

A professional register is helping to im

Is it time you signed

Continual profession development is easier than many producers think. There are also many benefits for employers and employees alike. We spoke to some members of the scheme to find out more.

text **Rachael Porter**

Training and development doesn't have to be time consuming or expensive. Just ask any of the 1,000 members of Dairy Pro, which was launched in 2012. It is a professional development register, operated by BASIS, and has more than 70 training partners, including AHDB Dairy, Arla, the RABDF, LKL Services, and several vet practices.

For just £20 a year, both employers and employees can keep up to date with the latest skills, techniques and ideas, both 'on farm' and off it, with 'points' accrued when attending an industry event or a discussion group. And producers can spend as little – or as much – time as they choose to ensure that their skills and knowledge remain up to date. Membership is open to all producers, and dairy staff with more than 12 months of dairy experience. The scheme also offers associate and student membership.

Dairy Pro is certainly a way to keep track of industry developments that suits Rachael Poole. In partnership with her husband, James, she runs a 150-cow herd near Holsworthy, in Devon, and says that it's vital to have a firm handle on what's going on within your own business – as well as the wider industry.

She's been registered on the scheme since 2012: "So I've been collecting points for a few years now. I think it is important to learn and get involved with other businesses and organisations within the industry – we can learn so much from each other and by collaborating within the industry."

Farm assurance

Rachael is a member of a local dairy discussion group, run by AHDB Dairy, and says that she finds this beneficial from both a social and business point of view. "I am not collecting points to develop my CV, but I believe that it is still important, in terms of farm assurance and keeping our milk buyer happy. It certainly makes our business appear to be much more professional.



Rachael Poole: "Scheme gives our business – and the wider dairy industry – a professional edge"

"On-going training and personal development, whether you're an employer or an employee, is critical to the success of any business. It's important to make the time to ensure you keep bang up to date. And by this I not only mean going to meetings but also reading respected agricultural magazines and journals and learning from other producers' and dairy businesses' experiences. There's a wealth of information and resources out there to be tapped into and this register is an excellent tool to help producers do that."

Rachael and James' long-term aims are to have a sustainable business that can provide a succession opportunity for their children while, at the same time, maintaining a family farm set up and looking after the environment.

"We are continually looking for more efficient and effective ways to reduce production costs without compromising our herd's health, welfare and productivity. And being registered with Dairy Pro ensures that I am informed of any relevant or topical meetings or events being held nearby. For me, the points I accrue are simply the icing on the cake. It's what I actually learn – and can apply to our business – that has the most value."

prove producers' skill set and image

up and went 'pro'?



Stephen Crowther: "The scheme means that my efforts to keep up to date are officially recognised"

Stephen Crowther agrees that Dairy Pro is invaluable to those who want to improve their skills set – as well as herd and business performance. He is the herdsman charged with managing David Cotton's herd, based near Glastonbury in Somerset,

and says that it was David who encouraged him to sign up with Dairy Pro. "And I'm so glad that I did. It's proved invaluable for me," he says, adding that this scheme really adds some substance to his CV. He says that it is also relatively easy to gather Dairy Pro points as he's come across lots of training he's really interested in and that's not in a classroom environment.

Employee benefits

"I've always been keen to attend discussion groups and other workshops and courses and this adds an extra layer. My efforts to improve my dairy knowledge and skills are now being officially recognised, which is great because I don't have any formal agricultural qualifications.

"Although I have no plans to move on, I am very aware of how volatile the dairy market is and realise that getting my training on record makes me more employable should I need to look for another position at any point," he adds.

"My CV is now in great shape because I'm constantly updating my skill set and keeping up to date with the latest ideas and technology. The register is proof of that."

He says that not only does the register 'add value' to the time he spends on training and development, it also makes him feel valued: "By both my employer



Nick Shorter: "All other professionals have to demonstrate their competence through CPD and accreditation – so why not dairy managers and staff?"

and by Dairy Pro and its many partner companies and organisations across the UK. They're investing in my future security, as well as that of the wider dairy industry.

"That's a great motivator and I feel positive and secure about my position both here at Bridge Farm and within the dairy sector."

Manager's view

Velcourt's Nick Shorter encourages all decision-making staff within the business to join Dairy Pro. Indeed he's a member himself as well as being BASIS and FACTS registered: "I'm a big fan of

continual professional development and accreditation, under the wider umbrella of developing a more professional image for dairying and agriculture," he says.

"All our dairy managers and trainee dairy managers, as well as herd managers working directly for Velcourt, are registered on Dairy Pro and record their training through it.

"Any other staff are also encouraged to join and their fees are paid by the business."

The company manages 6,800 cows, in 13 dairy herds, from Cumbria to Devon, as well as offering advice on looking after a further 7,000 cows across the UK.

Nick says that, as well as accruing points for attending external training days and conferences, staff gain points for attending internal quarterly development meetings and training days, as Velcourt itself is a Dairy Pro-registered training partner.

"All other professionals, be they land agents, nutritionists or agronomists, have to demonstrate their competence, through CPD and accreditation.

"We expect our vets and accountants to be fully qualified and 'up to date' and we should expect the same from ourselves and our colleagues and employees," he adds. |

Dairy Pro – how does it work?

The training partners register their events and courses, each of which gets awarded points through BASIS depending on, for example, complexity or commitment required. These are posted on a calendar.

All training partners are assessed by BASIS to gauge suitability for Dairy Pro through a set of rules.

This safeguards the educational quality and independence of each training activity.

Each event submitted for accreditation must have a clear purpose and agenda to gain accreditation, and BASIS undertakes random checks on 5% of

training activities to ensure delivery is in compliance with Dairy Pro standards.

Training partners register the participation of Dairy Pro members in their training activities and send this information back to BASIS so it can be added to individual training records. Training profiles are then compiled and can then be downloaded for individuals and farm businesses.

Individuals gaining a minimum of 20 points in a calendar year will become 'Dairy Pro Endorsed'. Attending a one-day workshop, membership of a discussion group and the completion

of an on-line assessment will achieve this target, so 20 is easily achievable. This endorsement will remain in place as long as the individual maintains his or her minimum points each year.

Becoming 'Dairy Pro Endorsed' signifies that a member has undertaken sufficient training and development during that year to maintain a strong skill base, and is on a par with the minimum requirements of other comparable CPD schemes.

➔ To find out more about Dairy Pro and how to register, visit www.dairypro.co.uk.