

4.6 Rostering Systems

Planning the workload and the work breaks

Why this is important

Time off is very important to farm employees and ensures they are refreshed for the time that they are on the job. Rosters are as important for farms with one staff member as they are for farms with large numbers of employees. A roster allows people to plan their time off and get more value from the break.

Planned rosters indicate that a farm system is organised and efficiently run. They also help employees form a picture of what the reality of daily life on a farm will look like and therefore help clarify the employer's expectations of the employee.

This fact sheet will cover:

- What is a roster?
- What makes a roster successful?
- How to make a roster
- How far in advance should a roster be planned?
- Things to consider when making rosters

What is a roster?

A roster is a list or a plan that shows when people who work on a farm will be on duty. Rosters are typically used for two purposes:

- To schedule time off for staff and employers
- To schedule work tasks for individual staff members.

Keeping a record of rosters is also an effective means of maintaining records of holidays taken and time off for staff.

What makes a roster successful?

Rosters can be made in many different ways. While some farming businesses use very formal rosters, such as a computer-generated spreadsheet roster, other farms operate equally efficiently on less formal rosters, such as notes made on a year planner.

The key to the success of a roster lies in the planning and organisation that has gone into developing it and the commitment of management to making the roster work. Employees need to know that the roster is fair and that management will stick to the roster except in extenuating circumstances.

Good rosters are simple, easy to follow and also have flexibility in them so that they work to support the people involved in the business. This means that they provide a guide as to how the work will get done on the farm, but they are not set in concrete.

Rosters plan the work that everyone knows is going to happen. However on dairy farms there are often unplanned tasks that crop up each day. A successful roster will incorporate a plan to manage the unplanned tasks likely to arise from time to time. For example the roster may plan for one person to have flexibility in their workload so that they can cover unplanned events.

Making a roster to allocate time off

Allocating time off involves using a year planner to ensure that staff have regular breaks, plus their entitlements to statutory holidays and annual leave. There are 11 statutory holidays in a year and farm employees are entitled to four weeks' annual leave per year (for more information on leave entitlements for employees (see Legal Responsibilities Fact Sheet 1.1).

Many farms are breaking away from the traditional weekend-based time off and using other combinations of time off. Some examples of commonly used systems are:

- 6 days on, 2 days off
- 5 days on, 3 days off
- 11 days on, 3 days off
- 9 days on, 3 days off
- 11 days on, 3 days off, 6 days on, 1 day off
- A combination of several of the above.

Making a roster to allocate work

The basis of a roster that allocates work is the staff planning process outlined in the Staff Planning Fact Sheet 1.5).

When using the staff planning process to develop rosters it is useful to break the farming year into work or seasonal periods. For example:

- Calving period
- Mating period
- Summer period
- Dry period.

Start with only one work period at a time and plan how the tasks that need to be done in that work period will be allocated.

How far in advance should a roster be planned?

It is a matter of personal preference as to how far in advance a roster is planned. However, it is important for staff to be able to plan what they will do in their time off and a longer roster will help them do this. This means that it is better to plan the roster too much in advance rather than too little.

Most employers or managers have planned well in advance how they intend to run their farm. This means that it is possible to make the roster for a whole year well before the year starts and in this way help give the employee a clear picture as to what time off they can expect and when they can expect it.

Planning a year in advance makes it possible to ensure, at the start of the season, that statutory holidays and annual leave can be covered by other staff. This means that the employer knows the work will still get done and the employee knows they will get their fair allocation of time off.

Changes to the roster can easily be made once the initial plan is in place.

Things to consider when making rosters:

- Personal circumstances of employees
- Personal preferences of employees. For example do they prefer weekends or weekdays off? Does it matter to them?
- Age of employees, as this may affect how much time off they need and when they would prefer to have it
- Amount of pay and responsibility level of employee
- The availability of relief milkers and part time staff
- The farm system and associated work requirements of the system. For example moving irrigation, or feeding out to stock
- The employer or manager's requirements for time off.

Types of rosters

Rosters may be written in many different ways. The following is a list of ideas for rosters:

- Use a year planner pinned to the farm dairy wall
- Write it on a calendar
- Use a whiteboard in the farm dairy
- Write it by hand (or draw it) on a piece of paper
- Use a computer spreadsheet.

Other tips

- Use coloured pens to highlight people and/or duties
- Supply employees with a fax machine while they are in your employment and fax the roster to them. This ensures they receive the exact same roster as the employer has and is also efficient and easy
- Photocopy rosters.

What are the benefits to me?

Well-planned rosters will help employers manage the workload on farm, making the farm run efficiently. Rosters also help to keep staff happy.

What do I do next?

- Work through the staff planning process outlined in the Staff Planning Fact Sheet
- Plan time off for all staff for at least three months in advance
- Talk to staff about their preferences for time off.

This fact sheet is part of DairyNZ's HR Toolkit - a guide to the fundamentals in establishing successful employment relationships. To access the full HR Toolkit please visit the DairyNZ website at www.dairynz.co.nz

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