manager from that same dairy.

The person providing training to the workers was in most cases a co-worker or supervisor, but in rare instances the worker was the operator or manager from that same dairy.

Background opinion regarding the underlying causes of work-related injuries differed from the reports of the workers. Both dairy workers and dairy operators agreed that more formal work safety training is necessary to avoid work-related injuries.

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The reported number of injuries and work days lost per worker per year were very similar between the two groups. Nearly half of the workers interviewed suffered at least one work-related injury in the 12 months prior to the survey, and the average number of work days lost after the injury approximated six days. Almost half of the injuries were seen by a health professional.

Injuries reported by the workers ranged from being stepped on or kicked by cows, to fractured bones as a result of machinery falling on a foot. One-fifth of the workers reported experiencing respiratory problems, and one in seven of all workers reported suffering skin problems related to work.

Perception of Injury Causes Differed
Workers and dairy operators had different opinions regarding the underlying cause of work-related injury. According to the workers, most injuries happened as a result of direct contact with animals, with the workers identifying human error as the most common cause of work-related injuries, more common than direct contact with animals or machinery.

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Reproductive Ultrasound Revisited

By Page Dinsmore, DVM and Kevin McSweeney, DVM Dairy Specialists, ILM, Colorado State Univ., Fort Collins

Over the last five years the use of ultrasound for routine reproductive management in the dairy industry has made major leaps forward. This progress is a result of improved technology, interest, and expertise developed by reproduction specialists, and widespread adoption of estrus synchronization programs which benefit from early pregnancy detection.

Improvements in Technology