

Dairy Business Association: Hiring, management tools boost success on dairy farms

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GREEN BAY, Wis. — As 2021 gets underway, farmers are dealing with familiar issues, things like up-and-down milk prices and weather. Increasingly, the challenge of finding and keeping quality employees is becoming one of the standard issues as well.

But while milk prices and weather are out of a farmer's control, there is something that can be done to improve the workforce situation. Jorge Delgado of Alltech's training, talent development and retention for dairy workers program, stresses that getting creative and proactive in hiring and management is crucial.

Image "It's time to start thinking outside of the box; start innovating, applying and changing the way we manage employees in our industry," Delgado said. "We need to start thinking in a proactive way when it comes to managing employees instead of thinking in a reactive way."

Delgado shared his advice today with participants at Dairy Strong, the Dairy Business Association's annual conference. The event is virtual this year.

Dairy farmers can use tools like personality tests to measure current and potential employees' aptitude, personality traits and skill sets, Delgado said. Personality tests help farmers find answers to important questions. Will the employee be comfortable in a certain role? Does he or she have the behavioral traits that will lead to success in a position?

"I believe they [farmers] can make a better impact internally through changes in the way they work with their employees," Delgado said.

Farmers will enjoy a more efficient hiring process using objective and validated metrics, as well as increased employee retention, he said. They will also see a reduction in costs associated with turnover, such as hiring and training, and a higher rate of productivity.

Alltech On Farm support has a model called The Workplace Productivity Profile, which is a test to help dairy farmers predict whether an individual will be a conscientious, productive and reliable employee. This is generally used for entry-level positions.

“This test measures several traits: conscientiousness, perseverance, integrity/honesty and attitudes toward theft and fraud,” Delgado said.

Getting an idea of whether an employee will be reliable and productive, as well as diligent in following the rules and regulations of the farm, can help farmers position the best people in the most effective roles and improve the culture on the farm, he said.

Another relatively new management tool for dairy farmers is the use of internal surveys. Anonymous feedback from employees provides farmers a better understanding of concerns they need to address, Delgado said. This helps improve workplace culture and employee productivity and motivation.