
NORTHWEST SUSTAINABLE DAIRIES

LABOR MANAGEMENT



INTRODUCTION

Labor costs account for one of the largest portions of any dairy farm's budget. Dairy farming is a labor intensive industry that requires a wide array of duties to be completed on a daily basis such as milking cows, feeding, health care, and facility management. In addition to the daily activities, employees are also typically needed for seasonal duties such as harvesting feed, applying manure, or irrigating crop land. Because of this, employees are an integral part for the success of a dairy farm.

Northwest dairy farmers recognize the importance of an employee's contribution to the farm. Since Oregon and Washington have two of the highest minimum wage levels in the nation, dairy employees in the Northwest typically receive higher wages than their counterparts in other parts of the nation.

From the first day an employee is hired, *farm labor regulations* need to be followed. Through organized and clear *communication*, employees should be able to understand what is expected of them. By giving special attention to *employee safety*, employees can also feel safe at work. At the end of the day, it is critical that employees receive fair *compensation* and be rewarded for good workmanship.

This document outlines these labor expectations and responsibilities associated with the Northwest dairy industry in greater detail.



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FARM LABOR REGULATIONS

Guiding Principle: State and federal regulations should be followed for all employees.

Expectation: Employers must abide by state and federal regulations for employing farm personnel.

State and federal regulations must be followed when hiring and managing employees.

Background: State and federal labor regulations outline procedures to be practiced with all employees:

- All dairy employees must receive at least the state minimum wage and be paid at least monthly.
- All dairy employees must receive meal and/or rest breaks (depending on time period worked).
- Employment specifications for minors must be followed.
- Records must be kept and made available to the appropriate entities upon request.
- New employees must complete an Employment Eligibility Verification form (I-9) . Employers must verify the employment eligibility and identity documents presented by the employee and record the document information on the form. The completed form must be retained.
- Employers provide Workers' Compensation Insurance to cover costs associated with injuries or illness from the workplace.

Note: Labor requirements for the State of Washington can be found at: lni.wa.gov/. Labor requirements for the State of Oregon can be found at: boli.state.or.us/.

Verification: Review appropriate documents. Talk with employee(s) and employer.



COMMUNICATION

Guiding Principle: Effective communication is essential for providing a positive, understandable, and safe work environment.

Expectation: Communication with employees should be performed in a manner that is clearly understood by employees and documented. Written employee handbooks and manuals should be developed that clearly explain workplace policies and procedures.

Background: Communication is important in every aspect for every business. For dairy farms, this should include several key areas:

- Hiring and firing procedures
- Training materials
- Standard operating procedures
- Employee reviews

Formal documentation of these materials helps employees clarify what is expected of them and lessens the potential for legal challenges resulting from poor communication practices.

Verification: Review documentation materials available for employees.

A. STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

Expectation: Standard operating procedures (SOPs) should be prepared and made available to all workers. Standard operating procedures should be provided in a language that is easily understood, especially in cases where workers are non-native English speakers. Employees should receive training associated with each SOP they are responsible for.

Communication with employees should be clear and concise for the benefit of the employee, the dairy cattle, the environment, and milk quality and safety.

With proper training, employees will have a clear understanding of what is expected of them and how management decisions are implemented.



Background: Well-written SOPs provide direction, improve communication, reduce training time, and improve work consistency (Stup R., 2001).

Veterinarian advice is recommended when developing animal health-related SOPs.

Note: For assistance writing SOPs, refer to “Standard Operating Procedures: A Writing Guide.” found online at pubs.cas.psu.edu/freepubs/pdfs/ud011.pdf.

Verification: Review SOPs. Talk with employee(s) and employer.

B. TRAINING

Expectation: All employees must be trained and have adequate supervision to ensure they are educated and competent within their job duties. If not, retraining may be necessary. Training (both written and verbal) should be provided in a language that is easily understood, especially in cases where employees are non-native English speakers. During training, ample opportunity should be provided to answer an employee’s questions. Documentation of training, and retraining, should also be completed.

Background: Training is the single most important job undertaken when hiring a new employee (Keown, 2005). Training can: help orient new employees to their new work environment, enable employees to fulfill their job duties in a safe, appropriate manner, help reduce the potential for problems that can arise due to improper operating procedures, and lead to more efficient running of the dairy farm. Training is an investment into the employee’s future and mutually benefits the employee, the farm, the community, and the dairy industry at large.

Training should go beyond basic standard operating procedures (SOPs) because SOPs by themselves are not sufficient to teach all of the appropriate working skills (Stup, R). For example, when training employees how to assist with a difficult calving, the SOP will likely explain in a step by step fashion how to assist; but knowing things such as when to assist, how to use good hygiene, and why things should be done a certain way are more thoroughly taught with hands-on training or the equivalent.

*Note: Information about animal care can be found in the **ANIMAL CARE AND WELFARE** section of Northwest Sustainable Dairies. Information about milk collection can be found in the **MILK QUALITY AND SAFETY** section of Northwest Sustainable Dairies. Information regarding the handling of manure can be found in the **ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP** section of Northwest Sustainable Dairies.*

Verification: Visual assessment of employees working. Review training protocols. Talk with employee(s) and employer.



SAFETY

Guiding Principle: Careful effort should be focused on creating a work environment that is as safe as possible.

A. WORKPLACE SAFETY

Expectation: The workplace must be safe for all workers. Workers must be properly trained in safety procedures. Unsafe conditions must be corrected immediately.

Background: Safety should be a priority issue on the farm. Improving farm safety can result in fewer accidents, lower injury and illness rates, decrease workers' compensation costs, increase employee morale, and lower production losses.

A safe workplace is extremely important for employee, as well as dairy cattle, well-being.

Dairy farm safety should be promoted through proper training, and effective communication.

Note: Information for workplace safety is available through the Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OR-OSHA) or Washington State Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH). Both Oregon and Washington offer confidential, no-cost safety, health, or ergonomic consultation for dairy farms. In Oregon, information about consultations can be found online at cbs.state.or.us/osha/consultation.html or by calling (800) 922-2689. In Washington, information about consultations can be found online at lni.wa.gov/Safety/Basics/Assistance/Consultation/about.asp.

Verification: Review training protocols. Observe hazardous work areas. Talk with employee(s) and employer.

B. EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN

Expectation: An Emergency Response Plan should be developed and easily accessible to dairy farm workers. The plan should be written in a language(s) understood by all workers.

Background: In the event of an emergency (flood, fire, etc.) rapid communication is essential. The Emergency Response Plan should include the name(s) and phone number(s) of important people to contact (such as the herd manager, owner, and veterinarian) and be posted in a prominent location(s) on the farm that can be easily accessed by employees. The Emergency Response Plan should also be written in a language(s) that is easily understood by workers. The Emergency Response Plan should be made a part of regular safety/training meetings with the employees.

Verification: Review Emergency Response Plan. Talk with employee(s) and employer.



COMPENSATION

Guiding Principle: Compensation of employees should be fair and good work should be rewarded.

Expectation: Workers must be compensated for work completed on the dairy farm. Compensation should be fair, based on the current labor market, and reward good job performance.

Background: Employee compensation should be fair, equitable, and competitive for the market. Providing fair compensation is valuable for retaining competent farm employees. Compensation may not be limited to employee wages. Compensation may also include insurance benefits, incentive programs, employee housing, retirement plans, or personal use of company vehicles or equipment. It is important for incentives to be concrete and measurable. Items to consider in making compensation fair include: length of employment, employee responsibilities, amount of training, and incentives for performance.

Workers should be compensated for good job performance on the farm.

Compensation can include a variety of rewards, but should be fair and appropriate.

Note: A compensation survey can be conducted to determine if employee compensation is fair. A survey is available online at the Dairy Herd Management website: dairyherd.com/directories.asp?pgID=724&ed_id=4579.

Verification: None, due to confidentiality.



REFERENCES

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For more information, please contact Northwest Sustainable Dairies (www.northwestsustainabledairies.org).

