

Farmers' responsibility to become more competitive and sustainable employers



NUFFIELD IRELAND Farming Scholarships

by Edward Payne

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Personal Introduction

My path to becoming a farmer was not always clear, although born and reared on a farm. After school I went to college, where I studied engineering and then business studies before the opportunity arose for me to return home full time in 2009 which I took and have never regretted. Since I have moved home I have studied a level 6 specific green certificate in Mountbellew Agricultural College during which I won FBD student of the year.

I am 33 years of age married to Jennifer with two young boys, Benjamin (six years old) and Aaron (two years old). Building a resilient farming business that in the future our two boys will hopefully choose to step into like I did is one of my key drivers to continually develop and move the business forward. It is the responsibility of Jennifer and I, to grow a business over the next number of years, so that it can offer the type of lifestyle and workload that our kids will want to get involved.

“The job of each generation is to solve more problems than they create and to lift up the next generation to be better than the last. Simply repeating the past does neither.”

— [L.R. Knost](#)

Our farm runs a grass-based system of compact spring calving cows. In 2011 we started milking, moving our farm across from sucklers, beef and sheep to dairying. In February 2018 we started milking on a second owned block where we are milking a further 200 cows once a day. Next year our farm will milk over 500 cows and it is with thanks to all our staff and advisors that has helped us to where we are.

I was first introduced to Nuffield in 2010 while working on a scholar’s farm in the south east of Ireland and from then on, being awarded a scholarship was a goal of mine. I was delighted and proud to become a 2017 scholar and hope that my report and further work in the industry will be of benefit to the farmers and farming in Ireland.

Since being awarded the scholarship I have gained friends and contacts in many countries around the world, as well as gaining a huge amount of knowledge in relation to global agriculture. My farming business has benefitted from the scholarship as I have implemented many techniques that I had seen while travelling. Nuffield has made me proud to be part of the wonderful industry of agriculture, it has opened my eyes to the Global scale and importance of the industry. Nuffield has shown me the value of travel and how continuing to push myself outside of my comfort zone, challenging myself and my business model will help me build a resilient business in the future. I hope that over the period of my career I can now be of help to others in the sector and through what I have learnt help them in some way. On a personal note, since being awarded my scholarship I have developed many new skills. I hugely underestimated the task of completing this report but I have gained greatly from the process.

I cannot thank my family, friends and employees enough for their time and effort in allowing me to complete this scholarship. Since being awarded my scholarship our farm has continued to develop at a relatively fast pace. We have set up a second unit, employed another full-time person and grown the total area farmed through both purchase and lease of land. This has been possible thanks to the strong team of people I have around me and their hard work has allowed me the time to concentrate on my topic.

Background to study topic

On our farm we have always employed full time staff, and this has not changed since I have returned home, but the reason for wanting to obtain a Nuffield scholarship and pursue this topic choice came from several different areas.

Firstly, I recognised one of the main limiting or risk factors to the expansion plans of my business was the availability of good, reliable, long-term staff. This coupled with the fact that I myself did not have any training in human relations, people management etc. I saw the need for more investigation in this area.

The strongest and most obvious reason for my drive to find answers and solutions came from a current employee. From Killybegs, Co. Donegal, Aidan our farm manager is not from a farming background and has a degree in electrical engineering. Yet when he and his now wife travelled to New Zealand, they worked on some dairy farms for visa reasons, and it was there that Aidan realised he enjoyed working on a farm. This struck a chord with me that the Irish agricultural sector had allowed this couple to travel all the way around the world to find out they enjoy milking cows.

From there my focus grew to wanting to find out what farmers can do to attract more people to farming. We hear so much talk in the industry of how many people we need but that is the case for any expanding company or industry. The labour shortage is not exclusive to the farming community, but our sluggishness to adapt and invest in creating a workplace that can compete is our foolish mistake.

When employees leave a farm, for any reason, there are many expenses that are incurred from this. Direct expenses from losing staff include paying short term staff, relief staff and the recruitment of new staff, advertising and time spent interviewing and responding. Training new employees on your farm, whether they have done the job on another farm or not, has a cost and the time it takes to bring them up to the productivity of previous employees can amount to large costs. Indirect costs of losing an employee can be seen in their declining productivity as they work out their leave and may not be working to full potential. This could result in a drop in morale and a loss of farm know-how, especially for critical health and safety and animal welfare issues.

Modern farms in Ireland have had to become much more business focused over the past number of years. As a result, while researching for this report I found myself comparing farming and its techniques against companies in other sectors. I began looking to see if there is anything we can learn from them to improve our employee management.

Executive Summary

Attracting people into the industry of farming has been a perpetual challenge, and will continue to be unless we can make it an attractive career choice, and working environment. What I have tried to do while studying this topic is to learn from great examples that I experienced on my travels, to encourage farmers to do all they can to create a place of work that people will see as a credible career path. It's a 'build it and they will come' approach; if the workplace is wrong, then solving the problem is doomed from the beginning.

The expanding Irish dairy sector is going to need thousands of people to enter it over the next ten years, however this dilemma is not unique to farming or dairy alone. The unemployment rate in Ireland is returning to the low levels of ten years ago and currently sits at 5.4%, more than 3% lower than the euro zone average (CSO Ireland). The rate has fallen sharply since early 2012 when it was 16%.

I conducted a survey at an Agri-careers day in Dublin in 2017, which provided some key findings for the basis to my report. Over 85% of the people attending the day were from an agricultural background. This raised the question, "Why is a career in agriculture not appealing to those who do not come from a farming background?"

During my travels, I had the opportunity to meet many great farmers who all have their own approach to staff. Many of these were aware of their own strengths, and weaknesses, as a manager. They were also conscious of their own style of management and the effects it has on the employee engagement.

Some of the common themes I saw run through the farms I visited that are being very proactive regarding employees were,

- Great communication at all levels
- Continual investment in improving the working conditions
- Mentoring, training, team building
- High level of respect for employees
- Realistic expectations
- Awareness for their employees' priorities

My Key recommendations include:

Farmers must:

- Create a workplace that has comparable working hours to careers in other sectors
- Embrace and communicate to others the opportunities within agriculture
- Educate themselves on the best recruitment approach to filling a position
- Become more aware of the importance and route to better employee engagement
- Be willing to train and develop people into their business
- Invest in building a workplace to be proud of as an industry

In order to attract and retain the 6,000 people it needs over the next ten years then there may also be a role for other stakeholders.

- Creation of an improving workplace certificate for farmers
- Tax reliefs for employees
- More emphasis on HR and people management skills in our Ag. colleges
- Advisors trained and able to assist in the recruitment process on farms
- Lobby groups to place agriculture on a more positive footing with the media and public

Conclusions

We must be willing to invest in the correct places on our farms to make sure we build a workplace that offers more than that of other sectors, varied work type, shorter commute, flexibility, less work or stress while off farm and improved health benefits. There must also be a career aspect, and good communication is essential if employees are to be included in the development and growth of the company. The business must show it values its employees and allow them to prosper in a personal, professional way and being assisted to meet their own plans.

My findings show that there is an opportunity to provide continual professional development for farmers to aid them in their knowledge of Human Relations and employment law. From there it could be possible to create a certificate of performance which may lead to getting the backing of government to attract employees to farming.

We have a hugely positive, future proofed industry that has much to offer in the way of a career path. It is up to us, as employers in farming, to mend our ways and create the pathways for new people to work alongside us in this sector.

What is the win if we improve?

Before setting out on my travels I saw my business competing with other farms for staff. I had to make a great effort to ensure my employees chose working with me instead of seeking work elsewhere. Since travelling and seeing many different approaches to employment I feel the sector must work together to compete against other industries for staff before we worry about which farm they choose to work on.

As shown by the success of The Land Mobility service, there is huge potential for expansion through collaboration and other agreements. If the industry does not overcome these weaknesses then the opportunities will become threats due to under-staffing and under-investment in the correct areas to create an attractive workplace.

Finding and attracting the people needed on Irish farms should only be a stepping stone to the industry becoming a workplace that potential employees have a desire to work in. New Zealand has, for years, been known as the go to country for share-milking agreements and these have supported many families through a successful career. The Irish dairy sector can

put it's stamp on the world dairy industry as the workplace and employment capital of the dairy world.

Chapter 1: Communication

Regardless of where I travelled or at what stage of the supply chain the business was involved, the importance of communication was always very clear. Although approached in different ways the key principles were always the same.

Communication - the human connection - is the key to personal and career success.

Paul J. Meyer

By communicating well, employers show that they value their employees — information is powerful — and they ensure that employee expectations are clear. When employees feel valued, they may be more likely to stay with an employer and not switch jobs. When they know what's expected of them, they can focus on improving their performance in those areas.

- Clear communication path via WhatsApp or other apps

WhatsApp has become a very useful management tool on farms across the world. With the use of these electronic groups, information can easily be passed between all members of the team. Key pieces of information such as a grass wedge, reports and items that are needed to be purchased can all be put into the group message.

Since returning home from my travels we have set up a What's App group on our farm for smooth circulation of information between all members of the team on the farm. We find it very useful for sharing information and getting information from all areas of the farm gathered regularly, easily and straight onto a record that can be referred to later.

Goggle documents are another way that employees and employers can electronically keep records. A document that can be altered by any member involved can help in a big team with things like a list of jobs to be done that can be removed as completed or make a list of important upcoming dates and events or booking holiday time.

- Channels allowing communication flow both up and down the management structure

Of course, as mentioned later in this chapter, the culture of the business is very important and the management style will dictate the level and amount of two-way communication. From what I have seen on my travels, to improve farms as a place to work, employees must be given access to a pathway of communication that allows them to express their views, feelings and put forward suggestions on how the business can improve. This could take shape in formal weekly or monthly meetings, as discussed below, or just a casual chat while daily tasks are being completed. The important part is that staff are invited to engage in the communication and given the opportunity.

- Scheduling regular staff meetings

The larger the team on the farm gets the more important this formal structure of meetings becomes. Whilst on my travels I saw different levels and regularity of meetings. Lawson farms Farmers Responsibility to become more competitive and sustainable employers
Ed Payne 2018

in Wisconsin for example, held meetings at all levels of the management structure every week and directors met once a month. This farm milked over 8000 cows and communication was vital to the smooth running of the business. These meetings offer an opportunity for employees to feel more involved in the farm. Employers should take this opportunity to understand how the farm is performing and how staff are dealing with current conditions. Also, the meeting should reflect upon actions taken since the last meeting and what lessons have been learnt and changes to be made in the next period. Most importantly though these meetings should strengthen the relationship between employees and the business. It is a chance for the farm to involve staff in the plans and the direction that the farm is going.

- Distributing a complete, easy-to-understand employee manual

At times and especially if you are a new member of staff the hardest questions to ask are the simple or obvious ones. Having a clear manual for all employees can help new employees to settle into a job. It is also a great way to get new staff in on the culture of the farm as it can all be included in the manual.

- Outlining job expectations and employee goals

While in Milk Source in Wisconsin I asked an employee, what do they feel drove the owners of the company to where it is now, milking over 40,000 cows. They told me that the owners all thought that good staff stay in a company that is growing and challenging them. In Ireland on our farms we must communicate the expectations and goals that we have set for employees. There is no gain from telling employees afterwards that you expected more. It is only fair and will lead to better buy in from employees if they are aware of what is expected from them before they attempt the task.

- Requesting feedback from employees

Continuous development and training is another key part of becoming a better employer and is covered in more detail later in this report. One approach to Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is to ask for feedback from your employees. If we are to be constructively critical of our staff and try to shape and help them into a job that they will enjoy and stay in, we as employers also need to be able to listen to their criticism of us and the job role we have built for them. Of course, more important than listening to their points is to act upon them. Staff appraisal meetings can be a great opportunity to engage in this conversation; it gives the employee a chance to air his or her feelings about the job, the management structure and their place of work.

1.1 Workplace Atmosphere and Culture

Workplace culture is the environment that you create for your employees. It plays a powerful role in determining their work satisfaction, relationships and progression. It is the mix of your organisation's leadership, values, traditions, beliefs, interactions, behaviours and attitudes that contribute to the emotional and relational environment of your workplace. These factors are generally unspoken and unwritten rules that help to form bonds between your employees. (www.sidekicker.com.au)

Employers must be very aware of the atmosphere or culture that is created on a farm if it is to become an attractive place to work. Positive outlook and approach to work can lift the morale of employees. The mission statement and key focuses of a business must be clear and well defined so that everyone coming to work is under no illusions as to the direction the business is going.

While visiting Vince Bown of Healthi Straw in Canada he spoke of how he put a lot of weight on employing people who fit the culture of the company and feel that skills can be taught.

The culture at Milksource in Wisconsin milking a total of forty thousand cows over numerous farms is one of “promote from within.” All employees are constantly reminded of how it is possible for them to climb the ladder of progression which will earn them better working hours, more responsibility and job security.

If an employer can successfully develop a good positive workplace atmosphere and culture it will lead to a great sense of belonging by an employee. If a business shows a good level of professionalism and structure that employees can buy into it will be felt as another level of security by them.

For example, a workplace uniform, by that I mean overalls, jackets or T-shirts with the farm name or logo on them helps to show a level of professionalism but also when staff are wearing this clothing it can help to disconnect from life outside of work, ie. when wearing these clothes, they can switch into the culture of the farm.



Figure 1 My GFP group at the kitchen Table of Bailey Farm Iowa

1.2 Calendar of works

Mohan and Navin Rajes, Coffee plantation India.

While on GFP in India we visited the Moganad plantation of the Rajes family in India. The plantation is an integrated cropping system of coffee, jackfruit, citrus, pepper and spices. The plantation spans over a huge 900 hectares. With 97% of the worlds coffee plantations being 15 hectares or less, this shows the massive scale that this family run business is operating on.



2 Employee picking coffee beans

Navin Spoke to me about how in the remote area of India where this plantation is securing a steady workforce is impossible. The workforce on the plantation is very fluid with people turning up for work on a hit and miss type basis. New staff can turn up for work unannounced and need to be integrated into the system easily as their turnover may be very quick.

The plantation operates on a one member of staff per hectare basis which means roughly 1000 staff members on hand on any given day. Jobs include picking, fertilizing, spraying, weeding, replanting and shade regulation. Due to the nature of the terrain all these jobs are done by hand with very little mechanical assistance.

Navin spoke of how the use of a calendar of works was paramount to the smooth running of the plantation. This document held pride of place in the office and was made available to all employees. It was a hugely detailed document that made each task for each week of the year. In a company with so many employees and a large staff turnover this is a great way to make sure everyone knows the day to day, week to week and monthly tasks that need to be carried out. Managers, who are longer term staff that have been promoted from within the business, are allocated an area of the plantation of which they are in control. They often refer to the calendar of works to asses if they are keeping up to date with tasks that year and what the upcoming tasks are over the next period.

The document is always being added to and changed due to new techniques or weather trends. For example, the owners of the plantation had been gathering rainfall and weather data for over 50 years and have noticed a trend that the rainy season is starting and finishing later in the year, therefore fruits are ripening at different times of the year and planting time has changed so with that their calendar of works has been altered to cater for this.

Transferring this idea to dairy farms in Ireland a calendar of works would be a huge benefit to any employee if he or she was not waiting to hear from the employer what the upcoming tasks were. If an employee knew that milk recording, or vaccination always took place during a certain week they could order the products well in advance and have their time scheduled to get the job done.

The whole principle itself helps with the communication level on the farm, employees will feel more included in task planning and will gain a sense of control over what is happening.

DairyNZ Farm Management Calendar									
	Dry Period		Start of Calving to Start of Mating		Mid Lactation		Late Lactation to Dry Off		
	Activity	Frequency	Activity	Frequency	Activity	Frequency	Activity	Frequency	Activity
Pasture Management	Assess carrying capacity	Monthly	Assess carrying capacity	Monthly	Assess carrying capacity	Monthly	Assess carrying capacity	Monthly	Assess carrying capacity
	Monitor pasture cover	Weekly	Monitor pasture cover	Weekly	Monitor pasture cover	Weekly	Monitor pasture cover	Weekly	Monitor pasture cover
Supplementary Feeds and Crops	Grain storage crops	Monthly	Grain storage crops	Monthly	Grain storage crops	Monthly	Grain storage crops	Monthly	Grain storage crops
	Monitor grain storage	Monthly	Monitor grain storage	Monthly	Monitor grain storage	Monthly	Monitor grain storage	Monthly	Monitor grain storage
Herd Management	Monitor body condition score of cows	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of cows	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of cows	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of cows	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of cows
	Monitor body condition score of heifers	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of heifers	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of heifers	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of heifers	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of heifers
Reproduction	Monitor body condition score of cows	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of cows	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of cows	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of cows	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of cows
	Monitor body condition score of heifers	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of heifers	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of heifers	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of heifers	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of heifers
Animal Health	Monitor body condition score of cows	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of cows	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of cows	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of cows	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of cows
	Monitor body condition score of heifers	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of heifers	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of heifers	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of heifers	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of heifers
Nutrient Management	Monitor body condition score of cows	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of cows	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of cows	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of cows	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of cows
	Monitor body condition score of heifers	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of heifers	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of heifers	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of heifers	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of heifers
Staff	Monitor body condition score of cows	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of cows	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of cows	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of cows	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of cows
	Monitor body condition score of heifers	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of heifers	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of heifers	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of heifers	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of heifers
Young Stock	Monitor body condition score of cows	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of cows	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of cows	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of cows	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of cows
	Monitor body condition score of heifers	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of heifers	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of heifers	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of heifers	Monthly	Monitor body condition score of heifers

1.3 Staff Requirement planning

It is vital for a farm to have a good understanding of what number of staff is needed to carry the work load on the farm over the period of a year. The calendar of works explained above can be used as a reference and aid to calculate the number of employees that will be needed and then plans can be put in place to fill the workload peaks and troughs.

Managing expectations is a vital part of this process. Farmers I met as I travelled often spoke of how they have had to educate themselves on the level of work each employee can do. Many farmers spoke of how they felt the staff turnover has reduced when they reduce the level of expectation upon employees to a more realistic level.

1.4 Communication off farm

This heading brings quite an important point to attention. Employers should expect the very best from their employees while at work, equally employees while at work should give their full attention for many reasons, none more than health and safety. However, time outside of working hours should mean exactly that.

This rule should of course stand in all sectors, as employees need time to disconnect from their place of work. They should be able to be present elsewhere, without having to always be conscious of what is happening at work or if they are going to be contacted about an issue or problem.

The way to implement this is to make it clear to employees that they will not be expected to be involved in any emails, WhatsApp group chat etc during weekends and time off. For this to work the handover between staff members must be structured and easy to follow.

Correct use of whiteboards or electrical systems such as mentioned above should be able to facilitate the person leaving to communicate all the relative information so that they will not need to be contacted while off. Of course, there will be emergencies, and everyone should be willing to allow for these, but the rule of thumb should stand and that is that “off farm time is off farm.”

If we are to pick areas that farming can prove to be a career of choice for people that are not from a farming background or if the industry is to draw a potential employee away from a more office based formalised job this can be a big area of focus. Although many jobs are perceived to be 9 to 5 or even 8 to 6 in many cases they are much longer hours than that with employees expected to check work emails and messages in the morning before work and in the evening or weekends on supposedly off time. For many this can add large amounts of stress and the feeling that work has no defined start and finish time

1.5 Feedback and Reviewing

Performance reviews are a key component of employee development. The performance review is intended to be a fair and balanced assessment of an employee's performance. They are an opportunity for employers to:

- Discuss job performance
- Set goals for professional development
- Establish objectives for contributing to the department's mission
- Discuss expectations and achievements over previous period

(University of Tennessee Knoxville)

Agricultural employers should establish a feedback loop within their businesses. In other words, the employer should create opportunities to provide constructive feedback to employees, and employees should have the opportunity to share feedback with the business. Performance reviews and in some cases, employers ask employees to participate in surveys on job satisfaction facilitate opportunities for sharing feedback.

With a performance review, an employer assesses how well an employee has done his or her work. Also, it enables the two — employer and employee — to collaborate and help the employee develop a plan focused on growing professionally and moving the business closer to achieving its goals. A performance review adds some formality to the feedback process, and it summarizes overall worker performance instead of address just a particular project, event or situation. *(Missouri Farm Labor Guide, 2017)*

Ideally, performance reviews will involve some planning and good communication by the employer. Often, an employee's direct manager will lead the review because the manager has had a good chance to monitor the employee's work. Employees should know when to expect performance reviews — for example, every quarter, six months or year — and they should understand how they'll be evaluated during those reviews.

During the review, encourage an employee to share his or her thoughts about personal performance. The following list provides some sample questions to guide the review. Then, the employer should have time to share performance-related comments. The performance review also creates a good time to update employees about upcoming changes in compensation, personnel or job descriptions. The employer should keep written records of the review and its contents, and the documentation can be added to the employee's file.

- What do you view as your top work-related strengths and weaknesses?
- What resources would help you to improve your job performance?
- How do you plan to continually develop professionally?
- How well is your work team functioning?
- Between now and your next performance review, what goals do you plan to achieve?
- What do you see as opportunities for the business?

(Missouri Farm Labor Guide 2017)

These performance reviews also give employers an opportunity to quantify employee improvement.

During a performance review, the employer should identify opportunities to recognise workers for doing well on the job. Also, give employees the opportunity to ask questions, clarify information provided by the reviewer and create an environment for discussion.



Figure 3 Meeting with Joe Horner and Ryan Milhollin of Missouri State University

Chapter 2: Employing the right person

Identifying a work need on your farm begins the recruitment process. Start by brainstorming parameters for the job position. For example, does the farm need full-time or part-time help? What time of day and day of the week — mornings, afternoons, evenings, weekdays, weekends and so forth — does the business need help? Is the work need seasonal or year-round? After considering questions like these, employers can start creating a job description.

Having spoken to recruitment agencies it is clear that farmers themselves have to step back and assess exactly what it is that they are looking for in an employee; do they want and can they afford a full time employee? Can they be flexible with working hours or do they need someone for fixed hours? Knowing exactly what the role is going to entail and looking for someone that fits the farm and that a farmer will get along with should be higher on a wish list than possibly the qualifications.

Having a clearly defined job description is key to determining who the farmer is looking for, what they will be expected to do and help to find the right person for the role. Advertising for a farm manager, when really a farmer needs someone to help milking, will mean that both the employer and employee will end up frustrated and unhappy in their work. Farming is a fantastic life and career for those that have an interest and finding the right fit for the farm makes a happy place to work.

2.1 – Job Description

For farms, job descriptions are important for several reasons. When recruiting workers, a job description clearly lists a position's needs and expectations. It should help job-searchers determine whether they would qualify for a job or have interest in a job.

During the interview process, a job description can help an employer consistently track whether potential hires can fill a position's needs and meet its expectations. With a clear job description, an employee — and the company at large — may better understand his or her role in the business and the relationships that he or she should create with co-workers and others.

2.1.1 Writing a Job Description

In most cases, written job descriptions should consist of at least six parts:

1. *Title.* A job title should concisely summarize the position and indicate its level of seniority, which could be described with terms such as “manager” or “trainee.”
2. *Job Summary.* As a short paragraph, a job summary should explain a position's duties, responsibilities, expected qualifications and physical demands. Because the summary reflects information included throughout a job description, consider writing it after finishing the other sections. Employers may use the summary for promotional purposes.

3. *Job Duties.* Typically, jobs involve a set of duties and tasks. In this section list all required duties for a position. Possible applicants like to see a breakdown of a typical day at work or a list of what some of the main tasks will be at certain times of the year.
4. *Job Qualifications.* Qualifications are skills, knowledge, experience, education, certifications and other personal characteristics that are essential for an employee to do a job.
5. *Work Relationships.* Generally, employees will collaborate with other staff. Where an employee will fit in the organizational hierarchy by naming reporting relationships. In other words, who's the employee's supervisor, and who does the employee supervise?
6. *Work Schedule and Environment.* Schedule refers to typical hours, overtime needs, and the potential for work during evenings, weekends, holidays or other irregular times. Environment involves whether work is inside or outside and whether it is team-oriented.

In a job description, employers may choose whether they mention salary and benefits, which include time off, housing and the options of future training. Some employers prefer not to share that information. Regardless of whether a description mentions pay, employers should consider a range that the business would like to spend, and that job-seekers would accept. (*Missouri Farm Labor Guide, 2017*). Appendix 1 shows a copy of a job description for our Herdsperson.

2.2 Interview skills

During an interview, employers should learn about the person being interviewed and share information about the position and business. Listening skills are important. If an interviewer talks too much, then the person being interviewed doesn't have as much time to speak, and you don't have an opportunity to learn as much about the interviewee. As a general rule, 20 percent of an interview should involve the interviewer speaking. The person being interviewed should speak during the other 80 percent of the time. This doesn't mean that you shouldn't ask follow-up questions or share information about the position or the business, but the key is good balance. Use the same questions for people interviewing for the same position. Doing that will help you to easily compare answers from each candidate. Also, take good notes. Otherwise, remembering specific responses after the interview concludes may be difficult.

In many cases and from speaking to many farmers here in Ireland Interview skills are a huge weakness of Irish farmers. Many farmers have not had to prepare themselves for many formal interviews in their own career. Obviously, the interview has a huge influence on the person who finally gets offered the position and without the right skills and experience it is very difficult to expect the employer to run a successful interview process. An interview run without correct structure and planning can quickly end up too casual, some of the people I met who have well planned interviews would have pre-defined roles for everyone that would be at the interview, people would have certain questions to ask. The route of the trip around the farm would be planned, sometimes if there were already staff employed on the farm the interview would include meeting and engaging with the other team members.

Charlie Joe (CJ) and Jose Ortiz at Milk Source, USA



Figure 4 Ed Payne with CJ Ortiz at milk source Wisconsin

Jose who started as a milker at Milk Source in 2008 showed he valued the culture at Milk Source that everyone who works towards the company's goal can progress up through the company and in 2017 he became their new farm development specialist. He moved first to maternity and did a year at Tidy View dairy. He was eager to learn and was promoted to herd staff where after 4 -5 years he became lead herd person. John Vosters, one of the three company founders, promoted him then to Omro Dairy. During this time CJ who was a stay at home mum, was called and asked would she come to work at Milk Source; they were very flexible with her and she now works on PR, showing visitors around the Dairy with enthusiasm and happiness that has come from their whole family being well treated by the company and the promotion of family values within. CJ made a point to know all staff and brings in treats on a regular basis. Their 15-year-old son has had a scholarship paid for by Milk Source to become a mechanic with the view of working for them also. Milk Source has paid for courses for the whole family. CJ believes that being flexible and having a culture of respect is key to their success.

2.3 Women in Agriculture

In many of the farms I visited, from a vegetable farm in Brazil to a coffee plantation in India, most of the staff on these farms were women and there were several reasons behind this strategy. The culture of the country was often that the women did a lot of the work, the employers often found women to be easier to manage than men, they found that women had a better ability to do very repetitive tasks well and held their concentration better.

Seeing a woman working in ag in many of the countries I travelled to was as common there as it is uncommon to see a woman in agriculture here in Ireland. The agricultural industry in Ireland must look to all labour pools over the coming years to attract enough people to fill available positions.



Figure 5 Rice being planted out in Paddy fields in India



Figure 6 Coffee being dried on coffee Plantation in India

On many dairy farms now, the position available may be nearly a split shift of milking, a morning of calf rearing etc. etc. and these roles may fit very well with a woman in the locality.

Case Study: Anton Burst, Saskatchewan, Canada

Anton runs a dairy farm and is very aware of the culture on his farm. He milks all his cows through 16 Lely robots and is extremely people focused. He chose to change from a conventional milking parlour to robots as he felt the consistency of milking the cows was of vital importance and he was not able to educate his employees to a consistent enough level. Instead, he runs a very regimented structure around the maintenance of the parlour and day to day running of the farm.

At each robot is a checklist that must be signed against by a member of staff at regular intervals which is how accountability is created in the workplace. All equipment needed is close to robot, well positioned for ease of use and has maintenance checklist.



Figure 7 Ed Payne and Anton Burst

All staff of Anton's are cross trained so if there is a shortage of staff in an area on a particular day it means someone else from another area on the farm can fit in with no added stress.

Anton believes you need to know what you know and what you are good at and let others fill in for your weaknesses. This is also a great demonstration on this farm of delegation, although accountability levels are high and staff work with a strict code of practice they have a lot of freedom to plan their day and can take responsibility for specific tasks on their own accord.

2.4 Matching employee to management style

No two farmers manage the same way, some prefer crossbred cows, some like to run a high input all year-round system and the same applies to the way people manage other people. There has been, over the years, a lot of work done on how best to manage people in a workplace but first you must understand the type of manager you are. The scale slides from autocratic, where management keep decisions tight and staff have little or no autonomy, to more relaxed style where employees can make more decisions based on their own initiative and managers take much more of a counselling and listening type role than the more micromanagement type approach of others.

Whatever your management style, it is important to identify what it is and put in place a plan to employ someone who will develop, commit to and enjoy working under that style. To reduce staff turnover rates, it is important that during the interview process you can evaluate the type of management the interviewee would prefer. Questions around decision making, backing their own thought process or whether they take instruction well, if they work well under tight management structure and strict guidance.

As many farms in Ireland move from not employing anyone on a full-time basis to having to employ one or more employees this is a vital part of the employment process. It is the responsibility of the employer to identify his or her own management style and be aware of that as part of what employee will best suit them. As I travelled I saw many different styles of management. In the US for example, where the cow numbers were large and the job description quite repetitive, the management style was usually more autocratic. Staff performed well but were guided at every opportunity: strict procedures were in place which allows for very little freedom of expression from the employees.

2.5 Delegation

As mentioned above, it is vital to match to the type of management structure that an employee prefers to work under with the management style of the manager or managers in charge. However, in the case of many rapidly expanding dairy farms here in Ireland where cow numbers are growing quickly, a considerable amount of capital investment may be taking place or maybe the business is spread over multiple units. Correct use of delegation is one of the key tools I saw as I travelled to allow a farm business to successfully transition through expansion. When I asked an employee of Milk Source in Wisconsin, a company now milking over forty thousand cows why they felt the three co-founders have always had such drive to expand the company, the answer was simply that the founders feel to keep good employees the company must grow ahead of them, so they can gain more responsibility and feel the security of the business getting stronger.

Many expanding farm owners in Ireland are going through a transition from being cow managers to people managers and having to delegate may not be a task that comes easily to them. Owners may be more comfortable to take on the responsibility of the more important

tasks themselves instead of taking the time to set up a correct delegation structure which may well be a new skill to them in many cases.

Delegation will give employees a very strong feeling of involvement in the business and will show that they have the trust of the business.

Delegation is to start by specifying the outcome you desire to the employees that are to carry out the task. Establish controls, identify limits to the work if necessary and provide sufficient support. It is important to offer support or assistance if needed but only when asked for (www.mindtools.com). Keep up to date with progress and focus on results rather than procedures. The key point to successful delegation is to focus on the results, allow employees the freedom to select the tools to use and their own approach to the task. Finally, when the work is completed, give recognition where it's deserved. The above is the approach taken to one specific task. The issue ahead of many expanding farmers in Ireland is to gain the knowledge and ability to delegate a large percentage of the running of their business, grassland budgeting and management, herd health management, breeding policy etc. The more major parts to the running and future plans of the business may have larger financial implication so delegating in these areas will be harder than lesser tasks but the principle and system remains the same.



Figure 8 Employees sorting and grading carrots on vegetable farm in Brazil

Chapter 3: Agricultural Stigma

If the agricultural industry is to attract future employees away from other industries it must remove the stigma attached to it. That of long working hours, hard dirty work in bad weather conditions, or of no route to progression.

At Agri Careers day in the RDS Dublin in 2017 I ran a survey of the students in attendance and the top two reasons for them not to choose a career on farm were long working hours and no clear career progression path.

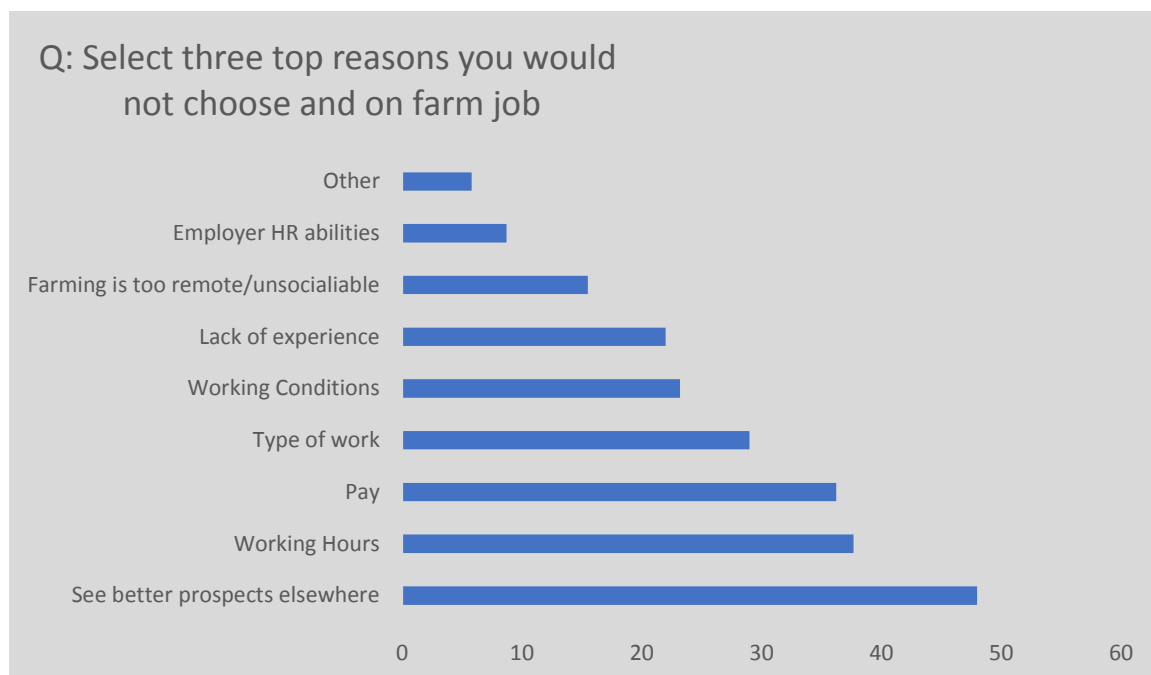
Running a modern dairy farm myself, I feel that it is possible to set up a farm structure in which both these issues can be addressed. Although there are seasonal busy times, with good planning and enough temporary staff, working hours per person still don't need to be excessive.

The removal of this stigma must have a long-term approach assisted by many bodies but no one more responsible for it than farmers ourselves. We must approach our job/career more professionally. Farming must be seen in the future as a much more positive industry. We have many representative bodies involved in Agriculture in Ireland but to date no one is attempting to aggressively promote farming as a possible career choice. The perceived view of a career in farming, and the actual benefits and values of it, is not properly portrayed to people in areas with little or no agricultural knowledge.

The New Zealand dairy sector has long been known for its ability to offer huge career progression through share milking agreements. People have progressed from farm labourer right up through to becoming land owners. Due to the low levels of farm sales here in Ireland, the scale of many of the farms and the lack of that culture of progression in agriculture to date we have not seen these routes freely opening to people. This New Zealand model has been well publicised here in Ireland but as part of my studies I find myself asking is this model the correct one for Ireland. Milk Source in the states, like many other farms I visited in America has no such progression path through share milking, instead they use the employment model and encourage progression and career pathways through it.

3.1 Survey Results

As I mentioned above, in 2017 I ran a survey of potential future farm employees from which I gathered some very interesting statistics. Over 36% of those surveyed were not considering an on-farm job at the time and just 12.5% were focused specifically on finding an on farm job that day, while the rest, just over 50% would consider either as a career path. For me it was staggering to discover that more than one third of this group, which was made up of 70% 18-25 year olds, were not going to consider an on farm job.



From that response I then carried on asking for reasons why these people were not choosing to follow a career on farm. I, like many others I have spoken to on my travels, expected the main answer to be level of pay; however the top reason for not choosing a career as an on-farm employee was that they saw little or no level of progression in the future, following that the second most chosen reason was the long working hours they felt farming involved.

As for my report and study topic, I took a lot from the results of this survey. I was encouraged by the fact that the future labour force of our industry was not fearful of the level of pay. From the employer's perspective the obstacles that are stopping people from seeking a job on farm are not as financially limiting as competing with other industries on the pay scale.

Teagasc research shows no effect of 18/6 hour compared with a 12/12-hour milking interval in herd averaging <6,000kg/cow. An 18/6-hour milking interval should be practiced on all farms averaging <6,000kg/cow. With this in mind and of course pulling together other time saving and labour efficiency tips from this and other reports farmers can remove the stigma of long working hours from farming.

3.2 The strengths of farming

While travelling on my Nuffield studies one of the most striking things for me was the value of agriculture to economies all over the world, the level of employment it generates and the stability it offers to local communities. No matter what country I was in or who I met from the agricultural sector we could relate to many common topics through the agricultural industry.

Ireland has a huge history of farming but with growing urbanisation and the obvious growing divide between consumer and producer the farming industry, I feel needs to become more proactive in promoting our industry. If the industry is to compete with other sectors in the country for employees then we need to become more positive and professional about the

way we look at our own sector as well as using the positives within our sector to attract people to choose an on farm career.

With rising urbanisation comes rising rent and living cost in the larger cities across the country. Some people are choosing long commutes to work and can spend up to and over 4 hours a day commuting to and from their job. As an employee on a farm people can expect much lower priced and more readily available housing. Add to this positive the shorter commute, the fact that farm work is varied, mentally, physically and emotionally challenging can be seen as another positive by people whose job can be very repetitive and fixed.

3.3 Can we change this?

As I mentioned above, the process of changing the stigma attached to jobs in agriculture has to take a multifaceted approach. From a farmer's or employer's approach, what can we do to change the perception of farming?

We must regard our industry much more professionally, by this I mean we learn from other industries and how they have managed through labour shortages. We must put in place the findings of this report ie. better starting finishing times and staff planning. We must create a safer workplace by working alongside the health and safety authority to move the industry as a whole to a much safer place.

3.4 Community Farming

While travelling in the states I visited a group called Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin (PDPW). It's a member funded organisation aimed at improving the profitability of its farming members through education and networking. One point we discussed with the executive director, Shelly Maher, was the programme of open farm breakfasts they are involved in. Different Farms across the state open their gates monthly to the public to attract people in to learn more of how their food is produced. The programme is a great success with local food producers also getting involved to showcase their products and taking the opportunity to contact possible customers. Similar initiatives are run in the UK with open farm Sunday for example and Agri Aware's Open farm day this year around the country.

To date very little like this has been taking place here in Ireland and as some anti-agriculture lobby groups gain momentum in the country the industry needs to be more proactive and transparent. We need to be more open and welcoming on our farms as we have nothing to hide, it is simply to get a process in place.

3.5 Government Involvement

The importance of the agricultural sector to the Irish has never been more obvious than it has been since the recession began in 2007; but now, more than ten years on and projections showing the country will be back at near full employment next year, how can and will the country's government see a benefit in removing this agricultural stigma and create a better workplace on farms.

Could the agricultural sector help to slow the growth of the well-publicised housing crisis in the main cities across the country? With more than 6000 farm workers needed in the industry in the next eight years, the government could offer tax allowances for farm employees to highlight the benefits the government sees in people living and working outside of our main population hubs. This policy would be a double-edged sword, in that it would reduce the growing number of people looking for living arrangement in urban areas as well as circulating more money in the rural towns and villages that are not seeing the same economic recovery that the major cities are seeing.

3.6 Improving Employer Certificate

Another initiative that would run alongside the Government involvement would be a status a farmer could receive if his or her farm is making a noticeable attempt to improve its farm as a place to work. Run alongside and as part of the Bord-Bia audit or independently accredited by Teagasc or another body this certificate would not only encourage better employment practices. Farmers would realise this certificate would signify to potential employees that their farm is continuously working to improve the workplace.

Pulling the two above points together I can see an option that only employees of farms that have received the improving employer certificate would receive the tax incentives to work on farm. This would insure that the tax reliefs would not only be encouraging people out of the built-up areas and not only allowing people in the country to free up some more disposable income, it would further encourage farmers to improve their employment skills and the standard of workplace they offer.

If it was the case that only employees to a farm holding the improving employer certificate would qualify for the tax reliefs then this would also offer those farmers working to gain the certificate a recruitment advantage.



Figure 9 Milking on Larson acres farm in Wisconsin

Chapter 4: Investment

It was always apparent to me no matter where I travelled that both employers and employees did not see money or salary as the main reason to attract and retain staff. However, it was obvious in many of the farms I visited that continual investment in a safe and modern workplace was valued very highly by all concerned.

4.1 Small changes, big moral boost

It can be surprising how a small practical change can really make a huge difference to the efficiency of a farm but also the mood of employees. As well as improving employee efficiency this small investment helps to show that the farm is maintaining things on all levels such as:

- A well-positioned and organised white-board
- Somewhere clean and tidy to change and eat
- A toilet and shower room
- Clearly defined and available roster
- A map of the farm on whiteboard and on A4 size printouts to help with contractors

4.2 Employee efficiency focused investment

The Irish dairy sector has for many years prided itself on the low cost of production that can be achieved here. Farmers the country over have trimmed costs, where possible, to help their business become more resilient to the global market volatility that is such a huge part of our industry now. During this process the question must be asked as to whether we have contributed to the shortage of available labour in our industry as a result. If you look at other business or industries such as Facebook, Syngenta etc, it is obvious how much they value their employees by the continued investment they make in staff moral and staff workplace.

On many of the farms I visited in America where staff played an integral part in the business and staff numbers where high, more than twenty full time employees, the area of employee related investment was taken very seriously. All parlours I visited where modern, fit for purpose, up to date and had all the technologies needed for the system that the farm ran. Apart from the parlour itself though the importance staff had to the farm was obvious everywhere, spacious comfortable tea rooms, clean toilets, offices and rest areas on farms that needed such items.

Investment and of course, debt must be approached with caution but to put it bluntly in many farms further borrowings from a bank are easier to find than long term employees. The equipment on a farm is paramount to the morale of any staff and will have a direct effect on productivity

Terms such as staff efficiency and LEAN management must also be approached with caution. The aim of this report is to highlight the importance of becoming a better employer which

certainly will result in a more efficient workplace. I visited many farms that aim for very efficient employees which, in one way or another, may be expecting too much from them. It is important that the staff planning that was spoken about earlier is maintained. To be over-staffed at times of the year may not, in the long run of the business, be a bad thing.

4.3 Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

Nuffield itself is an example of continuous professional development, that of getting outside your comfort zone, going in search of new information and bringing that knowledge back to your own respective area of work in the industry. For Irish dairy farms to become more attractive places to work farmers are going to have to learn new skills and continue to develop themselves as employers. These recognised courses could be linked to the improving employer certificate mentioned above. Farmers are aware of the importance of financial management skills, grassland management skills amongst others and employment skills are no different. Although I have mentioned some in this report there is much more detail and many more skills that farmers will have to up-skill themselves in or look to contract out those jobs to companies offering such services.

4.4 Health and Safety

Farming is now the most dangerous workplace in Ireland and, it goes without saying, that if farming is going to become a more attractive workplace it is going to have to become a safer workplace. Hindsight and “What ifs” are little use on a farm after an accident; significant investment may have to be made on the farm to address health and safety risks. Discussion groups can play a part here also, nominating a safety officer or two each year whose job it is for each meeting to evaluate any health and safety issues on the specific farm that is being visited. All issues can then be raised at the AGM to find out if any or all have been addressed and how that was done.

4.5 Investment in staff planning

As mentioned above, with the use of a calendar of works farm managers can gain a greater feeling of involvement and more responsibility for the day to day tasks to be completed. Another benefit of having a calendar of works is that a farmer can calculate with some accuracy the amount of people needed on the team at any specific time of the year. On most dairy farms here in Ireland spring time and early summer will be the peak requirement time for staff and if a farmer is aware in time he/she can set in place a plan to fill these shortfalls in the labour on the farm. Apart from this, farmers should be able to see the busy times in their calendar and move more flexible tasks from one month to another to create a steadier work flow. For example, with good planning a lot of spring preparation of sheds and facilities can be done before Christmas, fencing upkeep can be done mainly in August or September.

This does not get away from the fact that investment in having enough staff on the roster when the workload increases will come at a cost for the business. The race to produce milk at the lowest possible figure in some areas I believe is a false economy. Labour is, as it should be, one of the biggest costs on many Irish dairy farms and, as mentioned earlier, some capital will be necessary on many farms to modernise and develop them into competitive sustainable workplaces.



Figure 10 Ed Payne with Gary Nolan on his farm in Missouri

Chapter 5: Legal

As mentioned earlier it is important that farmers become more professional as we attempt to move the industry away from the stigma attached to it, and allow farm employment to become more available and seen as more of an option to people that may not be from a farming background. What better way to do this than to take the area's employment law more seriously on farm?

5.1 Contracts

Formal contracts between employees and employers are taken as normal in all other industries yet in agriculture in Ireland we seem to be slow to offer employees contracts. This may well be due to a lack of knowledge in the area mixed with a degree of fear of what signing a contract commits them to. To the contrary, a contract will help to clarify some issues that may well not yet have been discussed with a new employee.

While the complete contract does not have to be in writing, an employee must be given a written statement of terms of employment within 2 months of starting work, but in most cases a full contract is the chosen option as it offers better protection to the employer.

A contract should include

- The full name of employer and employee
- The address of the employer
- The place of work
- The title of job or nature of work
- The date the employment started
- If the contract is temporary, the expected duration of the contract
- If the contract of employment is for a fixed term, the details
- Details of rest periods and breaks as required by law
- The rate of pay
- Pay intervals
- Hours of work
- Details of paid leave
- Sick pay and pension (if any)
- Period of notice to be given by employer or employee

(www.citizensinformation.ie)

5.2 Working Hours and Pay

As shown above in the results from the survey I carried out at the Agri Careers day in Dublin 2016 potential employees to the dairy sector in the future saw long working hours as a bigger reason not to work on farm than the level of pay. The lessons I take from this is that farmers

need to educate themselves on what the regulation is around working hours. The maximum an employee should work in an average working week is 48 hours. However, in Ireland there are exceptions allowing this figure to be averaged over a period shown in the table below.

Employees who are night workers	2 months
Employees generally	4 months
Employees where work is subject to seasonality, a foreseeable surge in activity or where employees are directly involved in ensuring continuity of service or production	6 months
Employees who enter into a collective agreement with their employers which is approved by the Labour Court	Up to 12 months

(Teagasc Farm Labour Manual)

The seasonality of the spring calving dairy sector allows farmers to average this requirement for a 48-hour week over a six-month period but there must be a win-win for both employer and employee. As discussed in chapter one everything must be communicated and agreed in advance. Expecting someone to work very long shifts and large numbers of hours per week during a busy and demanding calving period without having discussed with them the light at the end of the tunnel so to speak that they will have more relaxed hours after calving is over.

That in mind, if correct staff planning is in place there should be no need to expect employees to have to work these excessive hours.

Rest times are also a key part to the legal obligations of an employer as they have a direct effect on the health and safety in the workplace. An employee is entitled to 11 consecutive hours rest per day and 24 consecutive hours once per week following a daily rest period.

This area is very well documented by the likes of the Workplace Relations Committee (WRC) and in the Teagasc Farm Labour Manual that goes into a huge amount of detail on all aspects of the legal side of farm employment. The WRC is also very approachable and willing to offer assistance to anyone looking to move into the area of employment.



Figure 11 Aidan Brosnan, Employee at Hilltop Dairies in Ireland

Conclusions

- Farming as a career and workplace has a huge amount to offer over other industries.
- Large financial investments are not paramount to becoming a better employer.
- Farming as an industry is behind the curve in staff training and continuous personal development
- Knowing the style of management you practice and being aware of the workplace culture is paramount to creating a stable workplace and developing employee engagement.
- Farmers themselves are responsible for the image of agriculture and must work together to change and improve it.
- Minor, major and fatal accident numbers are far too high in the industry and it is putting the workplace in a very bad light.



Figure 12 Ed Payne with Akinwumi Adesina, 2017 World Food Prize Laureate

Recommendations

- Farmers themselves need to become aware of areas that must be invested in to become a competitive workplace, eating, changing, showering, toilet facilities. Parlour fit for purpose.
- Health and safety must be more regularly inspected on farms.
- An improved employer certificate programme could be linked to Bord Bia inspections that would allow farmers to prove their intention to become better employers.
- There is an opportunity for the government to offer tax allowances to farm staff to encourage more people to live and work in the more rural areas of the country helping to reduce urbanisation and decline of rural town and villages.
- Tying the two above recommendations together only employees on Bord Bia approved and improved employer certificate holding farms could avail of the tax allowance.
- Farmers must educate themselves realistically on how many staff they need to complete the year's work and invest appropriately to always have enough staff on hand.
- Farmers need to be more professional in their approach to employees by having contracts signed, correct working hours and holidays and rest periods agreed
- Farmers need to play to the strengths of the industry to help attract labour away from other areas of employment by having flexible working hours, short commutes and an outdoor variable workload that is both physically and mentally challenging.
- CPD is needed for farmers in employment law, Human relations, Management styles and structures.
- Agricultural colleges need to highlight to their students the importance of being a good employer and they should have more emphasis in this area on their courses. Teagasc has a role to play to make sure students studying agriculture also gain Human Resources management skills.

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Appendix 1:



Job Description – Herdsperson

Milking on the Once a Day Unit in Ballymoe and in Tusk as required.

Grassland management, which is key to our farm. Grass must be measured and recorded at least 40 times per year from early Spring onwards. All recordings to be added to Pasturebase and information used to manage grass decisions.

Cow care is very important the health and wellbeing of the cows must be monitored and managed at all times, cows to be treated well at all times.

Fertility management will play a vital role as well.

Keeping the facilities clean and well maintained at all times.

Records to be kept up to date.

Attend local discussion groups and to continue to learn and progress.

Training and development.

Small amount of tractor work.

Key Attributes

Experience is not necessary.

A passion for working outdoors and like cows we are more than happy to provide training as necessary.

A positive, can-do attitude and eager to learn.

There will be some working on your own at times so self-motivation and own initiative will be required, although we all work as part of a team.

Enthusiasm, reliability and trustworthiness are key.

Driving licence essential.