Identifying training needs

What is meant by identifying training needs?

Everyone on your farm will have training needs, including you! They will range from the most basic needs of new staff to ensure they learn to do their all tasks competently and safely, right through to you and your management team keeping up to date with new developments and people management techniques.

It’s not limited to just skills and knowledge for the job, either. It should include identifying opportunities for future personal development to help staff achieve their career goals.

Identifying these needs will enable you to develop a plan to fill the gaps for each person and help ensure your business is successful.

How do I identify training needs?

Training needs will become clear at different times: recruitment, orientation and performance review are good times to list the skills and knowledge your staff have and to note where there are gaps.

During recruitment discuss with job applicants what areas they feel they are capable in and which areas need developing against the job description. It is rare that an applicant can fill 100% of your needs so there will always be gaps. You can also ask referees what area or tasks your applicant would benefit from if they received training.

During orientation you should complete a thorough skills assessment checklist. This involves assessing the employee’s current skill level of tasks or areas of responsibility detailed in the job description. Sometimes these will be practical skill assessments and sometimes you will need to make a judgement based on conversations. Ideally you and you employee will agree on where you assess their skill level to be.

During performance reviews discuss with your employee how they are finding the job, what areas they are enjoying and feel competent in, and what areas they are struggling or feel they need more support and training in. These discussions combined with actual results against targets should provide you with sufficient information.

Remember mistakes and accidents will also provide you with instant information on training needs, and seeing these incidents as opportunities to learn from is a positive way to deal with them.
DairyNZ tools to assist you:

Identifying training needs and then following up by completing the required training is essential to get the best out of your employees. DairyNZ has two tools which can help you firstly identify these needs:

- **Skills training needs** can be checked off against the lists in the DairyNZ Quickstart Skill Checklist for the following jobs:
  - Farm Assistant
  - Herd Manager
  - Assistant Manager
  - Farm Manager

  Using the checklist will ensure that you know the areas in which staff require training, and also those areas where training might be unnecessary because they are already skilled.

  The checklist can be modified for different roles on farm as required.

- **Career development** opportunities can be discussed with your staff using the DairyNZ Career Pathways tool. This is available free of charge to people working or studying in the dairy industry by phoning 0800 4 DairyNZ (0800 4 324 7969) and contains a huge amount of information and resources including financial planning calculators and budgets, goal setting guides, an interactive CV builder and training and education options.

What next?

Once the training needs and providers have been identified, you can then develop a training plan for each person. Discuss the gaps with your employees and work together to create each person’s training plan. Key items to include in the training plan are:

- What training is required
- Where the training will be conducted (on farm by whom, or off farm by whom)
- When the training will be completed
- How the training will be practiced on farm once the skill is learnt

To learn more read the factsheet “Building a Training Plan”.

Remember that regular reviews of your employee’s progress are important to ensure the gaps you have identified are being dealt with and that new gaps haven’t arisen.