



Staff-shortage solutions

This is the second 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 attracting and retaining workers has never been more crucial. What can producers do to reduce staff turnover?

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**

Sourcing dairy staff can be tricky and, when you do find the right candidate, how can you make sure they stay? We spoke to some leading dairy recruitment specialists to find out more about employee attraction strategies.

text **Rachael Porter**

What really motivates staff and creates loyalty is often not what producers think. So says LKL's business development director Ian Lindsay. And he should know. He carried out a survey, asking producers what they thought motivated their staff. He also asked dairy workers the same question.

"The answers made for interesting reading," he says. Most notably, producers believed that, above all else, wages and remuneration motivated staff. Yet this was low down the workers' list. They cited communication, followed by training and responsibility, appreciation and involvement, and job security as more important 'motivators' (see box on page eight).



Ian Lindsay: "Good communication must be a priority"

Different view

"What's really telling is that the number-one motivation for staff – communication – doesn't even feature on the employer list. There's a big

disconnect here and the results tell us that producers looking to recruit and, more importantly, retain staff must make good communication a priority.

"I questioned employees across a range of skill levels, pay grades and herd sizes and the results reflect – from both employee and employer

We share some
Communicat



perspective – a similar picture seen across other industries." LKL's managing director George Gordon says that, often, dairy producers don't have a reputation for being good communicators. "But it's important and well worth putting in the effort and taking time to do things better. Of course, pay is

tips on recruiting and retaining dairy employees

ion key to staff retention



important and employers should make sure that the wages they offer are competitive to both attract and retain employees. “On the face of it, many see that there are easier ways to make a living and, in some instances, they are right. So it’s important that the working hours and pay are

competitive. Workers’ expectations are very different today and some producers have to move with the times.

This may mean offering more time off, shorter shifts, and more sociable working hours.

“At review time, some staff may prefer more pay, but some would opt for more time off. Moving to a ‘one weekend on, one weekend off’ scenario, and maybe introducing a rota accommodating different team requirements, could make all the difference.”



George Gordon: “Working hours and pay must be competitive”

Competitive package

“Again, work out what would work for you and your business, and talk to your staff.” Mr Gordon sees that the trend is towards dairy staff having more time off, working, on average, between five and 5.5 days a week: “That’s forcing up the cost of staffing a dairy unit. But it’s the kind of package that’s required to keep the sector competitive and to encourage people to stay in the industry.”

When it comes to recruitment, things are getting tighter and not least because the number of people coming to the UK from Romania and Bulgaria have slowed considerably since Brexit.

“Businesses employing European labour, and indeed British people, should now be pulling out the stops to retain good staff. Listen to the team, communicate and change things to create better working conditions.

“Get accommodation issues sorted out and put effort into people management. Try to keep team morale high wherever possible. For ambitious senior staff, the key here can be to offer them opportunities and maybe even promotions that could be mutually beneficial. Equity and profit shares are attractive options, that will allow



Dominik Wojciechowski: “Imagine what it would be like to work for you”

senior team members to take on more responsibility and to take some ownership. And, with the average age of UK dairy producers in the late 50s, it creates the opportunity to let someone else take the strain.” Whatever producers do, it’s vital that they do something to retain staff. “If someone leaves to



What really motivates staff?

Top-five ranking factors from LKL's survey of employers and employees:

Producer ranking

- Wages & remuneration
- Job security
- Promotion & growth
- Good working conditions
- Mutual loyalty

Employee ranking

- Communication
- Training & responsibility
- Appreciation & involvement
- Job security
- Wages & remuneration

work in construction for £200 a day, for example, they're not going to come back. It's vital that we all look after the good people that we've got and then also take steps to attract others into the industry. Understanding what motivates staff is a good place to start."

Regional managers

As a result of the survey, and feedback from European employees, LKL appointed regional managers, from the Romanian and Polish communities working with cows in the UK, to support staff and help them settle more easily into their jobs on UK units.

"Starting any new job is stressful. Now imagine doing that in a different country with little or no language skills and having to sort out all manner of paperwork – let alone carry out your day-to-day responsibilities," says the company's Dominik Wojciechowski.

He helps to recruit and support the company's Polish staff and now works from Poland, but he started working for LKL in 2008, milking cows on a farm in Sussex.

"Communication is my biggest role – and making sure that Polish staff working in the UK are as happy as possible. The language barrier can create fear and uncertainty, but if they know that there's someone on the end of the phone who can help, then that helps to take the stress out of many situations – be it a work, health, financial or family issue that they are struggling with."

Language barrier

Mr Wojciechowski knows what the Polish staff are experiencing when they first come to the UK – he's been through it himself.

"Firstly, you're in a new and unfamiliar country with a different culture. And then there's the language barrier. And the working environment; Polish farms tend to be much smaller than those in the UK and many people are used to working alone. The UK has larger units and people must work as part of a team. These are all big changes that take time to adapt to."

Once staff are settled, his job is to keep them in the UK. "Ideally we'd like them to settle here for good, move up the career ladder and take on more responsibility."

There's more choice for employees now – the job market is strong. "Having worked on both sides of the fence, I think that it's important that employers put themselves in their employees' shoes.

"Imagine what it would be like to work for you? Would you want to work for you? If not, how could you make your employees' lives and working day more satisfying? Accommodation, machinery, systems, communication, rapport – they all have to be right if employers are not only going to recruit but also retain motivated and dedicated staff.

"There's one main reason why staff leave, in my experience, and that's stress. So do all you can to alleviate that and you'll go a long way to avoiding staffing issues." |