

WHOLE FARM MANUAL

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Our brief presentation will answer three questions.

1. Why have a farm manual - do you only really need them to enter competitions?
2. What is included in our farm manual? We will provide our business focus and performance review pages, and show the technical detail of the 'how to' part of the manual
3. How did we get around to doing it? The involvement of our staff in the writing process and the way to make the manual a living/updating document.

Why have a farm manual?

Induction to systems

Most farmers experience staff turnover, and part of the solution to our shortage of skilled labour has been employing staff from European countries. Generally these have been experienced, high quality employees who have been an asset to our business. Because they are on their "OE" however, it means they also come and go. We have found our farm manual invaluable in helping new employees to slot into our systems quickly.

'Relief milkers' is another group for whom we have found the manual invaluable. The manual details the milking process and cow flow, providing new employees with written back up for the first time they nervously wash the plant themselves, or a written explanation of how the backing gate can enhance or hinder the milking process. For example, every farmer who milks in a herringbone probably has slightly different beliefs on how to optimize cow flow. Our manual ensures that the day the relief milker is on is not the day milking takes half an hour longer.

Recruitment

A farm manual has a role in the recruitment process. You can demonstrate clearly to a potential employee what we, as employers, are about, and what the prospective job entails.

Saving face

While a female employee (and some male employees) might be prepared to ask again if they haven't understood an instruction or the workings of something on the farm, many males and some females won't! Some farmer employers can also be notorious for making people feel they shouldn't ask again! A manual is a great private way to check your understanding without having to ask again when grappling with a task for the first time. Any system that helps people work things out

for themselves and builds their confidence is useful. Farms tend to attract people who like to be seen as independent and competent. No-one likes to feel a fool.

Performance

A significant advantage of a manual *that is actually used* by employees is consistent results on the farm. Everyone knows why the irrigation hose has to be laid out straight and what distance it should be from the wire rope (resulting in no damage to rotorainers!). Everyone knows we don't get out of the pit when we are milking on this farm (resulting in good cow flow); everyone knows where the oil goes in the tractor and who is responsible for it; and everyone knows the cows graze to 1500 before they get shifted and what that looks like (resulting in high ME pasture).

What's in our manual?

These are the headings in our manual:

Business focus of Guiney Family Dairy farms (page 1)

On this first page we broadly outline our financial, family and farming goals. Using bullet points our farming philosophy is made crystal clear so prospective employees understand *why* we do what we do.

Sub headings on this page are: 'Purpose of Position', 'Reporting Lines', 'Hours of Work' and 'Special Requirements'.

Performance review (pages 2 and 3)

This is a two page document outlining tasks on the farm, with space to mark performance for each task – simply taken from Dexcel's HR Tool kit.

Having the performance review in the manual that is handed to an employee on day one tells them what is expected of them and how their performance is measured. Far from being intimidating, it is much fairer on employees as they actually know what is expected. Many farmers

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have high or certain expectations but don't specifically outline them and then grizzle about the standard they get.

Operations

Headings for this part of the manual include:

Rotorainer/Centre Pivot Irrigation

Many photos are used here so every term that is used, eg, cam, lever, is shown by photograph.

Helpful hints and trouble shooting

Photos of the switches and valves in the pump shed with arrows pointing to the relevant switch or valve under discussion.

This section in our manual was successfully used one day by a new employee who was on with a relief milker when a power cut shut down the cowshed and irrigation pump and we were out of phone reception. Had they not used the manual and restarted the milking plant without the irrigation pump, the milk pump would have burnt out! The manual saved us and saved them!

Effluent irrigator

Milking process

A detailed diagram of where milkers should be to optimize cow flow, a detailed diagram of the yard and correct use of top gate with backing gate and detailed photos of all parts of plant for start up, cleaning and shut down.

Maintenance day

On this farm every Thursday, one staff member does all the maintenance for the week. All vehicles are filled with fuel and greased and the oil and water checked in them. All yards and races are cleaned and washed. This ensures the smooth running of the farm and vehicles on the farm. The person rostered on maintenance is given a checklist (included in the manual) and each item is ticked off as it is completed. Photos of farm bikes, tractors, wagon and places to grease and oil are included. Specific directions to complete maintenance day effectively make up this section.

How to get it done

We prepared the business focus ourselves (a one pager) and used a template from Dexcel HR tool kit for performance review. Kieran then gave the staff a digital camera and the task of imagining they had walked onto our farm out of Auckland city and needed to get through a week! Once Denis and Eugene started the process they really started to enjoy it and produced a

magnificently detailed document they were quite proud of, photos all included and burnt on to a CD for us. Updating will be required as the smallest things change (eg, we have a Varivac now so that alters start up in the cowshed - you may have a new bike that takes two stroke oil or the effluent system may have been upgraded) . Why not make it a project every winter to get the current staff on the farm to update the technical manual, and challenge you to update the farming goals page every winter? Then the manual update becomes a training tool as the staff get to know how everything works in detail, your manual gets updated and you have to talk to your spouse again about why you are farming!

Of course if you are too busy milking in the winter you may not have time...Yet another reason to the milk cows only when the grass grows!!

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