

# Dairy Sessions

Moderators: Diane Petrowski Ferry, Heath Bessoff White

## Labor Management: Organizing for Profit

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### Abstract

For many of us, the dairy industry has changed dramatically in the last 20 years. Herd sizes have become larger and technological development has changed the owner from a man taking care of a few cows to a man with a multi-million dollar business and many employees to get the work done. Managing cows has become managing people. Just like the large successful companies in this country, dairies are spending more time and money in training and motivating people to be productive in a wide range of skills.

### Introduction

I finished veterinary school at the University of Tennessee in 1981. I was really smart that day. I saw my future unfolding, with the amount of knowledge I had accumulated, being put to use to enhance the dairy industry. I have realized every day since then how much I really did not know.

I started in the dairy business in 1985 in a partnership in an 80-cow dairy, and I began to realize how much more about the dairy industry and managing a business I did not know. In 1992, I went out on my own and started a 450-cow herd. In 2000, I built a new parlor and freestall barn and have since expanded to a 1250-cow herd.

In every step of the way, as I have tried to get bigger and better, the management of people has always been one of the key challenges. I have maintained a veterinary practice through this process, and every day I feel I must delegate something else from my daily routine so that I oversee more, and actually do less, of the hands-on work. Sometimes I miss the days when I was really more in touch with some of the details.

I have never felt that I was a natural at managing people, and in 1998 I could sense that morale in my work force was going in the wrong direction. My dairy was

not progressing. We were not getting better. I felt that I needed someone to look at the business from another viewpoint. So I contracted with a business management company to look at my business and make some suggestions.

The main thing they saw as my weakest point was labor management. They told me I had to delegate responsibilities and work more at training people to do their jobs. I saw that I needed to change the way I approached my job every day. I needed a job description that gave me focus. I had said it before, but I began to really see that oftentimes the biggest weakness with people is that we have not adequately trained them. Do they really know what we expect of them? Do they know why we tell them to do the things we tell them? Do they understand the value that a good job can have and how costly a bad job can be? Do we as employers understand that certain personalities fit particular jobs and that some personalities definitely do not fit other jobs?

Each year I feel that we do a little bit better job, but it never gets to the point that people do not need more training. Many employees tend to drift away from protocols and they need constant reinforcement. Sometimes it seems as if you are saying the same thing over and over until it finally clicks, and they seem to have bought into what you have been saying.

Being able to spend time with each employee is still my greatest challenge. Since most of my employees are Hispanic and have a limited knowledge of English communication, it is a challenge for me since I have a limited knowledge of Spanish.

### Ask Some Questions

In evaluating employees, it can be helpful to see what they really know about their jobs.

- Does your feeder understand dry matter intake?

- Does he/she realize the damage moldy feed can have on your cows' health?
- Does he/she realize how much a 2 lb (0.9 kg) drop in production costs the farm?
- Does he/she realize how much an engine in the feed truck costs if it is run without oil?
- Do your employees know what a shot of BST or a bottle of Banamine costs?
- Do they know the value of a good cow or a tank of milk?
- Do they understand that without colostrum, calves will die?

The list could go on and on.

### **Two Different Approaches**

Some of my clients like to approach labor management as a dictator. They tell the employee what to do, with no explanation of why this is important. When the employee fails at the job, the employer becomes mad and feels the employee is not capable. Oftentimes these employers view most of their employees as incompetent and they tend to struggle with delegating. I have heard of a large dairy that decided not to go with a full prep procedure in the parlor because the manager did not think his employees would ever do that properly. That approach would tend to make you think you are defeated before you ever get started.

The other approach would be to spend more time in training, whether it be by yourself or other farm personnel, or to bring in people specialized in certain areas to work with employees. Some of the AI companies are becoming more involved in training for more than just AI breeding. They have training for obstetrics, milking procedures and sick cow protocols. Milking equipment companies are involved in milking procedure training and mastitis prevention.

Some veterinarians have capitalized on this need and made it the focus of their practice. I see this as a bigger part of the future of the bovine practitioner. As farms continue to get larger, the employees will continue to do more of the work that has traditionally been considered that of the veterinarian.

I feel that I have been blessed in many ways. I feel confident that the people on my dairy can take care of the work load and make proper decisions if I need to be gone for a week or so at a time. My focus is to make the larger decisions as to where we hope to be in one month, six months, and five years from now. When we stumble in one area of management, I feel responsible that I did not train or communicate enough to make sure the job was done right. Every day seems to be another learning experience. I hope that I instill a team approach in our people and that they can feel proud of themselves and the job they do.



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*Do not use in female dairy cattle 20 months of age or older as use in lactating dairy cattle may cause milk residues. Not for use in cattle of breeding age. Do not use for calves to be processed for veal. Full Product Information found on page 76.*

**BRIEF SUMMARY**

(For full Prescribing Information, see package insert.)

NADA #141-063, Approved by FDA.

**Nuflor®**  
**(FLORFENICOL)****Injectable Solution 300 mg/mL****For Intramuscular and Subcutaneous Use in Cattle Only.****CAUTION:** Federal law restricts this drug to use by or on the order of a licensed veterinarian.**DESCRIPTION:** NUFLOR is a solution of the synthetic antibiotic florfenicol. Each milliliter of sterile NUFLOR Injectable Solution contains 300 mg of florfenicol, 250 mg n-methyl-2-pyrrolidone, 150 mg propylene glycol, and polyethylene glycol q.s.**INDICATIONS:** NUFLOR Injectable Solution is indicated for treatment of bovine respiratory disease (BRD) associated with *Mannheimia (Pasteurella) haemolytica*, *Pasteurella multocida*, and *Haemophilus somnus*, and for the treatment of bovine interdigital phlegmon (foot rot, acute interdigital necrobacillosis, infectious pododermatitis) associated with *Fusobacterium necrophorum* and *Bacteroides melaninogenicus*. Also, it is indicated for the control of respiratory disease in cattle at high risk of developing BRD associated with *Mannheimia (Pasteurella) haemolytica*, *Pasteurella multocida*, and *Haemophilus somnus*.**RESIDUE WARNINGS:** Animals intended for human consumption must not be slaughtered within 28 days of the last intramuscular treatment. Animals intended for human consumption must not be slaughtered within 38 days of subcutaneous treatment. Do not use in female dairy cattle 20 months of age or older. Use of florfenicol in this class of cattle may cause milk residues. A withdrawal period has not been established in preruminating calves. Do not use in calves to be processed for veal.**WARNINGS: NOT FOR HUMAN USE. KEEP OUT OF REACH OF CHILDREN.** This product contains materials that can be irritating to skin and eyes. Avoid direct contact with skin, eyes, and clothing. In case of accidental eye exposure, flush with water for 15 minutes. In case of accidental skin exposure, wash with soap and water. Remove contaminated clothing. Consult a physician if irritation persists. Accidental injection of this product may cause local irritation. Consult a physician immediately. The Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) contains more detailed occupational safety information.

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Clinical improvement should be evident in most treated subjects within 24 hours of initiation of treatment. If a positive response is not noted within 72 hours of initiation of treatment, the diagnosis should be reevaluated.

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