

# STAFF - THINKING OUTSIDE THE NORM

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Ask any Dairy Farmer what their biggest headache is and 9 times out of 10 their reply will be staffing. Not turning up, sleeping in, lack of buy in, the list goes on.

Why is it, and where are we going wrong?

In our industry the word “sustainable” is bartered around all the time in relation to the environment and our practices. The definition of sustainable is “able to be maintained at a certain rate, level, able to be upheld or defend.

Are our staffing practices sustainable?

We don't have the answers to all the issues but the purpose of the workshop is to go through our journey with staff and some of the practices we have put in place and to be honest are seeing major benefits from.

So from 7,000 ewes to 1000 cows has been a journey of discovery. First our mortgage is hundreds of times bigger but we have 10 staff who now work with us. “Work with us” is a key phrase. Our staff don't work for us they work with us. This small change in wording makes a difference when interacting with staff. There is no “I” in Team! Our business would not survive without our staff.

We became employers by default – we needed staff to milk the cows. But there is a lot more to being an employer than paying the wages and allocating tasks. When I think about the mistakes we make from bad recruitment decisions to not putting enough focus on the individual needs of our staff. Staff are people and people have needs!

We watched staff self-destruct before our eyes – from alcohol to relationship issues, tiredness, not turning up. John and I would often shake our heads and say what were we doing wrong – it can't be this hard.

The first turning point for us was with the guidance of Results.com writing our strategic plan, setting our core purpose.

Our core purpose is Empowering People – Helping our team and whanau to be the best they can be; To inspire, teach and support.

We finally had our identity – you will find our values and purpose on the side of each of our sheds. These values and our purpose dictates our decisions.

We started looking at all our business decisions especially staffing from a different perspective and in this process we also do the test - “if it was me or my partner how would I feel” and a major one for me is “ if it was my child how would I feel”.

First of all as a mother I can tell you that I don't want my 17 year old working 12 to 14 hour days. As a wife I didn't want my husband and my children's father gone from 5am in the morning to 5.30pm at night only seeing them when they pop home for lunch. Too exhausted to help with the children and just want to crash on the couch. Not able to watch their Saturday sport or coach their rugby team because of work commitments.

So what were we going to do about it – ok to talk the talk but now we had to walk the walk – and stay in business.

First area we identified where we had our biggest issues and highest rate of “destruction” for want of a better term was our junior staff – Farm Assistants.

What were the issues?

- Long hours
- Isolation to peer group
- A job not a career
- Lack of family time / social time
- Accidents / Mistakes caused by fatigue
- Reduced decision making ability
- Budgeting ability

## Long hours

A typical farm staffing would look something like this:

AM Milking	Daily Tasks	PM Milking	Hrs / Fortnight
Farm / Herd Manager			120
Farm Assistant			120
Relief Milker	Weekend Milkings	Relief Milker	20
			<u>260</u>

### **Fact:**

The definition of a “full time equivalent position” is 40 hours per week. Our “typical dairy farm staffing” saw our staff working one and a half full time equivalent jobs.

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So this example shows two staff members plus a weekend relief milker were working the 3.25 FTE positions.

Why can't dairy staff work a FTE job?? So I started playing with the rosters and possible scenarios. This was an option we decided to go with on one of the units:

AM Milking	Daily Tasks	PM Milking	Hrs / Fortnight
Farm / Herd Manager			120
Farm Assistant 9am to 5 pm			84
Milk Harvester			30
Relief Milker	Weekend Milkings	Relief Milker	20
			<u>254</u>

Let's look at this dollar wise.

### Typical Model

AM Milking	Daily Tasks	PM Milking	Hrs / Fortnight	Hourly Rate	Salary	Housing/ Travel	F
Farm / Herd Manager			120	\$20.00	\$62,400	\$13,000	
Farm Assistant			120	\$14.75	\$46,020	\$9,100	
Relief Milker	Weekend Milkings	Relief Milker	20	\$20.00	\$8,000		
			<u>260</u>		<u>\$116,420</u>	<u>\$22,100</u>	\$

Note: Housing Manager \$250 per week, Housing Farm Assistant \$175 per week

No allowance for other package items such as meat, firewood etc in this table

### Gregan Farms Model

AM Milking	Daily Tasks	PM Milking	Hrs / Fortnight	Hourly Rate	Salary	Housing/ Travel	Total Package
Farm / Herd Manager			120	\$20.00	\$62,400	\$13,000	\$75,400
Farm Assistant 9am to 5 pm			84	\$17.40	\$38,002	\$6,240	\$44,242
Milk Harvester			30	\$20.00	\$12,000	\$2,400	\$14,400
Relief Milker	Weekend Milkings	Relief Milker	20	\$20.00	\$8,000		\$8,000
			<u>254</u>		<u>\$120,402</u>	<u>\$21,640</u>	<u>\$142,042</u>

Note: Housing Manager \$250 per week, Travel Allowance based on \$120 per week

No allowance for other package items such as meat, firewood etc in this table

In summary very little cost difference.

Before we go through the benefits of this option to our business – here is an example of the advertisement we placed in the paper.

**Gregan Farms  
DAIRY POSITIONS**

At Gregan Farms we understand the need for a balance between social, family and work commitments. We have created positions on our Dairy Farms at Hunter (30 mins from Timaru, 20 mins from Waimate) to allow a career in Dairying whilst having time to live life.

We currently have the following position available which involves all aspects of dairying. Milkings are generally 2 ½ hours each.

Below are the hours based on our two week roster:

- Monday to Thursday 9am to 5pm
- Friday 6am to 5pm
- Saturday and Sunday (am and pm milking but once our work is done we go home between milkings)
- Monday to Thursday 9am to 5pm
- Friday, Saturday, Sunday off

The position is approximately 85 hours per fortnight during the milking season and 80 hours during the winter, paid at an hourly rate depending on experience.

A travel allowance will be available.

We encourage and pay for our staff to attend courses

No experience is needed and age is not a barrier. As long as you are honest, hardworking and reliable and have a current driver's licence you could be the person.

Gregan Farms is a drug free work place.

For more information please contact  
**Cara Gregan 0274 782 259**  
**or Wayne Pritchard 027 689 5599**

We had a great response to our advertisement – we only advertised in local South Canterbury newspapers. We find the free community papers are best as a lot of people no longer subscribe to a newspaper and have found if you advertise on the internet everyone replies!

Here's the profile of the young gentleman we employed.

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Josh was 18 when he started working with us. He had worked in the dairy industry for 12 months but wanted to experience flatting and weekends. His previous roster was a six on two off hence he only had days off on a weekend every six weeks but being a young man wanted to go out with his mates. Josh found himself traveling to town (Timaru) every night to catch up with friends. A six on, two off roster will suit some staff but once again it is being flexible to understand what suits each staff members age and stage, best.

We agreed to a set salary to help him with budgeting his money rather than hourly pay and he went flatting in town. We paid his bond, provide him with a travel allowance but most importantly he loves flatting and being in town. His salary was higher than his previous job and he worked less hours.

This option has meant the dairy industry has not lost a very competent young man. Mind you it hasn't been all plain sailing. His vehicle is a Ford Falcon and costs a packet to run and he found it hard to budget now he had rent and electricity to pay. After a budgeting session at the kitchen counter and an interest free loan from us to buy a little run around he is all set.

### **Gregan Farms**

<b>AM Milking</b>	<b>Daily Tasks</b>	<b>PM Milking</b>	<b>Hrs / Fortnight</b>
	Operations Manager		100
	Farm / Herd Manager		120
	Farm / Herd Manager		106
	Farm Assistant 9am to 5 pm		85
	Farm Assistant 9am to 5 pm		85
	Farm Assistant 5 am to 1 pm		85
	Milk Harvester		30
Relief Milker	Weekend Milkings	Relief Milker	36
			<u>547</u>

Above is a summary of our whole operation. The employment of an Operations Manager is a lifestyle choice for our family and the fact John does some work off farm and therefore needs the flexibility.

Meet some of our staff and how we have benefited from a flexible workplace.

Firstly our Operations Manager. Wayne has been with us since our first conversion – a shearer by trade. His biggest asset is his ability to relate and deal with staff. He progressed through the ranks to Farm Manager. When we looked at how we could keep Wayne in our business we knew one of his key drivers was his children. Hence when we put the package for

the position together, we took him off the roster for milking but also he wasn't required to work weekends. Naturally in his role he checks in with the staff in the weekends and covers when needed but he has the ability to spend the weekends with his children

One of our Managers is a new parent to a very unsettled baby. Sleep deprivation is dangerous at any work place – a dairy farm especially. An unsettled baby also put's mum under a lot of pressure and I am a firm believer in "happy wife happy life".

Solution – extended lunch hour for our staff member. He would go home at lunch and spend two hours with his family. Often holding baby so mum can have a sleep or having a nap himself. It was a win win – mum had a break and our staff member stopped feeling torn between work and family. It's that work life balance.

Our dairy assistant Malcom who works from 5am to 1pm is an avid sportsman. He loves playing and coaching basketball as well as playing cricket and rugby. We have identified that isolation is a big issue with young staff. Malc lives in a single man's quarters on the farm. It could be a lonely existence for a young man. But by finishing each day at 1pm he often has a nap and heads to Waimate to the gym or to practice or a game. It has enabled him to enjoy life as a young person should but also to have a career. Malc has worked for us now for 15 months and this coming season is moving to the role of Trainee Herd Manager. His work hours will be 5am to 2pm as we didn't want him to give up on his great work life balance.

As discussed before we do not accommodate two of our Farm Assistants. Given their hours they can easily make the 30 minute commute to the farm from Timaru.

Our thinking behind this is twofold firstly on a purely financial point of view is we haven't had to outlay capital to build two homes. At a guess a four bedroom home would cost us around \$350,000. Interest @ say 7% would be \$24,500 plus repairs and maintenance etc. Paying \$120 a week milage is a quarter of the price. Other option is to base the allowance on their rent or mortgage in town. It really comes down to being flexible and tailoring the package to suit the employee and their situation.

Not accommodating staff means that accommodation doesn't feature in our decision on whom we employ. We can employ the best person for the job. If accommodation is a hurdle it is about helping staff find appropriate accommodation for their personal circumstances.

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Secondly it comes back to what is best for our employees. Typical scenario is that given our modern lifestyle Dad is the only one that doesn't end up travelling. I know myself that the children and I spend hours in the car driving to town for sports, school, music, swimming lessons, etc etc. I often threaten John that I will buy a house in town as I spend more time there, than I do at home, with all the kids' activities. There is a real cost to families running a vehicle to and from town. It also limits the ability of the partner to find work. In my discussions with a staff members wife she pointed out to me it is only worth working in town if she works full time by the time she pays petrol but she really wants to go back into the work force for the social interaction as well as the money.

Another big consideration is families are better with their support networks. Rather than uprooting everyone each time the employee changes jobs – are they better staying where their friends, families and child care are. Research has shown that each time a child changes school they lose six months of schooling.

As we all know the 90 day trial period is an important time for both employee and employer to ensure it is the right fit. If the fit isn't right and the employee moves on, often their children and family need to be uprooted from school and moved again. As humans we need stability especially in our home life.

Given the location of some units not accommodating staff may not be an option. We do accommodate our Operations Manager and one Farm Manager and acknowledge you do need some staff on farm but maybe just not everyone. We purchased a house at Makikihi (a small village of approx. 100) 10 minutes down the road for one of our Farm Managers. A contributing factor was the cost of the four bedroom house was \$175k, half the price of building. In tough times it can be sold or even rented out.

One on one time with your staff for 10 minutes every four weeks I have found invaluable. I sit down with them all individually for a chat. Often not about the job but about them, their family, sport, anything. It is here that they get an opportunity to talk and to discuss issues, problems, basically just chew the fat. But it gives me an opportunity to understand where they are coming from. Sometimes it is a comment about their son's soccer and the team needs a coach. I tend to make notes for myself, identify the issues and to date I have found in the next couple of days I come back to them with a solution or idea. It may be that if Rose would swap a morning milking for a night milking then they could be the soccer coach or that if practice was at lunchtime at school more than happy for them to work things so they can coach.

It's about finding the key drivers for your staff. It is not necessarily money – often it is about the work life balance and family and so it is making them feel that we understand this and put things in place to help them achieve it. It is a big reason why our staff days off always include a Saturday and Sunday. If you are rostered on in a weekend it is basically minimal duties and then head off to watch your children play sport or play sport yourself.

All the above points are about the big picture. Our staff are the cornerstone to our business. Without them our business would not exist so it is about being flexible, thinking outside the square, putting yourself in their shoes. As employers we benefit as much as anyone with engaged happy staff which in turn results in low turnover

I urge you when you return to your units to look at each of your staff individually. Imagine if you were them what would make your job so much better. Think about what are your staff key drivers. And start the process to making your place a work place of choice.

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