



**Staff-shortage solutions**

This is the third article in our series that takes a closer look at dairy labour. Many UK producers are facing the increasingly difficult challenge of finding staff to manage and run their herds and businesses. So how can they attract and inspire the next generation and keep them motivated and passionate about working in the sector?

Part 1: **Dairy labour: why there is a shortage?**

Part 2: **Recruiting and retaining staff**

Part 3: **Inspiring the next generation**

Part 4: **Success stories – training and apprenticeships**

Two young and ambitious herd managers tell us what attracted them to their current roles – and what’s key to keeping them, and the next generation, motivated and eager to work in the UK dairy industry.

text **Rachael Porter**

**R**ecognition for a job well done, as well as job satisfaction and a good work:life balance. These are just a few of the factors that are import to herd manager Rob Chadwick. At just 33, he’s already climbed to the top of the dairy management ladder and, from his own experience, he knows a thing or two about how to motivate people– and how to keep them there.

“Investing in staff is vital – it’s the best way of making them feel valued. I’m not talking about pay, but training courses and facilities to help them to do their job more easily and to the best of their ability.”

Rob is an LKL Dairy Academy graduate. He finished his two-year part-time course in April this year and

*Rob Chadwick: “Motivation is very much about feeling valued, as well as job satisfaction”*



*Tom Cratchley: “My partner, Rachael, and I were both looking for a new challenge”*



# Progression, prospects and What motiv

for him the most important part of the course wasn’t the module on dairy cow husbandry, or financial planning. It was the training on people management.

**Management training**

Rob works for the Edge family, managing their Cheshire-based herd of 600 cows and 500 head of young stock. But, to put that more accurately, Rob manages the team of staff, comprising eight people, who look after the cattle.

“I could look after cows all day – no problem. What I was struggling with, and what many producers struggle with, is looking after people. That’s a different thing altogether and I admit it didn’t come to me naturally. It was outside my comfort zone and I had to work hard at it to get it right.”

So staff management training – and developing management skills in general – was a huge help to Rob and also kept him motivated. “The Edges could see my potential and wanted to invest me. And managing staff is definitely part and parcel of any dairy herd management role these days. Herds are so much bigger today and it’s no longer solitary work. Successful dairying often means working as part of a team of staff both on and off the farm.”

And good management means getting the best from people. “Motivation is key to getting the best from your staff, as well as retaining them. Money isn’t everything. The same can be said for accommodation too. Some staff will want accommodation with the job and are happy to live and work on the farm. But others won’t. I very much wanted to live away from the farm – partly so that there was a definitive ‘end’ to my working day. So my salary has to allow me to live off farm.”

**Work:life balance**

And to keep a fresh interest, and prevent staff getting ‘stale’, Rob feels that a role in a business that evolves and develops is attractive to employees. They want to see some new ideas and developments, not years and years of the same working day stretching out in front of them. “So throw in some training, give them some ownership of their roles, and get them involved in decision making and any plans for the future of the business. Make them key to the success of your business.”

Creating a work:life balance is important too. “Too many producers and their staff work longer and longer hours, particularly as labour is increasingly difficult to source. But staff just become overwhelmed and exhausted and it’s unsustainable in the longer term. Sure, a couple of busy months with silaging or calving is inevitable. But there must be quieter times to counter this – no one can work at full throttle 52 weeks of the year.”

Again, he says that managing this is down to managing staff – not cows. “It’s better to have two staff working 40 hours a week each than to have one herds person working a 70-hour week. And you’ll have two happy and enthusiastic people working on the unit, rather than one miserable, exhausted one.”

Tom Cratchley agrees that job satisfaction is key and that pay

people management are key to attracting and retaining staff

# ates today's generation?



isn't everything. His dairy career is driven by a desire progress and to look for the next challenge. Tom's second job, after graduating from Aberystwyth University and working as a breeding adviser for 18 months, was managing a dairy herd in Gloucestershire. Today he's working as a dairy unit manager in Norfolk. The 28-year-old says that training and development are both key to attracting and retaining skilled dairy staff. But for him, the deal breaker is the opportunity to progress.

"I saw the job ad on Twitter and messaged the business partner, Tom Rawson, to find out more. That got the ball rolling," he says.

### **New challenges**

Tom Cratchley was happy in Gloucestershire – as was his partner Rachael who is originally from there and worked locally. But looking longer term he wanted a role where they could work together and, most importantly, there were new challenges. "I'd heard a lot about Tom and Charlie Crotty's business – Evolution Farming. I knew they were progressive and I knew that managing a new unit – which is what they were setting up – was just the challenge I was looking for."

Tom has been at the Houghton Hall-based unit, near Sandringham, since January 2018, milking the 350-cow herd. Despite being content in Gloucestershire, he's extremely happy that he made the decision to move – as is Rachael. "It was harder for her – she had family in Gloucestershire. But here we're working on the same farm – we're a team. And this is a nice place to live and work too. Tom feels that there are also more opportunities for dairy in the east, compared to the south west; not least the opportunity to expand the herd further. "We're looking to push cow numbers up to 500 and then 600 cows," says Tom.

Land is difficult to come by in Gloucestershire. Norfolk-based dairy herds are few and far between and Tom says that there's a blank canvas where they are and that the business is still growing and evolving.

"That's exciting. Who knows what the next move for the business could be. All I do know is that I have an opportunity to be part of it." |