This factsheet will help you to:

- Understand why off farm training is important
- Learn why off farm training benefits your staff
- Recognise the importance of your staff practicing their off farm training on farm

Off farm training

Why is off farm training important?

Training staff makes good business sense as people with skills, knowledge and initiative will boost your business performance. Farms that perform well have good and skilled people behind them driving these results.

Off farm training is important for the following reasons:

- It can provide your staff with skills that you may not easily be able to teach on farm, whether that be because you don’t feel confident or don’t have the required resources
- It allows staff to learn in a different environment from where they work – the change of scenery can be motivational
- It provides interaction with other peers working in the industry, giving them access to new ideas and networks
- It can provide support for both you and your staff during the learning process and a place to turn for assistance

Off farm training also increases job satisfaction and motivation for staff and can help in retaining good employees.

What is off farm training?

Off farm training can be practical or theory based. For most people it means that the training is provided by an independent party and at the completion of the training they will receive a certificate or equivalent from this training provider saying they have met the requirements of the course (assuming they do!).

In practice some “off farm” training is actually completed on farm. For example AgITO is the primary provider of industry training to the NZ agricultural sector. Depending on the course AgITO training can have two parts:

- On farm – the employer or supervisor acts as the trainer and assessor
- Off farm – theory knowledge is taught and assessed by a qualified tutor

In both cases however the student will receive the appropriate qualification if they complete the requirements.
What are the benefits of off farm training?

Most off farm training aims to teach trainees the “know how” to do a job. This gives people the skills and knowledge to make good decisions on farm that makes a real difference to the business.

So whilst training will often be taught in a class room environment it is about the fundamentals of dairying that people experience in their daily jobs and this learning should be able to be readily transferred back onto farm.

In addition much off farm training in the dairy sector also teaches trainees the “how to”, ie it teaches them the practical skills so they can actually do it. This is usually through assessments completed on farm.

Other benefits of off farm training include:

- Staff with better skills and knowledge that can take on more responsibility
- Increased staff satisfaction because they feel valued that you are investing in them which encourages them to do their best
- Increased staff retention because staff are progressing and learning on the job

Where do I look for off farm training?

AgITO is the leading provider of farming training in New Zealand and its courses are subsidised. There are also other specialists operating in the agricultural field and more information can be found through the internet and discussions with other farmers or rural professionals. PeopleSmart also lists many different training courses available.

Short one-day courses can also be motivational for staff to attend. These may include things such as inter-farm seminars, vet courses in animal treatment, discussion groups, or field days run by rural professionals.

Remember training does not need to be limited to traditional farming training. Other things to consider are:

- Time management training
- Outward Bound courses
- Leadership training

Tips for effective off farm training:

- Ensure that the training is relevant or desirable to your staff member. If they do not see the relevance of the training they may not be very motivated to complete it. The exception to this is if they have stated it is an interest to them for their future development.
- Ensure you regularly discuss what your staff member is learning about off farm. Provide practical examples to any theory they have learnt so they can see the relevance and how it fits into an actual dairy business.
Where possible allow your staff to train off farm during their normal working hours. This indicates to them how much you value the training and shows your support. It also means their work / life balance is not impacted.

Give your staff the opportunity to put into practice what they have learnt off farm so it becomes real for them. Actually doing the task will help cement the learning. Remember that people need time to practice a new skill several or more times, otherwise they are likely to forget it.