

IS THE DAIRY FARM TRAINING WORKING?



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Contents

Literature report:.....	3-4
Methodology.....	4-15
Survey wrap up.....	16
Where to from here.....	17-18
Conclusion.....	18
References.....	19
Appendix 1.....	20-25

IS THE DAIRY FARM TRAINING WORKING

Literature report:

I want to find if the current training system in the dairy sector is delivering what farmers need. I chose this topic as I have been hearing and seeing a lot of frustration in the off farm training of Dairy farm staff.

Introduction

Is there an issue with how dairy farm staff are being trained off farm and is this giving the results the farmers need. For the dairy sector to continue to farm in New Zealand we need to make sure that our staff are well trained in all aspects of farming not just the day to day work but also financial skills and we now also need to train the soft skills of management as well as the importance of how we are perceived by the Urban sector.

Is it important to have clear roles in a business and why is this and what are the outcomes if we get this right or wrong.

In *The Inescapable Laws of Organizational Structure*,

1. Fritz also argues that organizations are structured either to *advance* or to *oscillate*. Advancement is a positive move from one state to another that acts as a foundation for further advances. Fundamental to structural advancement is the concept of *resolution* when an outcome is achieved and a particular problem is resolved. According to Fritz (1996:6), management in an organization that is structured to advance coordinate 'individual acts into an organizational tapestry of effective strategy.' When all the individuals in this utopian organization are acting together, the result is synergy, allowing the achievement of 'enormous feats.'
2. The alternative is structural oscillation. Fritz (1996:6) explains this: 'Oscillating behaviour is that which moves from one place to another, but then moves back towards its original position.' So many organizations set out on some change program, full of enthusiasm and energy. But, six months later, the enthusiasm has evaporated and the program peters out leaving very little changed

Employees Who Know Their Jobs Make Better Work Decisions

Employees who do not have a clear understanding of how their jobs fit into the overall work picture of their organization are more likely to exhibit carelessness and the inability to make clear distinctions on which aspects of their job are most important when making ratings about their work assignments, according to a study conducted by two DePaul University industrial-organizational psychologists.

“This study clearly shows that employees vary greatly with regard to how accurately they understand the critical function of their jobs,” say **Erich C. Dierdorff** and **Robert S. Rubin**, both professors in the Kellstadt Graduate School of Business at DePaul.

Their findings were published in the fall issue of *Personnel Psychology*.

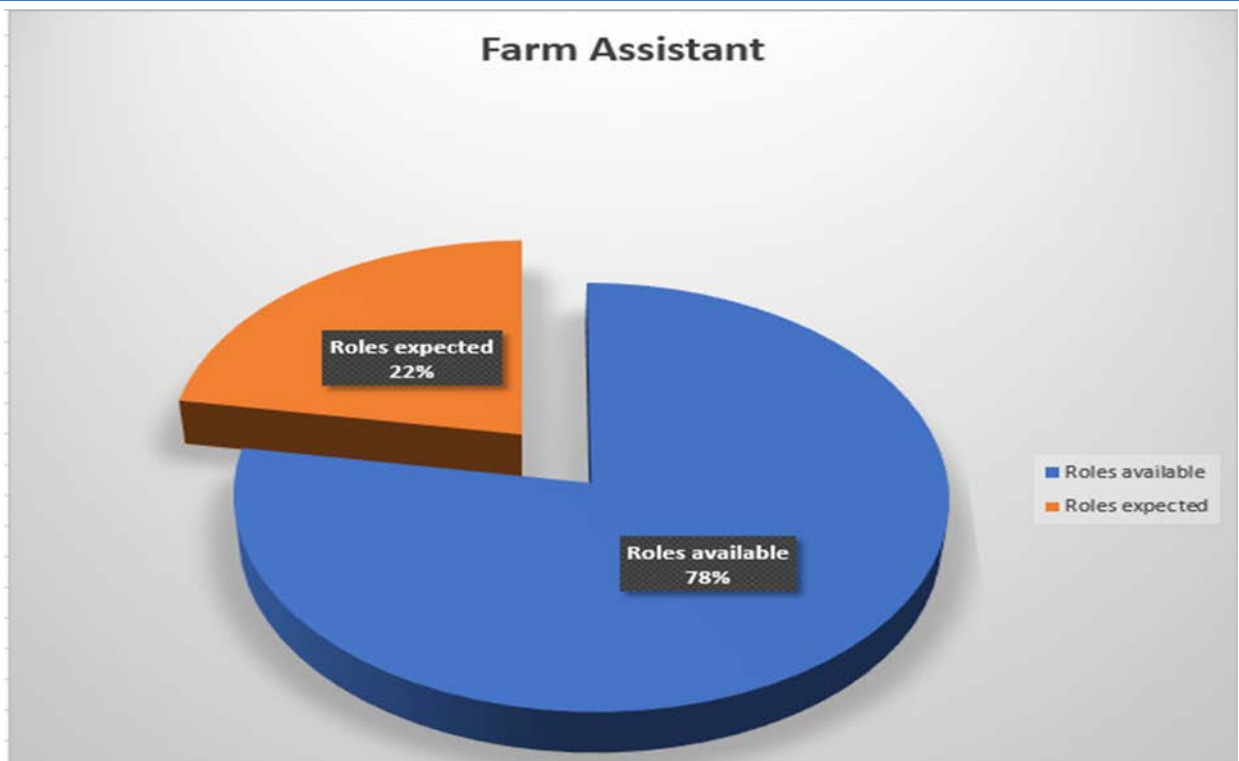
Methodology:

I sent out a survey to 15 Farmers and Land owners and from the returned surveys compiled the data in to graphs The survey is in Appendix 1

Farm Assistant

Dairy NZ has no less than 73 roles and responsibilities that a Farm staff member should be able to do.

Farm assistant expectation graph



- For the farm assistant: 16 of the 73 roles are expected by farmers
- The survey showed that only 22% of these roles are expected of a dairy assistant
- 78% of the roles and responsibilities on Dairy NZ were seen as not important for this position.

The three most important roles to managers surveyed were

- Animal welfare act is followed
- Environmental awareness
- Machinery maintenance

The most important attributes for a dairy assistant were

- Attitude ,100% of all surveyed said a good attitude was the most important attribute for a Farm assistant
- Work Ethic was more important than ability
- Drug free is in every survey which shows that this is a real concern to employers

What is this telling us? 78% of the roles that are on Dairy NZ for a farm assistant are not seen as important, “as” the desire of the farm assistant to do the job. All other aspects of the job can be taught. This does show that the roles expected are correct however not as relevant as attitude.

The off farm training that is offered by the industry has a 50/50 split on its relevant to the farm assistant role.

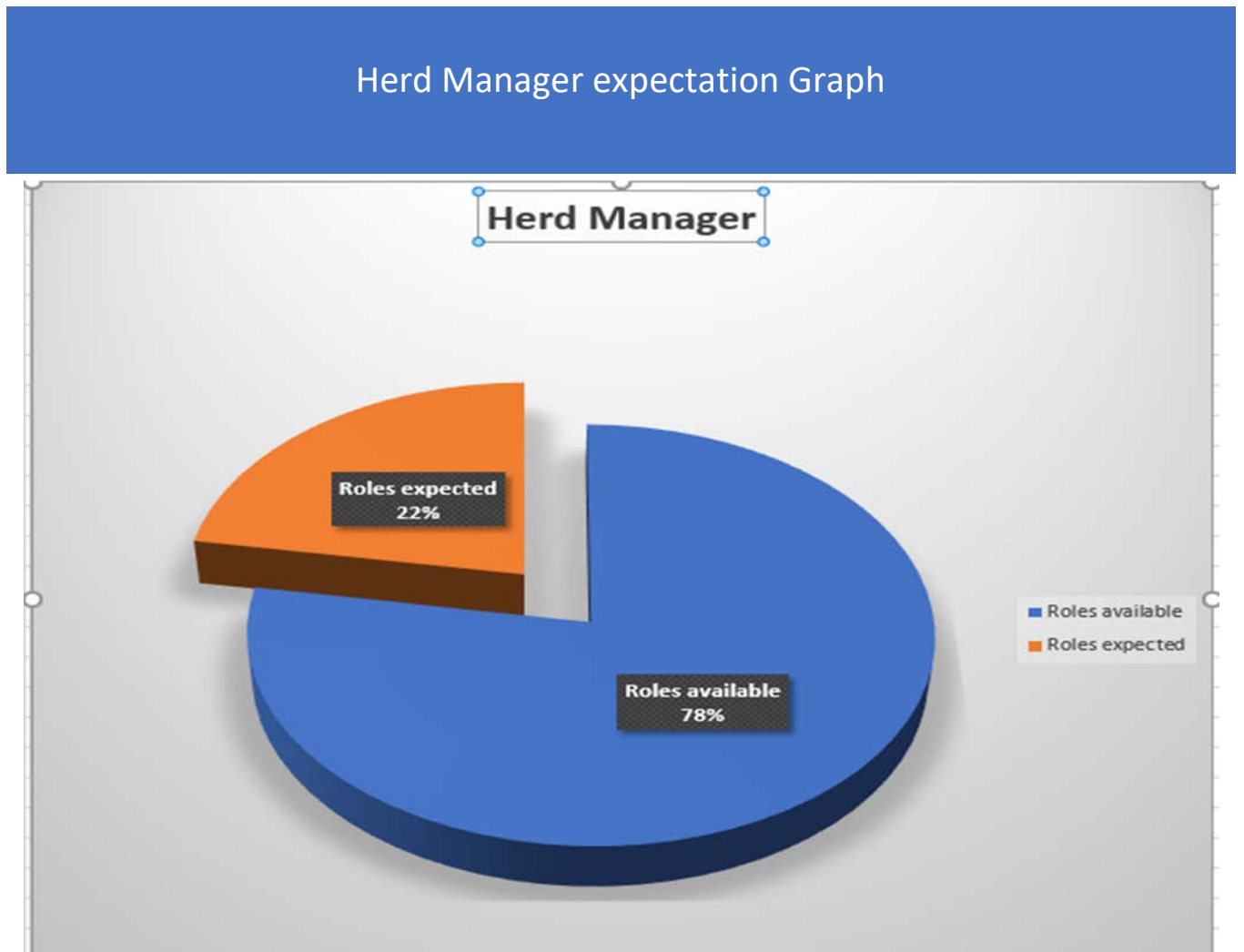
Why is this?

50 % said they did not have the time to give the relevant training to the standard required and therefore it was relevant.

50% said it was not relevant as the skills needed to be a dairy assistant where hands on skills that can be taught on farm. This would suggest that the only relevant training for a Farm assistant is in the understanding of Health and Safety.

Herd manager

Dairy NZ has no less than 73 roles and responsibilities that a Farm staff member should be able to do.



- The survey showed only 22% of these roles are expected of a Herd Manager
- For a Herd Manager 21 of the 73 roles are expected by farmers
- 78% of the roles and responsibilities on Dairy NZ were seen as not important for this position.

The four most important roles to managers surveyed were:

- Animal welfare act is followed
- The dairy diary is filled in properly
- Animal health records are kept
- Call vet for sick animals

The most important attributes for a dairy assistant were

- Self-management
- Pasture management
- Vehicle skills – motor bike riding, Tractor driving and feeding out
- At least 2 years' experience
- Full driver's license
- Fencing
- Primary ITO level 4 or equivalent

What is this telling us?

52% of the roles in Dairy NZ are not relevant for a Herd Manager. What is seen as important is daily farming skills to look after and feed the animals. The ability to be given a task and to either ask questions or get on and do the job. A level of self-pride and the ability to look after one's self is seen as key to being in this role.

Off farm training is important to be a good herd manager however the level 4-time frame means most herd managers do not have this basic technical knowledge when coming into this role.

One of the over whelming comments here was that Level 4 knowledge is needed here but takes too long to get through.

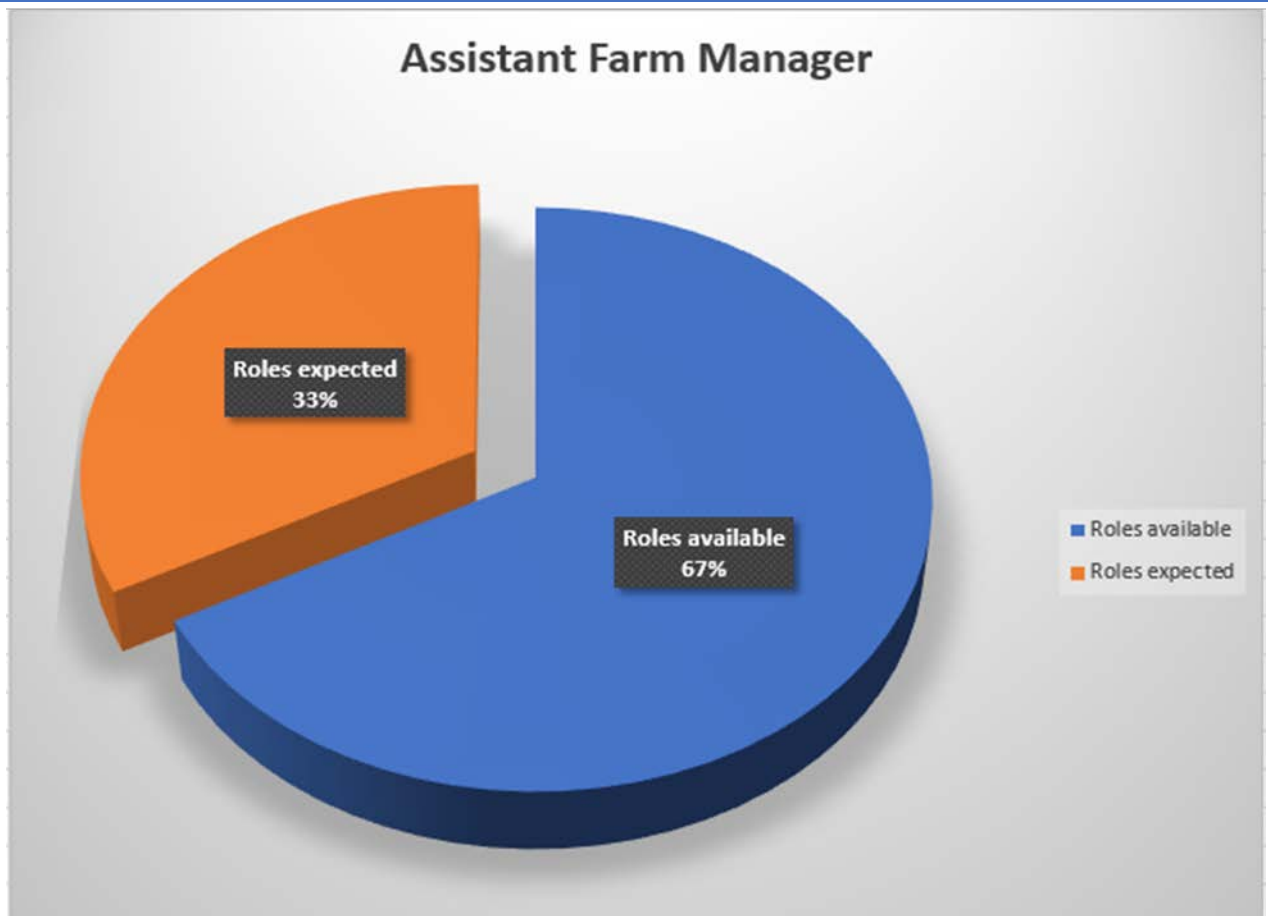
Why is this?

The off farm training is not targeted enough to the level that a herd Manager is working at and the time frame to achieve level 4 is too long and the contents was not relevant to the on farm work. The main focus being practical farming skills are not being taught well enough for the Herd Manager.

Assistant Farm Manager (2IC)

Dairy NZ has no less than 73 roles and responsibilities that a Farm staff member should be able to do.

Assistant Farm Manager



- For an Assistant Herd Manager 24 of the 73 roles are expected by farmers
- The survey showed only 33% of these roles are expected of an Assistant Herd Manager
- 67% of the roles and responsibilities on Dairy NZ were seen as not important for this position.

The five most important roles to Assistant Herd managers surveyed were:

- Animal welfare act followed
- KPI's are achieved
- Follow feed budget
- Environmental awareness
- Machinery Maintenance

The most important attributes for a dairy assistant were

- Good communication skills
- People skills
- Time management
- Self-management
- Use all farm vehicles
- Minimum 4 years' experience

What is this telling us?

67% of the roles and responsibilities from Dairy NZ are not seen as relevant for an Assistant Farm manager. What is seen as important are the skill to communicate clearly get the team under them to get the work done. We are starting to see the inclusion of soft skill into this role. These are the skills needed to get the fellow staff members to do their jobs and to keep them on task and on time.

Off farm training:

The development of soft skills is seen to be important for an assistant herd manager. However, these are also skills that most trainers are not qualified to teach and are not offered at a good enough level through a level 4 course or the equivalent.

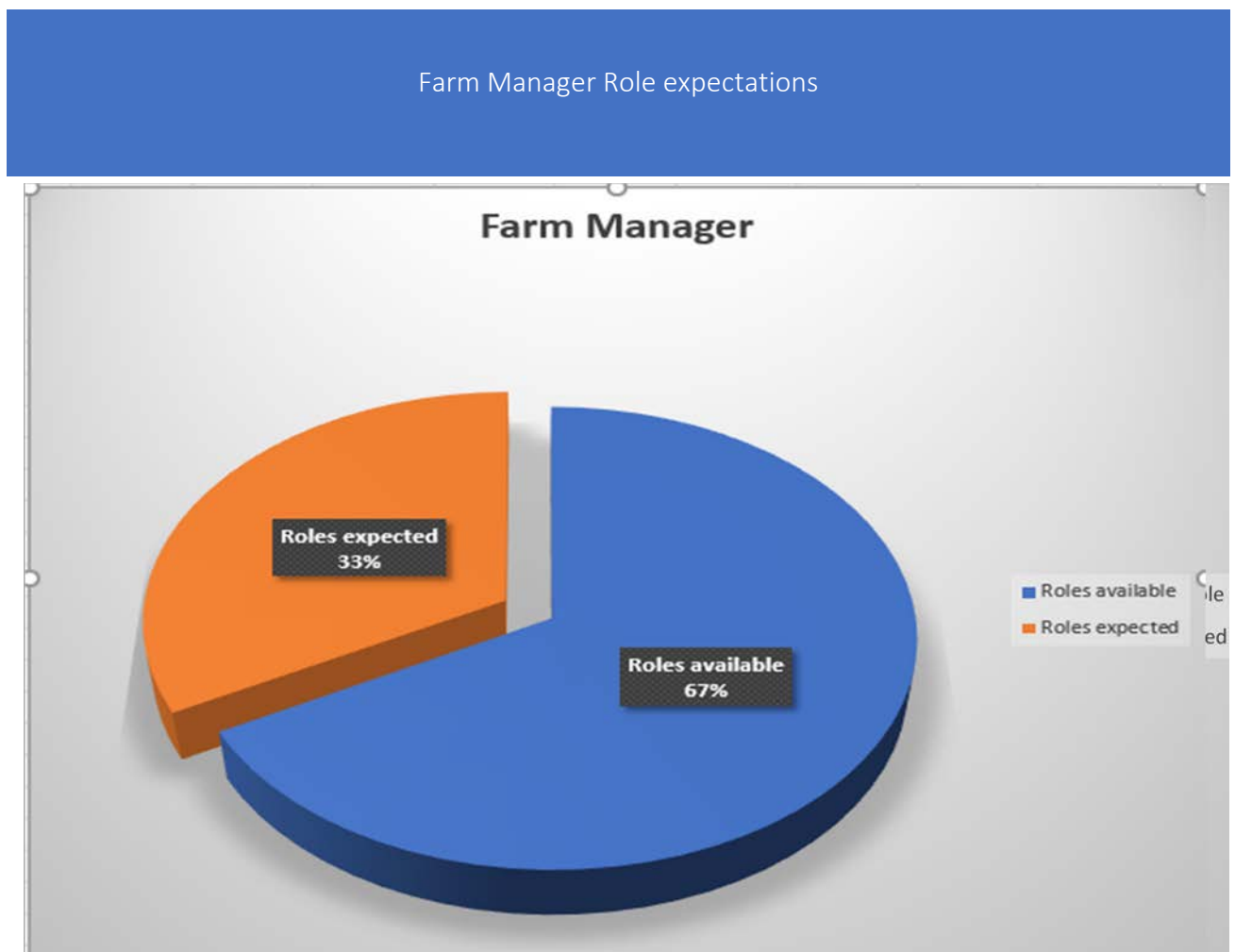
So, if this is the case where do managers and farm owners go to get these skills let alone teach them to their 2IC. The fact is that the dairy industries current off farm training does not offer it, yet it is in their roles and responsibilities list for a 2IC. This means managers and owners have to go outside the industry to get these skills. This is fine if you know where to go and who to look for.

It is not good enough to say we can't offer everything when it is such a vital part of staff development at this level and has been shown to have direct effect on staff performance and moral through to productivity.

What this suggest is that the off-farm training at this point is not meeting the expectations and what is required on farm.

Farm Manager

Dairy NZ has no less than 73 roles and responsibilities that a Farm staff member should be able to do.



- For Farm Manager 24 of the 73 roles are expected by farmers
- The survey showed only 33% of these roles are expected of a Farm Manager
- 67% of the roles and responsibilities on Dairy NZ were seen as not important for this position.

The eight most important roles For a Farm Managers surveyed were:

- Animal Welfare act is Followed
- Be in charge of mating
- Staff concern are dealt with
- Staff performance is monitored
- Set Financial budgets
- Follow farm budget
- All Staff matters (hiring, discipline and staffing levels)
- Machinery checks

The most important attributes for a dairy assistant were:

- Staff Management skills
- Record Keeping
- A clear understanding of Health and Safety
- Minimum of 6 years' experience
- Financial understanding of how to set and read a budget

What is this telling us?

To become a manager, you need to be a 2IC for at least 2 years.

That at this point in their career the soft skills are well established and there is a clear understanding of financial budgets and how to use them.

There has to be a clear ability to not just tell staff what to do but to also motivate and get the best out of their team.

At this point there is an expectation that the farm manager has the ability to set financial budgets and follow them. It would suggest that in the off-farm training is over complicated.

There are good simple tool available to help set a farm budget these have been developed by industry leaders. The ability to follow a budget need only be the ability to follow cash flow. Profit and loss statements are not that relevant to a Farm Manager on a monthly basis.

Farm Manager. It is only at this point they are expected to be part of the financial side of the business. Is there enough training going into the 2IC to get them to the level of financial knowledge to become a farm manager?

Pod Manager

Dairy NZ has no less than 73 roles and responsibilities that a Farm staff member should be able to do.



- For a Pod Manager 16 of the 73 Roles are expected
- The Survey showed only 22% of the roles are expected of the Pod Manager
- This means 78% of the roles and responsibilities on Dairy NZ were seen as not important for this position.

The ten most important roles For a Farm Managers surveyed were:

- Set Financial Budgets
- Animal welfare act is followed
- KPI's are achieved
- 100% compliance
- Staff concerns are dealt with
- Ensure mating is correctly implemented
- Analyse reports
- Set production budgets
- Set Animal health policy
- Environmental awareness

The most important attributes for a dairy assistant were:

- High level of communication skills
- Have had Skin in the Game
- High level of farming knowledge
- Human Relations Skills
- Financial Management
- 15 years' minimum Experience in Dairy Farming
- Has come up through the dairy Farming system
- Problem solver

What is this telling us?

A high level of knowledge is required at this level and a lot of experience. At this level qualifications are no longer as important as having come through the Dairy system, having had skin in the game (having your own money in the farm you run) and over 15 years' experience.

The reason for having to have such a long time in the dairy industry is this will help the Pod Manager to have the correct tools to deal with the variations in every season and know how to react to minimise adverse effects on the business.

It is expected at this level that further training is undertaken by the Pod manager themselves to improve their knowledge and widen their contact base

The Survey Wrap up

The survey data has shown that staff are promoted through the dairy industry before they have the skill to do the role they have been promoted to. The main reason for this is the rapid growth over the past 20 years in the dairy industry and the shortage of good staff coming into the industry.

The training from the dairy sector is adequate for the Farm Assistant and the Herd Manager.

From this point on there is a large part of what the Industry producers require is not being met by the industry trainers (the soft skills). The survey has shown the soft skills are vital in the development of staff at the 2IC level and up, yet very little if no training is offered by the Dairy Industry Training arm.

The result of this is senior staff that have not learnt the soft skills needed to get the best from the rest of the staff. This has a negative effect on team performance.

These soft skills of lack thereof in the dairy industry is one of the reasons the dairy industry has developed a reputation of being hard on staff and treating staff poorly. The training sector of the dairy industry has not offered the correct type of training to give senior staff the tools needed to excel at their roles and lift the industry profile.

Why is this important?

In this industry in the future we will require a Social Licence to Operate (SLO)

As mentioned by Pat Deavol in his article Rebuilding dairy farming's social licence to operate with the public.

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/farming/98291980/rebuilding-dairy-farmings-social-license-to-operate-with-the-public>

The industry training sector has been slow to bring in the necessary skills to meet the demands of the public. Instead relying on the tried and true and hoping the SLO would go away.

Where to from here?

1. Is this still the correct behaviour to continue with?
2. Can we do this differently?
3. What do other industries do?

Let's answer some of these questions.

1. Is this still the correct behaviour to continue with?

No This is not the correct way to behave.

We have to change the way we behaviour when it comes to training of our staff. As Albert Einstein said

“The definition of stupidity is doing the same thing over and over expecting a different result”

For the past 20 years this is exactly what the dairy industry has done in the training sector. There have been various reincarnations of staff training which have given the same result (stupidity accord to Albert). It is time that the training sector looked outside its own four walls. This means bringing in experts in the soft areas of management at the 2 IC level.

By the time a staff member is a 2IC they must have all the basic farming skill learned as second nature and this is easily taught by the manager and the current off farm training system.

2. Can we do this differently?

Yes, we can but, we do not just need to change the current training system but also what it is trying to achieve.

Once staff are past the herd manager level. It is worth pointing out that from the 2IC level on the staff member is a vital part of a multimillion dollar business, yet we still look at it as just farming.

The biggest issue here is going to be the willingness to fully change the training arm to deliver what is required.

3. What do other industries do?

Depending on their size other industry businesses either get professionals to come in and give training in specific areas or they will have personnel capable of doing the training.

There are a lot of trainers in the soft skills in New Zealand but at the moment in the dairy sector if you want to get this training you have to go find it yourself. This can be hard if you do not know what soft skills are.

What the survey showed is there is a need for the industry to provide access to these soft management skills either with direct training or as a vehicle to other organisations that are aligned with the dairy industry and this needs to happen a lot earlier than they are currently offered if they are offered at all.

In conclusion:

The training is partially working . For Farm assistants and Herd managers the off farm training offered by the Dairy industry is good and gives the skills that are required.

To get senior management (2IC and up) trained to the necessary level to not just do their role but also lead the dairy industry in the future there needs to be a change in how and what they are taught. Only teaching them how to farm and run a business is no longer enough. They need to learn the soft skills as well.

To date the training sector has had **structural oscillation** in its attempt to bring in change what we need now is **structural advance**.

If there can be better alignment of the training sector and the needs of farmers we will be able to as Fritz R states in Corporate Tides

the result is synergy, allowing the achievement of 'enormous feats.'

References

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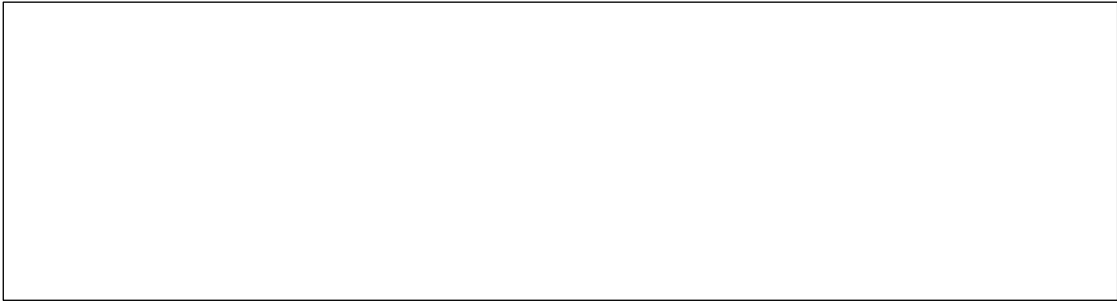
Survey on Roles and Responsibilities in Farming

1. What farm area do you manage?
2. How many cows do you manage? [Click here to enter text.](#)
3. Do you feel we need clear role and responsibilities on farm [Choose an item.](#)
4. Why do you think this is?

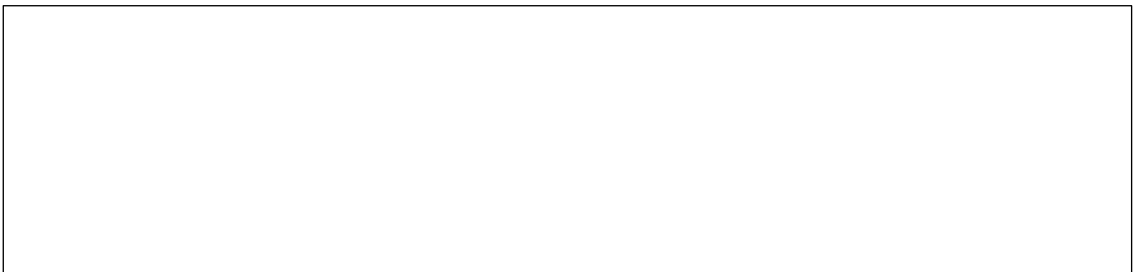
5. What are your expectations from the following positions and how much experience do you expect someone to have before obtaining this role

Farm Assistant

Herd Manager

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Assistant Farm Manager (2IC)

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Farm Manager

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Pod Manager

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6. How relevant do you find the current off farm training for the positions in your business?

1 2 3 4 5 OR Choose an item.
Low circle one High

7. Have you considered keeping training of your staff inside your business?

8. What would be your reasons for doing this or not doing this?

9. For staff that do off farm training are they able implement their learnings on farm?

Choose an item.

10. What level of understanding do they come back with?

1 2 3 4 5 OR Choose an item.
Low circle one High

11. What would you like to see different with off farm training?

12. Does the industry offer enough training? Choose an item.

13. If yes why do you think this?

14. What are the 10 most important jobs for each of the following position

JOB ON FARM	Farm assistant	Herd manager	Asst farm manager	Farm manager	Pod Manager
handle stock	✓				
help draft stock in yards					
moving stock around farm					
identify sick stock and report					
aware of public perception					
ensure stock have feed and water					
drive a tractor					
recognise normal healthy animals					
immediately reports animal ill health					
tail paint cows for mating					
handle bulls safely					
basic understanding of bulling cows					
identify animals correctly					
give basic treatments to stock					
prepare stock for transport					
correctly dispose of dead stock					
understand good quality pasture					
apply magnesium to pasture					
know common signs of health issues					
implement health treatments					
identify weeds in pasture					
run the cow shed					
milk cows					
identify issue with milking plant					
maintain cow shed plant					
treat sick cows					
dry off cows					
understand the concept of mating					
draft on heat stock					
record matings					
use minda					
identify cow to calf					
tube feed a calf					
understand calf rearing principles					
assist in calf shed					
Tagging					
ensure farm policy is followed					

JOB'S ON FARM	Farm assistant	Herd manager	Asst farm manager	Farm manager	Pod Manager
animal welfare act is followed	✓				
animal health recording					
be in charge of mating					
implement calf rearing system					
record all calving					
stock movements are recorded					
ensure production targets are hit					
KPI's are achieved					
compliance issues are attended to					
staff concerns are dealt with					
Staff performance is monitored					
fill in the dairy diary					
keep animal health records					
call vet for sick animals					
ensure mating is correctly implemented					
ensure farm is compliant in all areas					
analyse reports					
set financial budget					
set production budget					
order supplement feed					
Follow feed budget					
set farm animal health policy					
follow animal health policy					
set up breeding plan					
set in place remedial actions					
follow farm budget					
understanding cost of production					
understanding disease costs					
hiring staff and staffing levels					
staff discipline					
effluent management					
pasture walks					
fencing					
environmental awareness					
machinery checks					
machinery maintenance					

15. Do you believe the industry training sector is heading in the right direction? Choose an item.

Are you willing to explain your answer?

16. Does the industry move staff up too quickly, do you feel that staff have the skill set needed to do their roles when promoted in this manner? Choose an item.

And why do you think this?

Thank you for taking the time to do this Survey