

SPECIAL REPORT

Team Building

Welcoming new staff



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Fifteen-year-old Gateway student James Baker (right) working alongside Jack Raharuhi is one of six who will get experience on the farm this year.

Crusader with a cause

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High school was a period of rebellion for Jack Raharuhi and his hassled teachers probably never expected him to be back a few years later on a crusade to inspire students to choose dairying as a career.

This year he will have six Gateway students from his former Buller High School in Westport getting weekly work experience on the Landcorp farm he manages at Cape Foulwind, giving them a taste of dairying and balancing the negative urban image of the industry.

At 25, he has just won the Dairy Industry Awards West Coast-Top of the South Dairy Manager of the Year and now manages eight staff through the busiest months of the season on Landcorp's Totara unit which milks up to 1100 cows.

The best part of the job, he says, is the people who help him run the farm system and achieve results – which this year has seen the farm's production lift dramatically and should put it within the corporation's top 10 farms in the country for production and profitability.

His passion is mentoring – working alongside staff and showing by example as well as fostering their training in the industry and then seeing them succeed.

It's something he definitely never considered as a career at 15 when he was smoking dope, getting into fights and one of the boy racers.

The last straw for his parents was a drink-drive conviction and his father hauled him out of school to work for a friend on one of the Landcorp dairy farms.

The manager proved a tough boss who wouldn't take any nonsense from

a teenager with an undesirable attitude and Jack learnt to work hard.

It was a year before he finally began to enjoy his work and think seriously about dairying as a career. By the time he was 20 he had a partner and family, and with responsibility came the desire to focus on his career and go places with it.

Now he wants others to look at the dairy industry and get a taste of success as well, so heads back to his old school



Jack Raharuhi says the industry needs to spend more time attracting young people, like James (right), who is a Gateway student on the farm.





Gateway student James Baker hoses down the yard during his day on the farm.

to talk to groups and hopefully inspire them to take up roles in the industry.

He's taken part in career speed-dating at the school to give students and families an insight into dairying as a career. And he's taking on Gateway students who will spend one day each week on the farm to get an insight into dairy farm life.

He has actively pursued the school to get Gateway students to the farm because even in a small community such as Buller where dairy farms dominate the easier land, there is still a lack of understanding of the industry and much of the urban knowledge reflects the negative press, he says. It's why primary school children are brought out to the farm to help plant alongside waterways and wetland areas with plenty of helpers and high-visibility vests for safety on a working dairy farm.

"I think the biggest problem in the industry would have to be that it isn't involved enough in attracting people into it. You've got to make the effort for the long-term vision. These kids may end up being your workers one day."

Similarly, he now wants to establish a Young Farmers Club in Buller to reach more young people and mentor those who want to progress in the dairy industry.

Once on the farm, Gateway students are buddied with a staff member for the day which has the added bonus of

teaching leadership skills to staff.

Fifteen-year-old James Baker is a Gateway student who now plans to get a fixed-term contract on the farm as a milk harvester, while either continuing with some subjects at school or studying through correspondence.

With James on the farm, the staff ranged from 15 to 65 years in age until the latter retired recently and Jack says that enables younger staff to learn from those with years of experience, while a mix of gender adds a range of attributes that cover all the bases.

Jack is a big fan of buddying new staff, in the same way he uses buddies for the Gateway students, to teach them the team culture and work ethics.

"I think it's really important in that first two months to get a feel for the culture and a feel for their responsibilities to set the bar. They see how everyone else behaves as well as the health and safety expectations so when they go and work by themselves they know the expectations – whether they're new to dairy farming or if they have experience.

"Buddying-up is really valuable in the long run. I try to put introverts with introverts and extroverts with extroverts to make them feel welcome and make it comfortable for them. You can usually pick up a lot about their personality in the interview – they say you can tell a lot about people by looking inside their car."

Passion flows down

The goal to run a profitable business can only be realised with the support of the staff and that requires good communication and essentially people skills, Jack Raharuhi says.

"My farm motto is healthy team, healthy cows, healthy business. If they have a bit of a passion, it flows down to profitable business.

"I think you have to lead by example, be a team player and not take anyone for granted. So I get on the ground floor and do all the crap jobs too. And I look after my team."

His own people skills have developed largely through experience as he climbed the ladder with a range of bosses, while trying to balance work and family.

"I know what it is like to have a prick of a boss and I know what it is like to work in the pissing rain. And I've also worked with four days on and two days off. Along the way I think everyone I worked for could have had better people skills, so the one thing I was going to change when I became a manager was to have better people skills.

"In the weekend, let people go home after milking and have a bit of time with their whanau instead of going out on a Sunday night to fix fences. With a healthy team culture you should be able to sit down and have a cup of tea and discuss



what needs to be done without yelling out the window to go and do it."

To Jack, part of looking after the team entails feeding them a good cooked breakfast for about 12 weeks through calving and the start of mating – bacon, eggs, hash browns, the works. His wife Charlotte began cooking breakfast for the team and now Landcorp has enlisted her to cook for about 35 staff to include its other farms in the area. Through the morning she continually cooks breakfast for staff at one of the houses and that not only gives them a good feed for the day, but gives them all a chance to socialise with each other over breakfast.

"I've learnt a lot about healthy eating and healthy thinking. We got a nutritionist here for a workshop and that made me think more about feeding the team through calving and we'll probably start adding more healthy food for breakfast like salads."

Apart from healthy eating, Landcorp also has a roster that focuses on reducing fatigue in staff that can lead to health and safety problems. This season, the Totara farm needed a big effort to lift production and put staff on a six days on, two-off roster at the beginning before easing back to four on and two off.

"On rosters like this, you get your work back off your guys and everyone has a work-life balance and is in a better state of mind. It makes the whole dairy thing attractive again and I think it will eventually become the norm in the industry."

"You hear of managers who go right through calving without a break and I think to drive your strategy, you need to have a healthy mind that isn't fatigued. You can't be a leader and drive a strategy when you're fatigued."

The end result is a healthy team in body and mind which has worked for Jack who says the only turnover of employees has been those moving up the ladder and he has never had to advertise for staff.

Jack's motto
is healthy
team, healthy
cows, healthy
business.



Jack (right) catches up with his 2IC, Kahu Parata.

Training the 2IC

In the dairy industry, it's all about the people and Jack Raharuhi wants to help them succeed by mentoring those he works alongside and, down the track, running training camps.

His ultimate goal is to oversee a farming enterprise with up to 10,000 cows that employs about 40 staff, where he can use his skills to attract, progress and help them succeed in the industry.

"I'd take all the dairy assistants and see who wanted to move forward and run classes for them twice a week, make sure managers are working closely with them and really reward them."

Acknowledging achievements goes a long way to fostering enthusiasm and success, Jack says. So his vision includes regular meetings for all staff with reward ceremonies to celebrate staff achievements.

"If people feel they're acknowledged for their work, they get a sense of progression and that makes them hungry for more. That's part of being a good leader."

He envisages working with Primary ITO or similar training facilitators to run sessions for groups at differing levels to make it easier and more enjoyable for staff to train.

"You get such competitive, enthusiastic young people that it could become very healthy competition."

Similarly, second-in-charge staff (2ICs) could be grouped together to prepare them for the next step into management.

"You can never be too ready and the better prepared you are, the better manager you will be."

This year Landcorp intends running classes for the 2ICs on Landcorp farms at Cape Foulwind to give them an insight into the computer systems needed to manage the corporate dairy farms, but Jack thinks the need for 2IC training extends throughout the industry.

"I think there's a big gap across the country from 2IC to managers and I think it's becoming a problem. Sometimes you see production plummet with new managers and I think that's due to a lack of support going into that role. They're often dropped in the deep end and left to swim."

He will be running the 2IC training sessions at Cape Foulwind to bring them up to speed on technology such as MilkHub, dairy production reporting (DPR) and FarmIQ.





Alex Thompson gives a welcome pack to Arthur Liwag, a dairy worker from the Philippines.

A warm welcome

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For many taking on a new farm job isn't just about learning the ropes on the farm, it's also about settling in to a new district and sometimes even a new country.

That can be pretty daunting at the best of times, even if you're a single, out-going Kiwi. It can be particularly overwhelming when there's a whole family involved, you're new to New Zealand or English is your second language.

North Canterbury women Alex Thompson and Sharron Davie-Martin recognised the challenges for new farm staff in their Amuri Basin area, around Culverden, and have been giving out Welcome packs for almost seven years.

Although Alex and her husband Kevin consider themselves pretty "Kiwi-ised" they know what it's like to be newcomers, having emigrated from the United Kingdom to go dairying.

Next season will be their 10th and NZ is definitely home now with three children born here.

Sharron was also new to the area when she and husband Alan moved from Northland to buy their dairy farm, Beechbank Dairies.

"We both brought a different perspective to the Welcome packs – me as someone from a completely different country not knowing how things were done in NZ and Sharron as a Kiwi coming to a new district," Alex says.

"We'd also both been employers of NZ and overseas staff.

"There's a lot to take in when you move to a new area and what might seem like little things can become big, time-consuming problems when you

don't know where to find answers quickly – even things like where to register your dog, where you can buy the local school uniform or where the tip is for rubbish.

"Then there's things like knowing if you register with the medical centre it's going to cost you a lot less for any visits to the doctor or that you may need to convert to a NZ driver's licence depending on what country you're from and how long you're here."

All the telephone numbers for essential services are listed in the Welcome pack, as are interest groups, Churches and service times and local businesses are listed, including where banks are located, how to open an account and even where the automatic teller machines (ATM) are.

Forms such as an IRD number application form are also included.

Alex says they can hand out 15-25 or even 30 packs a season, with most sent out in late May or early June when new staff arrive on farm.

Employers ask for them, and the vet clinic and even the local rural postie lets them know there's someone new on the run.

Sometimes they post them out but other times they might deliver them themselves, or someone picks up a pack for someone else.

Over the years they've developed the packs into two versions – one for immigrant newcomers and one for Kiwis – to make sure the packs meet relevant needs.

"There are lots of things a Kiwi coming here from another district will want to

know too, and having all this information in one place should just make the move here that bit easier."

Alex says the Amuri Employers' Group started the concept of a "Welcome In" event about 10 years ago to bring new people together for a fun event such as a dance, games evening or international pot luck dinner.

"The Welcome In event gives groups a chance to interact with new people – someone from the local fire brigade, for instance, comes along and has a quick talk about the importance of smoke alarms."

It also gives people a chance to link up with others from their country working in the district. It's not uncommon for several countries to be represented at the event, including the Philippines, Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Russia, Fiji, Sri Lanka and India.

The website www.amuri.org.nz has been updated and redesigned by year 12 and 13 students from the Amuri Area School. It has a lot of information for new comers and they're directed to it in the packs.

The website and the Welcome In event are supported by the Amuri Community Connector – a position that was established with funding from Enterprise North Canterbury, the region's economic development organisation.

The Amuri Community Connector position is now funded by Connect Hurunui – a community run and funded organisation – with that person involved in linking people in the community to various groups.

The position was established because some of the reason for staff turnover on farms had been identified as partners feeling isolated.

AMURI HOME COMMUNITY BUSINESSES

Volunteering Opportunities

One of the best ways to make new friends and strengthen existing relationships is to commit to a shared activity together. Volunteering is a great way to meet new people, especially if you are new to an area. Volunteering also strengthens your ties to the community and broadens your support network, exposing you to people with common interests, neighborhood resources, and fun and fulfilling activities. So have a look through this list and get in touch with the relevant organisation to start/continue your volunteering journey.

<p>Culverden Fire Brigade 3 Stock Rd Culverden Ph: 03 315 8197</p>	<p>Friends of Waihari Hospital Princes St Waihari Phone: 03 314 4005</p>
<p>St John 23 Montrose St Culverden Ph: 03 315 8306</p>	<p>Culverden Library Contact JJ or Pam: Ph: 315 3008 E-mail: amuri@hurunuilibrary.govt.nz</p>
<p>Waiau Rivercare Group Contact Linda Laing: E-mail: linda.laing@gmail.com</p>	<p>Culverden Community Committee Contact David Craft: Ph: 03 315 8167</p>
<p>Culverden Plunket E-mail: culverdenplunket@hotmail.co.nz</p>	<p>Sports Coaching Contact the relevant sports club to offer your assistance.</p>

The amuri.org.nz website has information about a huge range of community groups and clubs.



Managing cultural differences

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Scoring highly when it comes to power distance indicates people need to know who the boss is and have a clear chain of demand; they're likely to want to be told what to do.

Those who have a low score for indulgence/restraint are likely to see a big dinner out or party night for the team as unnecessarily lavish and wasteful.

The terms power distance and indulgence/restraint are two of six descriptions or classifications used to explain tendencies of a culture.

New Zealanders, for instance, score highly for indulgence – work hard and we're happy to play hard – but have a relatively low score for power distance – we're comfortable giving feedback to the boss and will happily accommodate a flat hierarchy structure.

The dimension characterisations have been developed in human resource studies that began with Professor Geert Hofstede in 1963 when he analysed the employee database, which included employees from 70 countries, for computer company IBM.

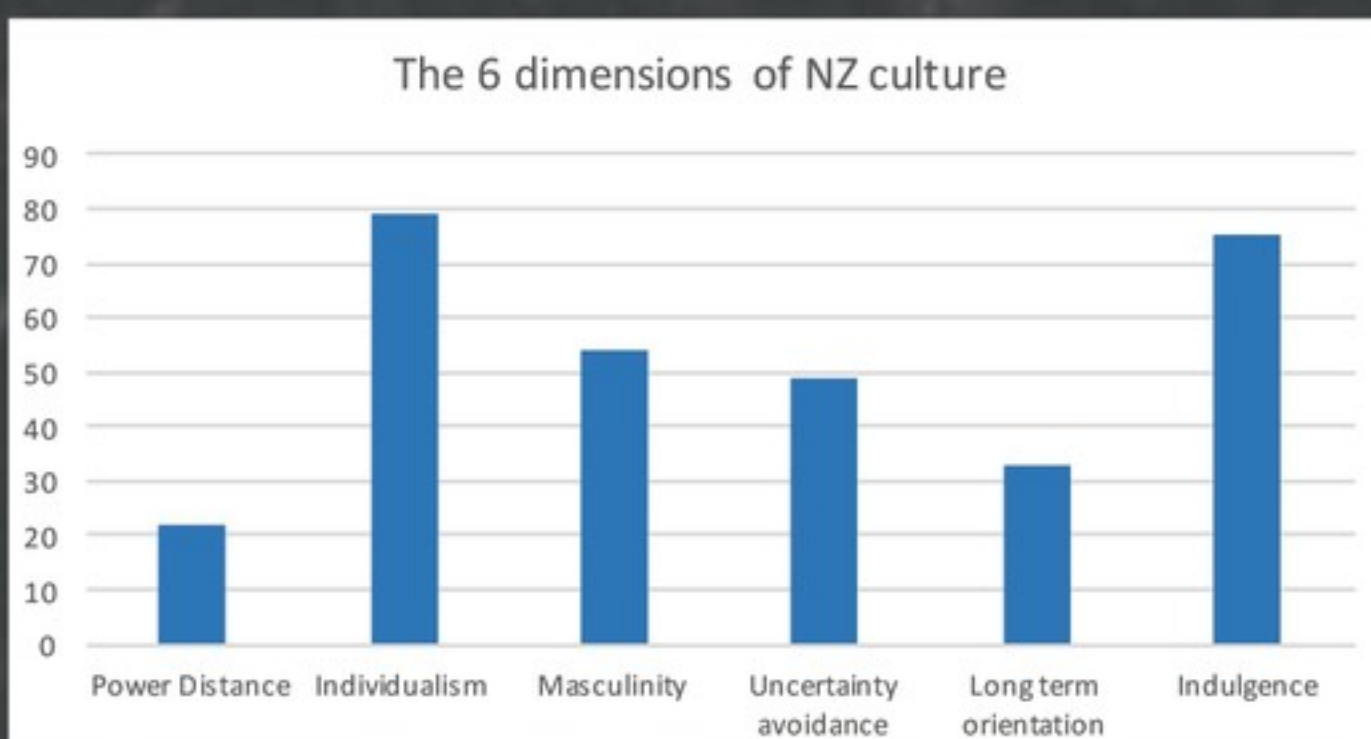
DairyNZ consulting officer Natalia Benquet told farmers at a People Expo in Ashburton last month that while they are generalisations, and factors such as age and individual life experiences will definitely shape characters, it could be beneficial to understanding the characterisations when it comes to managing a diverse farm team.

It doesn't mean cultures that tend to score at the opposite end of the scale can't work together but it will probably help if there's an understanding of the differences by all parties and if managers take the differences into account when interacting and directing staff, she says.

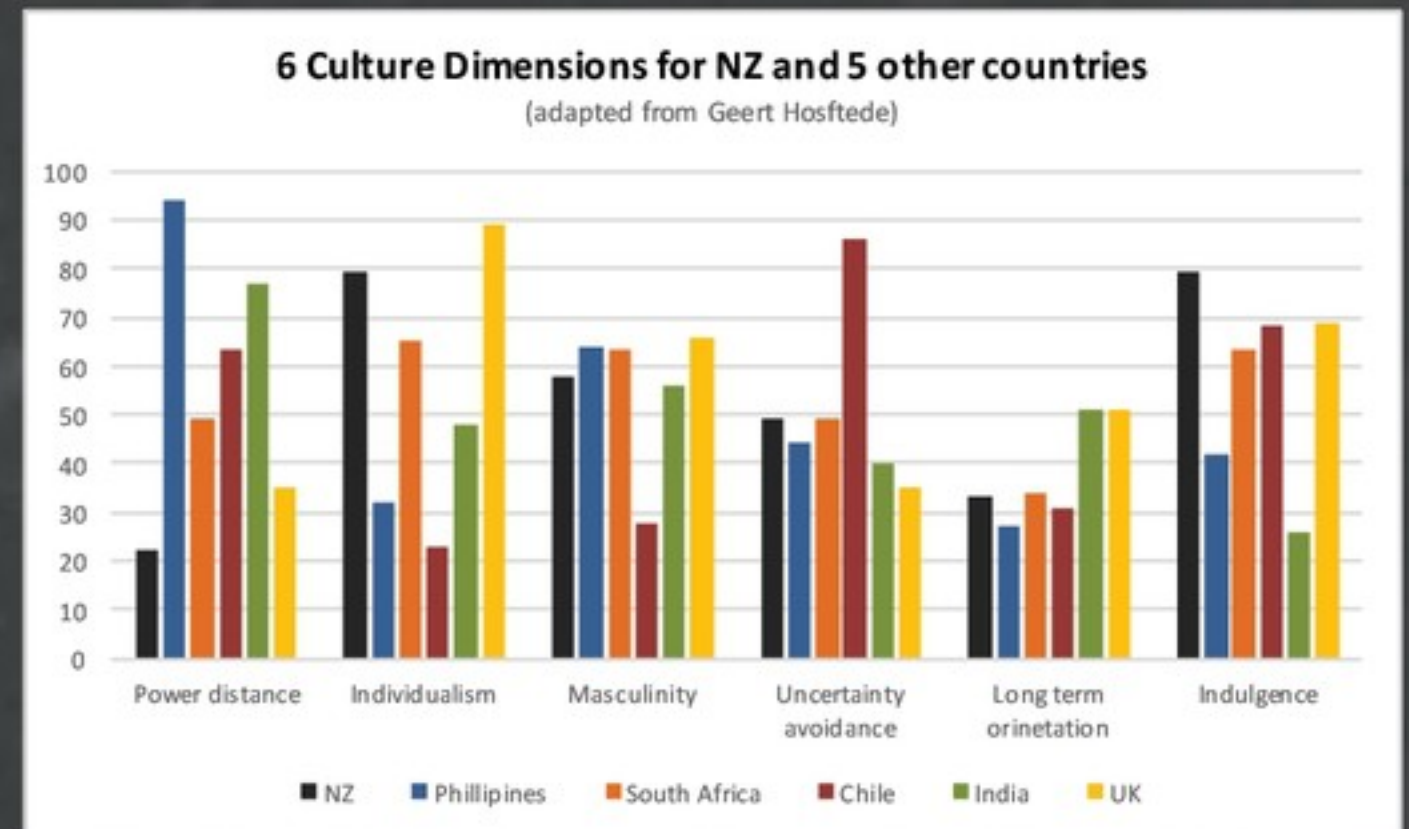
Those who have a high score for individualism will want to get on with their own tasks and consider their job done when they're complete.

Those who have a low score in that area will finish their job and go to help the rest of the team so everyone goes home together.

A society that scores highly for masculinity focuses on



It pays to be aware of cultural differences when employing staff from outside New Zealand. Pictured: South Canterbury farmer Lyle Green with Nepalese staff Ram Rai and Dhan Gurung. Photo: Sarah Rowland



achievement, heroism, assertiveness and rewards for success. Individuals are likely to be competitive, want to finish the task well and be praised.

A low score in that area usually means people tend to get together as a team more to improve things for everyone.

Someone from a culture that scores highly for uncertainty avoidance won't like having to change jobs frequently, go to a new area or not know what's coming next.

Those who have a long-term orientation hold on to traditions so observing religious or commemorative dates will be important to them.

Benquet says as new staff arrive on farm it's timely to think about the mix of cultures and how you might be able to adjust management styles to ensure people feel comfortable in their work.

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Listening goes both ways

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Roy Johnson from RJRural emphasises two-way listening and doing in his tips on settling in new farm staff.

"The first day should be all about information gathering," the Te Awamutu consultant and mediator said.

Farmers should carry out a health and safety induction, as well as a workplace induction. There should also be time spent showing where stuff is kept, what activities are carried out regularly and pointing out different scenarios and, "What to do if..."

Johnson said this shouldn't be anything too onerous and should include a conversation about how the job will end.

"All jobs end, and one day this job will end," he said.

"Hopefully it will be because the worker has learnt all they can off the farmer and now needs to further themselves."

The farmer can take the time to say they look forward to that day and being happy to give the employee a good reference to help them into their next career progression step. Then they can ask the worker how they think that together they will get there.

"This is the best way to end," he said.

"The worst way to is that the worker gives two weeks' notice and they're gone. So talk about how to prevent that and set up a process based on two-way listening and doing."

At the end of the second day and end of the first week farmers should ask new staff members how the job is going for them. Some questions are: Is the job what you thought it would be like and, What do you like about it?



Roy Johnson – a conversation about how the job will end up is very important.

"These questions should be repeated regularly throughout the employment period."

Johnson also suggests setting up a process for some autonomy with the employee by laying out some small responsibility of setting their own work and building from there.

"The aim is that the inefficient path to micro-management is not taken."

Another process which needs to be established is for regular "sit down" communication, for listening, change process, or praise and confidence building.

"This is not 'stand-up' daily instruction communication," he said.

Farmers should also put in place onfarm as well as off-farm training which can be formal and/or informal.

They can also tell staff they wish to be

invited into their house once a month for a tea or coffee to chat about work, the accommodation or whatever they would like to.

He warns farmers to be careful with professional performance reviews in a small workplace such as is the case on many New Zealand dairy farms.

"They can backfire and are much better suited to larger workplaces and farms," he said.

"The casual praise, appraise, praise routine would work better in small businesses."

Johnson said appraise is just a catchy term to remember.

"But it is the feedback stage, delivering criticism if necessary around positive reinforcement."

He believes formal review processes don't work in small businesses because if the evaluation is too critical the employee can take the attitude, "If that's what you think of me ...I won't work as hard".

"Motivation can drop especially where the worker has to face the boss the next day," he said.

Be careful with professional performance reviews in a small workplace such as is the case on many New Zealand dairy farms.

On a farm with just one of maybe two employees farmers are far better to keep the conversation casual. This can mean a chat using a team approach over a beer or coffee, or making some comments when both are on the way home from the dairy.

"The more communication the better," he said.

"A one-off professional review would be viewed apprehensively by staff and can drive a wedge between employer and employee in their relationship."

And his final tip is that busy people can be seen as being unapproachable by their employees.

"Farmers need to be busy in the human resources field too."

Starting as you mean to go on

The first day involves information gathering and is a chance for the employer to talk about how the job will end.

- At the end of the second day and first week the employee should be asked how the job is going for them.
- Establish some autonomy.
- Set up a process for regular formal communication.
- Praise, appraise, praise in small operations, or have a professional review of workers in a larger enterprise.
- Don't be too busy to engage with workers.





Having clear written instructions helps ensure new staff are in no doubt as to what's expected. Farm manager Carlos Munoz writes up actions for the day at the team meeting with, from left, Kate Doherty, Nico van Loggenberg and Erick Collins.

Keeping it Lean

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Whether they're employing a student or a new farm manager, Trevor and Stacey Monson say having a good induction process is equally important.

They're also finding the adoption of Lean Management principals can help smooth the way for new people in the first few weeks.

Trevor and Stacey are equity managers in Methven Dairies— a 398 effective hectare irrigated Canterbury property milking 1500 cows through two 60-bail rotary farm dairies.

It was converted six years ago and was previously run as a cropping farm by its owners John and Jane Wright, who Trevor and Stacey teamed up with as equity partners.

John is the general manager of Barrhill-Chertsey Irrigation (BCI).

Trevor's originally from Ireland. He came to New Zealand on a working holiday for three months but ended up making this country his home.

He worked for Canterbury dairy farmer Leo Donkers eventually managing one of the Donkers' family farms, Willsden, before going contract milking 600 cows elsewhere in the region.

After two years he and Stacey, originally a legal secretary in Christchurch, took the leap to 50:50 sharemilking on a 300-cow job but rapidly grew cow numbers as they progressed through sharemilking until they were milking 600 cows.

Five years ago, with additional cows and young stock, they were able to take up the equity partnership

opportunity with the Wrights.

Last year the farm team ran a Farm Tune programme through DairyNZ.

It's based on Lean Management principles first developed in the car manufacturing industry and aimed at improving efficiencies through continuous improvement and taking out the waste in the business.

That waste can be wasted time, wasted products and even waste in terms of non-productive or sick animals. (see Dairy Exporter special report April 2016)

Finding solutions and coming up with processes is driven by a team approach and often includes the use of visual tools such as instructions, both written and pictorial, posted at the place they're most needed.

"We're really in the early stages of developing and using the approach but the team has been pretty positive about it," Trevor says.

While it's developed by the existing

team the approach has benefits when it comes to new staff members coming on board.

Kate Doherty is a student from University College, Dublin, and is with the Monsons for four months.

She says having instructions posted at the site they refer to reinforces what you get told and helps you feel more confident.

Kate doesn't have to contend with a language barrier – although some Kiwiisms can take a bit for a non-NZer to get used to.

It might take a while before someone fully understands what yea nah actually means, for instance.

Pictures and written instructions can be very helpful for staff who do have English as a second language.

The "sorting" and putting everything in its place as part of the Lean process makes for a smoother induction period as well as improved on-going efficiencies.

In some cases the induction process is more comprehensive in terms of what they need to learn before they can work independently.

"When people start out everything is new and if they don't know where things are that adds to their anxiety. They don't feel like they're doing a good job," Stacey says.

Tony Watson from People Mad, the Canterbury company contracted to run DairyNZ's Farm Tune pilot programme, says it can take up to seven times of receiving an instruction before a person



Stacey and Trevor Monson go through the information new staff will get when they arrive later this month.



feels confident they've got it, so visual cues and written, diagrammatic or photographic instructions can really help speed up the time till someone feels competent.

"They'll feel they're settling in faster and the experience will be more positive if they feel like they're getting it right and don't have to have repeated instruction," he says.

There's less opportunity for mistakes too.

Tony says new staff can also have valuable input into the continuous improvement aspect of Lean, in that they have a fresh take on processes or might be able to bring an idea from a previous job.

Giving them the opportunity to contribute at meetings or offer a suggestion will make them feel valued and a part of the team, he says.

At the end of this season Trevor and Stacey's manager is moving on to a new 500-cow conversion and the Monson's are taking on a new manager.

For him the induction process started well before June 1.

He's been coming to the farm on his days off from his current job, spending time understanding the farm systems and getting to know the farm and farm team and working with Trevor on the winter feed budgets.

"He's on board with the Farm Tune thing and we're really hopeful that he'll pick it up and take it to the next level. It's an ongoing thing not something you do once and forget about – it's a way of operating," Trevor says.

It's also important a new manager gets to see the type of farming ethos and values the farm partners have.

At the management level success is as much about managing people as it is about the cows and grass skills.

The couple employs seven staff including the manager, with Trevor the operations manager.

Prospective staff get an introduction pack at the interview so they know the fundamentals of the farm and farm system as well as a diagram showing the staffing structure so they know who is who and who reports to who.

"We're thinking we might put photos on that just so they get to know people a bit faster," Trevor says.

New staff will have signed their employment contract before they arrive on farm for work.

Stacey says it's important documentation is signed before they start work, both for the new staff member and them as employers, because if it's not there can be significant consequences including that the 90-day trial period isn't valid.



Farm manager Carlos Munoz goes through safety instructions with dairy assistant Kate Doherty.

On day one Trevor and Stacey make sure the new staff member gets a health and safety briefing, that they get to read the health and safety manual, that all the paper work such as bank account details and IRD information is completed, and that they're settled in to their accommodation.

They're then handed over to the farm manager, who this season has been Carlos Munoz.

He takes them under his wing and at the top of his list is to again go through health and safety issues, identifying the hazards not just verbally and with maps but taking them around to point them out and talk about them in more detail. That might include the dangers of any pivot wheel ruts, above-ground pipes or the effluent pond.

Carlos also checks their competency on the farm motorbikes.

Even if they say they're fully competent on a two-wheeler he'll have them ride around on the tanker track at the farm dairy first and then take them out into the paddock and will record their experience level.

They'll spend the day with Carlos and if they're a junior will be matched up with someone to work alongside for a few days.

The first week is spent learning the ropes so they're not fully in the roster until week two.

"Everyone's managed individually though, depending on their experience and what they feel comfortable doing. Some people are super keen and you have to slow them down a bit," Trevor says.

Trevor says they try to strike a balance between employing for personality and balance in the team and skills.

"We don't run with a top-heavy structure so we know people can have learning to do on the job. In some cases the induction process is more comprehensive in terms of what they



Nico van Loggenberg with the bucket-marking idea former staff member Bill Healy came up with for mixing teat spray.

need to learn before they can work independently."

The couple employ students and settling them in well is important to Trevor and Stacey.

"They arrive in Christchurch the day before they arrive here and we get them settled in, make sure their room is all set up," Stacey says.

"I know what it's like to be new to a country and living on the job. We watch out for the signs of homesickness and generally try and make them feel really welcome," Trevor says.

Having a team function at the start of the season – something like going out for a meal – can help everyone get to know each other in a more relaxed situation.

"We're not all about forms and lots of paperwork and formal processes – you've got to balance that out with having a chat around the table kind of approach too," they say.

Getting it right in the first day or two, setting the scene and having people understand the expectations and feel comfortable and welcomed will pay big dividends in the long run.



Align Jacawanda's 2IC Matt Hird, right and herd manager Raj Nil go through the plant wash-down procedures with Patrick Canney. The procedures are posted in the plant wash area so they can be referred to easily. Janette Marshal is the herd manager.



Making a good start

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The first day of work for any of Mark Frear's new staff members starts with them being picked up rather than them making their own way to the dairy – but it won't be until the sun's up.

Mark is a farm manager for Canterbury dairy farming company Align Farm Partners and manages the 249ha Align Jacawanda property at Ealing in Mid Canterbury.

It peak milked 950 cows this season and operates with four staff plus Mark for the first half of the season and three through the second half.

He's worked in and run big teams sharemilking and managing and spent three years travelling and volunteering overseas, helping build houses after a marriage split saw him take a break from dairying.

Since returning to New Zealand he's spent several years managing for corporate dairy farms before coming to Align.

His philosophy on employing staff is a simple one built on life experiences.

"You've really just got to treat people as you'd like to be treated yourself – with respect.

"A simple please and thank you is where you start – people respond to that. I know I do.

"It makes them feel good, feel valued and if people are happy they're more inclined to want to stay with you and work well – it's human nature.

"You either behave in a way that shows you care about people or you don't," he says.

Health and safety is something he takes very seriously and that's the first order of the day when a new staff member arrives.

They don't ride a motorbike to the farm dairy on day one and will undergo a competency test, riding around the tanker track, checking they can handle a few turns and change gears safely before he observes them riding along the race.

"I don't ask people if they can do something because some, especially some from overseas, will always want to tell you yes. I want to know if they feel safe or if they feel comfortable with a task."

Newcomers get picked up from their accommodation on the first day once it's light.

Although they might have visited the farm for the interview and will have arrived the day before, Mark doesn't want people starting in the dark.

"They need to be able to see the farm, their surroundings."

They will already have all their documentation such as employment contract and IRD numbers in order before they start and will have been given their gumboots, overalls, helmet and wet weather gear on the day they arrived.

Mark goes through a health and safety check list to create a benchmark of what people are capable and not capable of. It's reviewed as people undergo training.

They'll observe the first milking and get a feel for the culture of how things



Importance of accommodation

Align's Jacawanda has a good array of housing including a block of three one-bedroom units and a three-bedroom unit as well as a three-bedroom house and the four-bedroom house Mark and his partner Kate Gallagher live in.

The one-bedroom units for single staff are fully kitted out with furniture, bed linen, blankets, fridge, microwave, oven and even utensils and crockery.

Mark's partner Kate ensures it's all ready for new staff so they can move straight in and start work comfortably.

"All they have to do is bring their food," Mark says.

Because the units are attached the single staff can socialise if they want to but be quite separate too.

Single staff can sometimes come down the pecking order when it comes to housing but Mark says it's important their accommodation is of a good standard so they can feel comfortable at home if they want to be there on their days off.

It also sets the scene as to what's expected of them too, in that if they go in to well-presented, clean, warm and comfortable accommodation they see the standard that's expected.



are done. If they are completely new to dairying will be coached carefully through each step of the milking process.

Even if they have experience they'll work alongside someone else at milking until Mark's satisfied they're competent.

"I never expect people to know how to do everything. They'll be taught task by task – be shown how to do it a few times and then get to either do it alongside others or left to do it on their own depending on what it is."

Mark's motto is smarter not harder when it comes to operating the farm and he's open to suggestions by staff that help increase efficiency.

He's developing a "Lean management" approach using standard operating procedures, visual instructions posted at the point they're needed and encouraging the team to come up with improvements for the tasks they do.

Through the Lead with Pride programme the farm has developed a comprehensive set of documentation that staff are able to read through, and their training is based on.

"It's not like they have to read all of it, but it's what we use as a kind of manual to make sure everyone is working to the same set of standards."

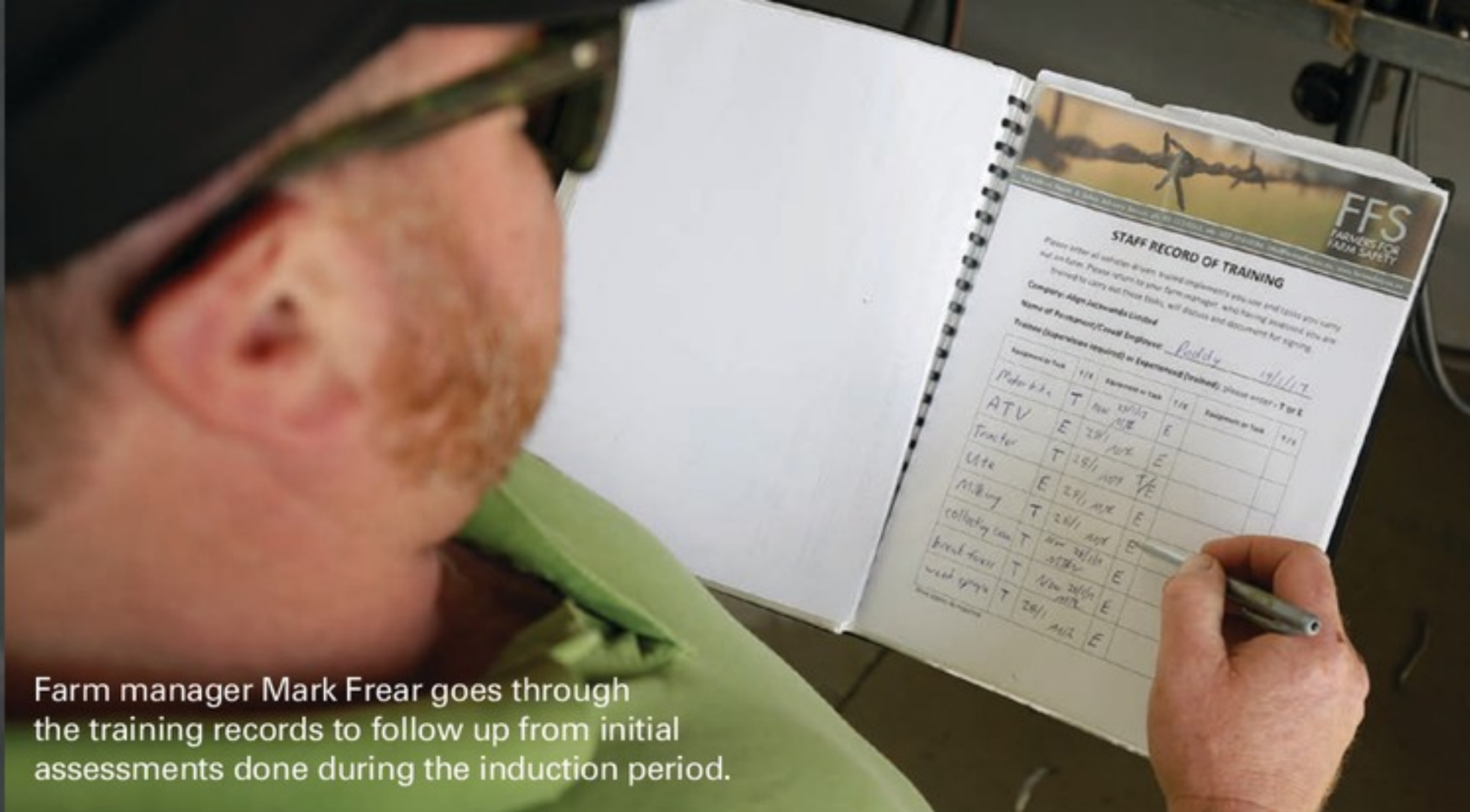
Its four pillars are

- environment,
- animal health and welfare,
- milk quality,
- social responsibility.

The social responsibility pillar refers to the human resources aspect of the farming operation.

The farm is independently audited as part of the Lead with Pride programme and is at the Gold Plus level.

Mark says as well as making sure staff are well aware of hazards on the farm and are capable of safely doing their job, they have their competency levels assessed so training can be organised where necessary. When they have all their documentation in order a good



Farm manager Mark Frear goes through the training records to follow up from initial assessments done during the induction period.

induction process will set the scene in terms of farm culture.

"We want to make everything we do onfarm count – it's got to become part of your routine – how you operate."

"So for instance when you go out to get the cows in out of the fodder beet, there's an 830m fence. While the cows are walking out through the next paddock move the fence for the next break, you're already out there and you've got time while they walk out and up the lane."

"It's about thinking how you can make the best use of your time every time, like making sure you take everything with you for a job – take a bit of time to think about what you need before you go."

Mark lets the team come up with systems too – such as the milking routine in the 80-bail rotary that's fitted with automatic cup removers.

"If the roster means you're on the whole milking in the afternoon and then again in the morning then you won't be on another milking for 24 hours."

The team has weekly staff meetings throughout most of the season to assign jobs, talk about what's coming up and bring up any issues onfarm.

Mark's also started using a phone app called WhatsApp, after Dairy Industry Awards Canterbury Sharefarmer of the

Year winners Christopher and Siobhan O'Malley talked about how they use it.

"It's really a messaging app but we use it like a mobile whiteboard because everyone's in the group and they can all see what's going up on it in real time – they don't have to come back to the office to see it."

It keeps everyone in the loop as well as being an effective way to communicate.

It also indicates who has seen the post so Mark or the staff know the message has got through.

Mark thinks it will be a great tool during the induction period because new staff will be able to double-check anything they need to, feel connected to the team and be able to quickly get an answer if they need to check up on something.

Working alongside other staff is an important part of the induction period.

A staff member this season has been Irish backpacker Patrick Canney.

While he had no dairying experience before he arrived he did have experience working with the Lean Management programme in a car manufacturing business.

He was impressed with how the farm team had adapted it for dairying and his input was welcomed as to how they could improve it further.

Patrick says he felt welcomed right from the start and found the procedures the team had set up were quite intuitive.

Working alongside others to learn the ropes had been relaxed yet he knew there was a lot of good information being imparted along the way.

"Everything was communicated in easy terms so it was pretty quick to pick things up."

"Everyone was confident in what they were doing and gave really clear explanations as to why we do things the way we do, what the thinking was behind it and that gave me a lot of confidence in the whole team and that what I was learning really was the right way to go about it."



Mark Frear assesses Patrick Canney's motorbike riding abilities.



Going home

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Getting a house as part of working on a dairy farm can no longer be considered a perk because employees are paying market value for rent out of their wages, Federated Farmers Sharemilker Section chairman Richard McIntyre says.

That accommodation needs to be up to market quality, and at the basic level the houses need to be warm and dry.

There was still some sub-standard accommodation in the dairy industry, McIntyre said.

As a start farm owners should ensure all accommodation had adequate insulation, or an HRV ventilation system where necessary.

"The farm is not going to run too well if your staff are sick all the time and staff aren't going to be happy if they come home to a house that's cold and damp."

Viewing farm accommodation should be a key part of a sharemilker's due diligence before they signed a new contract, he said.

"Housing is very important because your ability to attract good staff can diminish if you haven't got good accommodation."

Sharemilkers should also have adequate insurance to cover potential loss or liability in connection with the accommodation. Sharemilkers needed to be aware of the requirements for that insurance cover, including regular house inspections.

Once a tenant is in the accommodation, there should be regular house inspections by the farm owner or sharemilker.

"As farmers we need to get more comfortable with doing house inspections. We think it's an invasion of their privacy. But in this day and age we have to because there is too much money involved."

Farm owners or sharemilkers, who take on the tenancy agreements for the farm's accommodation, should do a walk-through of a house before a new tenant moves in, record the condition the house



Good-quality housing is important to attract good staff.

is in and make notes of any repairs that need to be done.

If that is not done at the start, people can have different memories of what condition the house was in at the end of the tenancy, or after a three-year contract, McIntyre said.

The same goes with controlled drug and contamination testing on a property. If farm owners want to be covered they need to have a test done before a new tenant moves in.

"You can't blame a sharemilker or a tenant if a house tests positive for P, if you haven't tested it at the start."

Farm owners or sharemilkers should also be clear with their tenant on how they expect the property to be kept from the outset.

Keeping a property tidy and clean was a subjective term that could mean different things to different parties.

Talk to staff about what you expect from them, like how you tell them how you expect the dairy to be kept, McIntyre said.

Landlords should also be prepared to be lenient. For example, expecting the lawns to be mowed weekly during calving when the employee was working long hours wasn't always realistic.

If there is a problem, talk to staff about it straight away, he said.

"Bring these things up when they're small issues. Don't wait until you get angry and they become a big issue."

Regular house inspections inevitably lead to a tidier property and better outcomes, he said.

Keep it realistic

More farmers need to use official tenancy agreements and get employees to pay bond for their farm housing DairyNZ People team leader Jane Muir says.

Employers should be deducting rent from an employee's total salary, but it's not common practice, she said.

"The best thing to minimise risk is to manage it like a landlord and be more professional, because once it gets away on you it's difficult."

The employment relationship and tenancy relationship had to be treated separately, she said.

It was important to set realistic expectations in the tenancy agreement for the upkeep of the property and farm owners should have regular house inspections, making sure to give 48 hours notice, she said.

"Are your expectations realistic? The onus is on the farm employers to lead the way."

If those expectations were not being met, have a conversation with the tenant, and follow it up with written correspondence, she said.

Getting an employee to pay bond gave a farm owner protection that the house would be looked after. It was very difficult to receive compensation for damage or claim insurance without a legal agreement in place.

It was also important farm owners had the correct insurance for their properties, particularly around drug policies, she said.

- For more information visit www.dairynz.co.nz/people
- For more on tenancy agreements and bond forms visit www.tenancy.govt.nz



Jane Muir: be professional.



Weighing up rosters

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Attracting and retaining quality staff is one of the keys to the future of the dairy industry. With a lack of enthusiastic young people coming into the industry, farmers are looking more closely at the packages they are offering future employees.

Linda-Maree Drake, managing director and John Fegan from Fegan & Co rural recruitment and HR says in the past few years there has been a shift in how farm owners and managers look at rosters, with consideration being given to the health and safety implications of over-tired workers through to optimum levels of productivity.

"A lot of young people are coming into farming from non-farming backgrounds and they do not want to slog it out for days at a time. One of the main reasons is they haven't grown up in that environment and they would like to have more of a work-life balance."

South Island dairy farms, partly because of their scale and the number of corporate-owned farms, have been leading the field.

"Ten years ago, workers had maybe every third weekend off. In the South Island when they were going through staffing shortages they had to modify their behaviour," John says.

"When you compare the north to the south, the South Island has already been through a big change and the North Island is still going through that

transition," Linda-Maree says.

With most North Island farms being family-run, the mentality of working solidly through the season with little time off, especially around mating, is still there. The South Island hosts a larger proportion of international staff who are pushing for different options that don't always revolve around weekends off.

Where rosters used to be the same across most dairy farms in the country, there is now a real variety.

"How the farm is run, the number of staff and the scale of farm are all factors that come into the type of roster you might choose to operate, however the issues remain the same particularly around health and safety. People who do long rosters get tired and that's where accidents happen."

John says many of their farming clients have noted a substantial drop in productivity after 10 days of work.

Changing rosters is often said to carry costs with it, but to a point, this is untrue. Although there is a cost in terms of taking on more staff members or hiring relief labour, a large proportion of this can be offset.

"If a person's number of hours worked are decreasing this can offset the cost of bringing in relief workers. The net cost to the business shouldn't be affected too much and that's something that many farmers don't understand or good at implementing," John says.

So in the changing world of dairy farming, how and who starts the conversation?

"In any employment relationship there has to be a willingness to be open to having any sort of conversation. Employees will often bring things to the table that challenge the status quo and you may not want to discuss as it but these topics can sometimes end up working well for all parties. It's about discussing the options and figuring out what's going to work best in that situation," Linda-Maree says.

In this tight labour market looking at other options is crucial to staff retention, and rostering is one way of having an advantage.

"We are looking for retention in the industry and the adage that 'this is the way we have always done things' won't work going forward."

"If you're looking to get good quality staff then providing a healthy working environment will attract a higher quality staff and help to retain them."



Understanding leave

Linda-Maree says one of the big issues in employment is the lack of understanding of the concept of accumulated leave and entitled leave. It is important to be very clear about the difference between the two, especially in relation to how rostered leave is applied.

Accumulated leave is leave that is accrued during the first year of employment. The employee is not able to take that leave unless it has been approved by the employer and the employer can't force an employee to take accrued leave. However, the employee can request to take accrued leave.

Entitled leave is leave that has been transferred across from the accrued total one year after commencement of employment. Once the first year of employment has been completed the employer can request that leave be taken.

"That first year of employment, you can't force employees to take annual leave. Any leave taken has to be instigated by the employee and also approved by the employer."

This is crucial to remember, because when deciding on which roster to apply, any roster that has a three day or more leave period might not be complying with the Holidays Act 2003.

Being highly seasonal there are obvious times of the year where employees taking leave isn't workable, and having conversations with new staff around the preferred time of year for leave is important.

"Having that conversation at the start is important and helps avoid running into issues down the track."

Often, there is real confusion about the types of leave, with many employers tending to merge them all as one.

John says record-keeping of the type of leave that's being taken is important because if there is a dispute around salaries or wages, if the breakdown of leave taken is not clear, particularly around sick leave, bereavement leave, rostered days off, annual leave and statutory public days off, you might find you have to pay the employee twice.

Types of leave

ANNUAL LEAVE: falls into two categories:

- Accrued leave – leave accrued during the year
- Entitled leave – leave balance after working for one year, which will equal 20 days or 160 hours (if no accrued leave was taken)

PAID LEAVE: an ambiguous title, any leave paid should be described by the type of leave it is, eg annual, (accrued or entitled), sick, bereavement, unpaid, or public holiday.

DAYS IN LIEU: a day in lieu is where an employee has worked a public holiday and so is entitled to another day of leave

UNPAID LEAVE: taken without pay

