



Winter - February 2021

## Three Tips to Help Dairy Employees Succeed

### Verified Premium Plus (VPP) Educational Series

Over the last several months we've been excited to share a webinar series with our certifying veterinary community. The series has been focused on education and communication around pertinent topics to improve animal wellbeing, food safety, and quality. Many of webinars also offered Registry of Approved Continuing Education (RACE) credits. Topics covered included:

- Heat Stress: The Effects on Gut Health and Strategies to Managing the Inevitable
- Connecting the Dots Between Health and Immunity, and Reaching Her Genetic Potential
- Culling Decisions: Economic and Welfare Considerations
- Factors Shaping the Future of Food Supply Chains, Farms, & Consumers

We appreciate everyone who has attended, along with our event sponsors: Diamond V, Caviness Beef Packers, and CS Beef Packers. We are proud to partner with organizations like these in an effort to bring value and education to our community.

As we look to bring more programs like these webinars to our veterinary and producer communities, we want your feedback on what's important to you. Look for a survey in your inbox soon to help determine subjects for our events moving forward.

Labor management is one of the biggest day-to-day challenges dairy managers face. Employee turnover and declining employee morale can be drains on productivity and profitability.

While there is no magic bullet for employee management, there are steps a manager can take to decrease churn and increase an employee's satisfaction with their position. Here are three useful ways to reduce dissatisfaction and maintain an engaged, passionate workforce:

#### Provide Clear Communication

Many times, what looks like disobedience or individual failures are actually problems with clarity or knowledge. Lack of clarity and direction can frustrate well-intentioned employees, causing them to stop trying, which from the outside can look like they just don't care. Do employees know what your definition of a "good" job in their area means? Make sure employees understand how to recognize normal stages of labor in the herd, and how to properly assist when the cow needs help. Here are some questions to think about:

- Have you provided adequate training to transfer this knowledge?
- Who trains new employees?
- Do employees have all the tools and equipment they need to do their jobs effectively?
- How do you respond when they ask for equipment and/or assistance in challenging situations?

Employees will often "make do" if they are made to feel bad about asking for equipment or additional assistance. This can cost your operation much more in the long run. Check in with them, listen to what they are telling you, and continue to encourage their feedback.

Another area to focus on is establishing clear, concise protocols for specific tasks – assisting with the birthing process for maternity employees, milking procedure, sick cow treatment protocols,

etc. Post reminders in work areas, preferably with both pictures and text, to ensure employees know what is expected.

#### Emphasize Accountability

Provide regular feedback to employees about their performance. Compliment and/or reward them for successes, and provide constructive feedback when performance falls below expectations. It can also be helpful to establish performance goals for employees during reviews that are SMART – specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timebound. Well-defined and achievable goals with regular feedback can help employees understand their place in the organization and positively impact employee confidence. When possible, show your employees examples of the impact their work has on the dairy's success.

#### Provide Opportunities for Growth

Work with your teams – management, veterinary, and nutrition – as well as with trusted allied industry resources, to establish training/learning opportunities for team members in all departments. When possible, provide employees with the ability to advance within your team. Employees who advance to management positions from within already know your systems and people, and require less training to get up-to-speed. Having the advancement opportunities encourages retention of high-performing employees who may otherwise leave your business to seek success elsewhere, which can increase costs due to turnover, along with hurting employee morale.

#### Takeaway Message

Labor challenges continue to be a pressing issue, and many dairies have expressed frustration with employees in one area or another. The most effective managers seek to understand employee perspectives and challenges, strive to remove barriers that undercut performance, and work to provide a roadmap to success.



# Factors Shaping the Future of Food Supply Chains, Farms, & Consumers - Webinar Overview

The Dairy Quality Center (DQC) looks for ways to add value to our dairy producer and farm veterinarian communities. Recently the DQC hosted a webinar panel discussion for veterinarians who provide audits for the Verified Premium Plus (VPP) Program. The discussion featured three leaders from the beef and dairy supply chains that serve or influence dozens of leading national and global quick-serve restaurants, brands, retailers, and more. Guest panelists included:

- Josh Luth – Director of Food Chain CSR Engagement, Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy/DMI
- Steve Sands – President, Protein Brands at Performance Food Groups (PFG)
- Dr. Brad Morgan – Animal Science Professor, University of Colorado; President, JBM Consulting.

The panel explored the premise that now, more than ever, the food supply chain, consumers, retailers, and brands influence not just the quality and value of meat, milk, and eggs leaving the farm, but also the products, practices, and protocols that go into their production. Some of the questions discussed included:

- Are these trends continuing? What and who drive the trends?
- What role will the consumer and food chain play going forward?
- What can veterinarians do to help foster these opportunities?

Overall trends the panelists shared included traceability, transparency, and connecting with the consumer. Here are some of highlights from the webinar.

## **Traceability:**

One of the main consumer trends we see emerging is traceability. Regarding this movement, Josh Luth believes we need to keep working forward toward reporting progress, continuous improvement with stakeholders, and demonstrating dairy can be an environmental solution.

Steve Sands discussed how the consumer today wants to know more about where their food is raised and how. Because of this, PFG built their entire marketing program around what they call, “Path Proven”. They established standards for how the animal is fed, what it eats, and the environmental impact of producers. Lastly, Sands pointed out that a coordinated supply chain delivers better results from the ranch, to the feed yard, to the packer, to the distributor, through to the consumer. Sands stated, “Consumers that demand to know something about how the animal was raised drive an aligned supply chain dedicated to a common quality or pricing goal, as well as shared economic risk and reward.”

## **Transparency:**

Another trend the panelists see emerging is transparency. With transparency, now that we’ve seen how environmental, social, and economic behaviors have shifted as a result of the pandemic, it’s important to highlight how US dairy is measuring and reporting its impact on these key priorities at each stage of the supply chain. “The Stewardship Commitment is one channel through which progress against the industry’s 2050 environmental stewardship goals will be measured” said Luth.

Regarding transparency, Dr. Morgan also shared some impressive statistics from Innova Market Insights. Three in five global consumers say they are interested in, “learning more about where their food comes from and how it’s made.” And three in four global consumers say they expect companies to, “invest in sustainability.” This means we need to tell that story, and we need to be transparent about it.

## **Connecting:**

All three panelists discussed connecting with the consumer, instead of focusing, as agriculture has, on educating consumers. They each believe that whether it’s telling consumers how to cook a piece of meat, what to order, or the next greatest thing out there, we must become better listeners and we must connect.

“The VPP program is something we need as an industry, and as veterinarians. We need to connect with consumers and be as transparent as possible,” stated Dr. Morgan. “In the beef and dairy industry, we should start sharing feel-good stories. This DQC program should keep being talked about, and is a great way to connect with our customers.”

## **Summary:**

The purpose of this panel discussion was to empower, encourage, and challenge our VPP-certifying veterinarians to continue to enhance their role in the food supply chain. We received positive feedback from attendees and hope to provide more seminars like this in the future.

## Health and Wellness Announcement

The DQC is excited to share a new opportunity for dairy producers to earn additional premiums on cull dairy cows being sold directly to our partners at CS Beef and/or Caviness Beef.

- DQC, along with our partners, have developed the Verified Premium Plus Health and Wellness Program. This voluntary program was introduced in January 2021.
- The program is designed to bring transparency and value to downstream food service, quick serve restaurants, and retail stakeholders looking for ways to meet consumer demand for beef raised sustainably.
- Program requirements include maintaining VPP certification, having a veterinarian-approved vaccination and biosecurity protocol in place, and feeding Diamond V’s Nutritek®, a supply chain approved immune support product, to all lactating and close-up dry cows at recommended feeding rates.
- At this time the program is only available to VPP dairies who ship cull dairy cows directly to CS Beef or Caviness Beef, through whom we are able to verify carcass quality and other factors our partners value.
- The DQC desires to provide the opportunity to earn additional premiums to all of our VPP-certified dairies from their culled dairy cows. If you ship your cull cows elsewhere and believe we could partner with your packer/processor and they can provide real-time and accurate cull data, please let us know.

For more information, contact us at [Info@DairyQualityCenter.com](mailto:Info@DairyQualityCenter.com) or 800.553.2479.

