



Putting people first

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If spring on your farm feels hectic try focussing on your employees to reduce stress and improve results. People are the difference between a crazy spring and a busy but enjoyable one.

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Spring is busy on dairy farms and you can't change that. Sometimes it really does feel like it is about survival. But you can make a decision to run your farm in a way that is sustainable for everyone. If you put your team (that includes you and your staff) first then the results will follow – the calves reared, the cows milked, the pasture and feed managed – and with less stress and greater ease than when you focussed on tasks first.

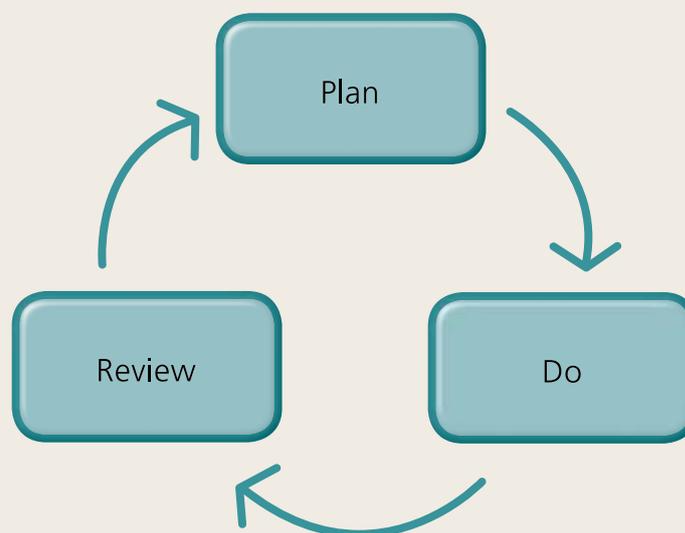
Good people, those with the right attitude and skills, make the difference between a crazy spring and a manageable one so focus on people and reap the benefits – both in spring and for the rest of the season.

### How?

You need to get everyone performing at their peak and to achieve this your team needs:

1. To understand what you are trying to achieve and why
2. To understand what is expected of them
3. To feel respected and valued
4. To have time to recharge off farm so they can maintain efficiency on farm

Since spring is busy these things won't happen by chance. An effective and simple plan to use is:



## Plan

### Be prepared. There is no substitute.

The success of spring on your farm will largely be determined in the lead up to spring. Time you put into planning now will pay rewards when the first calf hits the ground.

The following list might seem like an extra pull on your time but actually it will be the thing that saves you the most time and reduces stress. Good planning is smart farming.

### Top tips:

#### 1. Get your team involved

- Sit down with your team and discuss what you want to achieve in spring
- Create a list of actions that will need to happen to achieve these targets
- Discuss why these actions are important
- Decide who is responsible for the different tasks / responsibilities
- Set dates where appropriate
- Capture information on white board or equivalent and put where everyone can see it.

#### 2. Set a realistic roster for the spring period that will enable your team to perform at their best.

- All people on farm, including you, need at least one day off per week to recharge
- Try to ensure employees work no more than 12 hours in any one day (including breaks).

#### 3. Book the relief milker or employ a casual or fixed term employee so you have enough hands on deck. Although it is an additional cost those farmers that do it say it actually saves them money due to the efficiencies and productivity gained.

#### 4. Ensure you have an orientation plan for new employees so they become effective quicker

- Use the orientation plan in the QuickStart Recruitment Kit available from [peoplesmart.co.nz](http://peoplesmart.co.nz) or from 0800 4 DairyNZ (0800 4 324 7969).

#### 5. Discuss and plan any training that your team needs to get through spring.

- Explain why the training is important to help learning
- Give staff time to practice what they have learnt so they remember
  - Go to [milksmart.co.nz](http://milksmart.co.nz) for help on training your staff to milk efficiently
  - Go to [smartsamm.co.nz](http://smartsamm.co.nz) for help on training your staff in udder health and milk quality.

6. **Ensure all employees have employment agreements in place – they can provide a reference point for both parties in stressful times.**
7. **Make sure protective gear is available and has been replaced/repaired or updated if required. Lead by example and start wearing/using it now. Then you are in a strong position to request/insist your staff do the same.**
8. **Have a plan around how everyone will get three nutritious meals each day to keep energy levels up. This is especially important for young staff or employees who live alone.**
  - Plan meal breaks into your roster
  - Consider arranging or employing someone to deliver food to the dairy shed or homes to reduce cooking time
  - Keep a supply of healthy snack foods and drinks handy in the dairy shed to provide sustenance throughout the day, e.g. soup, fruit, muffins, bread and sandwich fillings.
9. **Get organised. You have a huge amount of knowledge in your head about what needs to be done but not everyone in your team has this same knowledge. Create a checklist and get others to help you complete the tasks.**
  - Ensure the calf shed is set up for the calf rearer
    - New bedding material
    - New teats for calfeterias
    - Calfeterias and utensils cleaned
    - Iodine/electrolytes etc purchased
    - Meal, hay and fresh water
  - Order everyday supplies for spring
    - CausMag and limeflour
    - Milk fever treatments
    - Mastitis treatments
    - Filter socks
    - Detergents
  - Organise a calving kit that stays outside of the gate of the calving paddock
    - Refer to page 41 of this booklet
  - Service all motorbikes and machinery, get milking machines checked, order new/change rubberware – breakdowns take time

## Do

Once you are in the thick of calving remember to keep focusing on your people with regular communication and feedback. Work through the plan you created and get the job done.

### Top tips:

1. **Hold regular team meetings. Team meetings simplify things on farm because they ensure everyone gets the same message and you only have to communicate once. They also help keep people involved and provide an opportunity for minor frustrations to be dealt with quickly before they affect morale and productivity.**
  - Usually weekly team meetings are best but in spring these might need to be daily or at least twice weekly
  - Use a simple agenda of
    - What happened yesterday / last week?
    - What's happening today / this week?
    - Other
2. **Keep talking and provide feedback. Spring is stressful and it is more important than ever to remember the little things that keep people going.**
  - Communicate, communicate, communicate
    - Often and little to let people know what is going on
  - Thank your staff for their hard work and praise their successes
  - When something goes wrong take 5 minutes to explain to your staff how it could be improved for next time
  - Don't let little issues become big ones. Address them as they come up so everyone stays focussed and positive.
3. **Work as a team. Calving is a team sport so get everyone involved. Coach your team to achieve success and celebrate the pool play wins as you go. That keeps motivation and spirits up.**
4. **Lead by example. Work hard and work smart when you are on farm. But ensure you take time off to rest and recharge. Nothing is more important than you and your staff's health.**
5. **Eat well and often and encourage your staff to do the same. Being hungry does not help performance. You are not their parent but you can ensure people take regular breaks so they have an opportunity to fuel their bodies.**

**6. Watch for signs of stress and fatigue, in you and your staff, and be proactive early. Ignoring the problem won't make it go away. When the pressure is on, it is vital to maintain a steady life balance.**

- Encourage employees to get off the farm several times a week for a change of scene and do something they enjoy
- Encourage people to take regular breaks throughout the day
- Encourage staff to look after their physical health – eating right, exercising and getting enough sleep
- Lead by example and try to ensure your life is also in balance.

Stress symptoms are not the same for everyone but typical symptoms include faster heartbeat, chest pains, indigestion, dry mouth, forgetfulness and shaking. Whilst acute or low level stress symptoms will usually go away it is possible the stress will become chronic and serious if the problem causing them is not dealt with. It can lead to burn-out, fatigue, depression and suicide as well as increase the risk of high blood pressure, stroke or heart attack.

- The Rural Support Trust ([rural-support.org.nz](http://rural-support.org.nz) or 0800 787 254) can help find options to manage you or your staff through stressful times
- If you or your staff are feeling suicidal contact Lifeline (0800 543 354)
- For more information and advice on depression visit [depression.org.nz](http://depression.org.nz)

**7. Keep timesheets for all employees. It's good practice and can save you a lot of headaches in the future.**

- Use timesheets to ensure that hours worked are fair, reasonable and safe
- Use timesheets to ensure that all employees receive at least the minimum wage for every hour worked, every week, and maintain these records for seven years.

**8. Use the template in the QuickStart People Productivity Kit available from [peoplesmart.co.nz](http://peoplesmart.co.nz) or from 0800 4 DairyNZ (0800 4 324 7969).**

## Review

Once calving is finished make sure you and your team take a well-deserved break and enjoy it. You have all survived and hopefully your planning and focus on people has helped you achieve better results while minimising stress and angst. Once things have calmed down, but before you forget, take time to review your spring experience with your team. Reviewing things accurately will help set you up for an even better spring next year.

### Top tips:

#### 1. Discuss with your team how the season went.

- What worked well?
- What didn't?
- What could be improved for next year?
- Capture the information so you can use it next year in the planning stage so you are building on your learnings.

#### 2. Take time to celebrate the team effort that went into spring

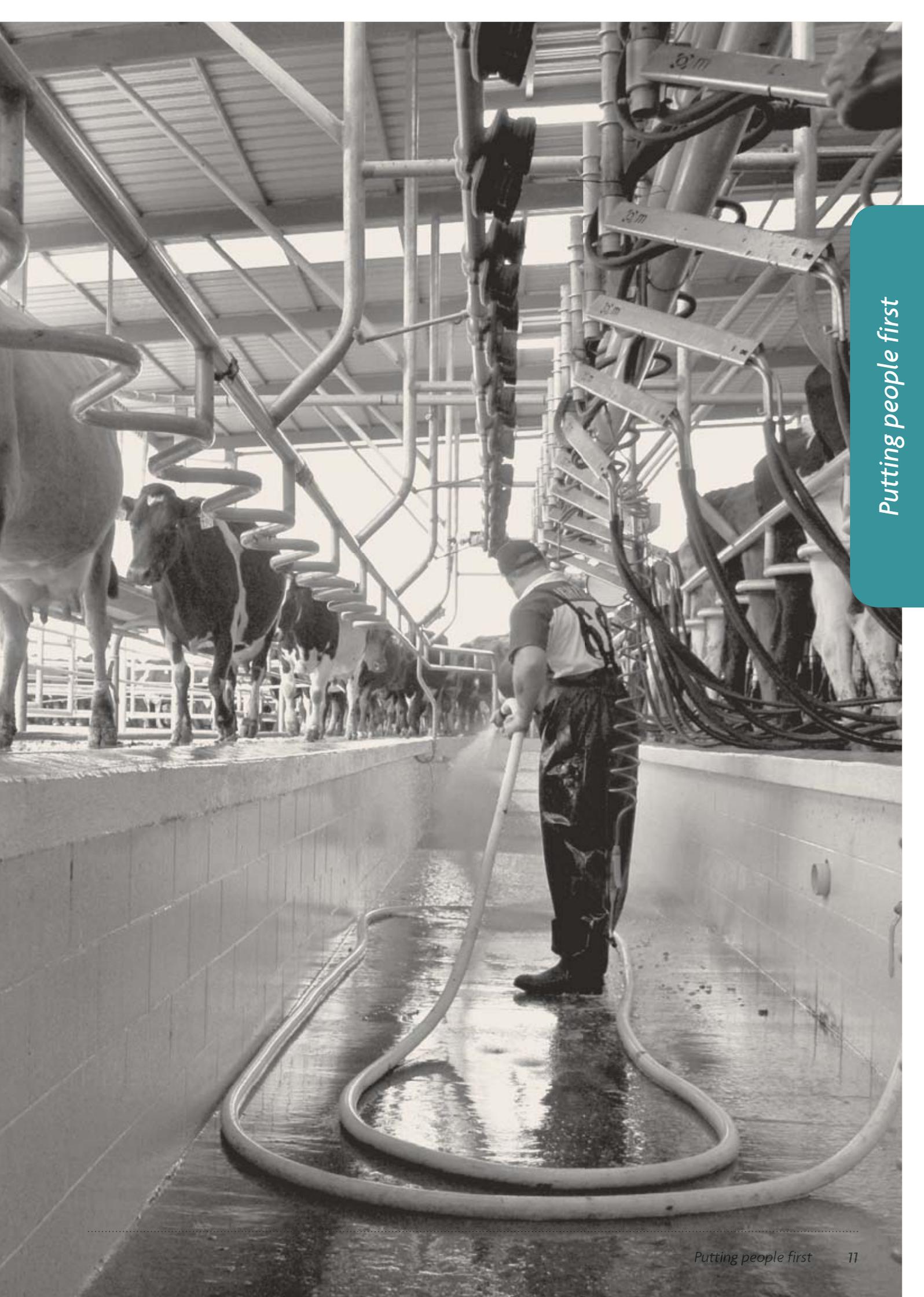
- Think about what is an appropriate celebration or reward for your team
- Remember that words and actions are both important. Ensure your team understand why you are celebrating.

#### 3. Determine the number of hours each person on farm worked over the spring period

- All employees are entitled to be paid the minimum wage for each hour they work over a week. If you find you have underpaid your staff then arrange for a top-up payment to be made.
- For more information go to [peoplesmart.co.nz](http://peoplesmart.co.nz) or [dol.govt.nz](http://dol.govt.nz)

Spring is busy on dairy farms and you can't change that. Sometimes it really does feel like it is about survival. Trust your instincts and support your employees to get the best results you can. But remember asking for help is smart farming because you and your team are what keeps your cows healthy and milked, the calves alive and thriving and your farm in top shape.

To get further assistance in getting the best from your team go to [peoplesmart.co.nz](http://peoplesmart.co.nz).



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