On farm training

Why is on-farm training important?

Training staff reduces work errors and therefore helps ensure that work is completed correctly. Improved work performance leads to better business success. Training also increases job satisfaction and motivation for staff and can help in retaining good employees.

On-farm training is usually very specific and practical to the tasks a person is required to perform in their role and therefore the impact of the training is rapid and significant.

Effective on-farm training:

To make on-farm training effective you need to create a good atmosphere for learning in.

You need your employee to feel comfortable enough to try new things and if not successful the first time to give it another go. This means you need to be careful not to talk down to employees or dismiss any ideas they have from previous experience. However don’t assume what knowledge or experience your employee has - ask them. This will help to ensure that you don’t under-explain concepts.

A good process to follow for training staff on-farm is:

1. Break the skill to be taught into simple components
2. Explain to the employee why the skill is important
3. Discuss with the employee what they already know about the skill and determine what knowledge is missing
4. Demonstrate and explain the skill to the employee slowly. Pause between steps and be sure all steps can be clearly seen.
5. Allow the employee to go through a skill step-by-step while the employer talks through what is to be done and helps out where needed.
6. Allow the employee to demonstrate the skill on his/her own without input from the employer.

This factsheet will help you to:

- Learn a good process for training staff on farm
- Help ensure that your on farm training leads to learning
- Recognise the importance of giving feedback during training
7. Ask the employee to give feedback on how they did. Give feedback to the employee on how they performed the skill. Don't forget to note the positive points!

8. Repeat steps 4, 5, and 6 as needed.

Ensuring that training leads to learning:

Training a person does not automatically lead to learning. For your employees to learn effectively you should keep the following information about learning in mind:

Third person learning:

Third person learning refers to the learning that takes place when your employee who has learnt a new skill teaches that skill to another person (the third person in the learning process). To make this technique work, observe your trained employee whilst they are training someone else, and only interrupt if necessary. This technique helps reinforce the learning to the person doing the training.

The learning cycle:

The learning cycle has four quadrants. Training is usually effective if it incorporates answers to the questions in all four quadrants of the learning cycle. People will often have a preference for learning through one quadrant of the learning cycle over others. If you ensure that your training covers questions from all quadrants in a repeating cycle it will ensure that the needs of the your employee are covered in the way they learn best.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>What if?</th>
<th>Why?</th>
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<td>How?</td>
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To use the learning cycle start in the “Why” quadrant and work in repeating circles answering the questions what, how and what if…

For example: Training in drenching

- We drench the calves to protect them from internal parasites that may stunt their growth (the “why”)
- We do this by administering an anthelmintic drench (the “what”)
- We do it by loading the race with calves and then working from the front of the row we put the drench gun as far into the throat as possible and squirt and drench into the calf (the “how”)
- When we do this sometimes calves can swing their heads up or around suddenly. This can lead to crushed hands or bruising, or trouble administering the drench to the calf (the “what if”)
- However we still choose to drench the calves to stop parasite problems because drench is cheaper than other products (the “why”)
- Other products that can be used are injectable or pour-on anthelmintic products (the “what”)
- And so on around the learning cycle.
Reinforcing training through feedback:

Giving feedback to your employee on their performance is a key part of training. Feedback can be given in the form “I like the way you…….” followed by “I would like to see you…….”. This technique reinforces the positive steps your employee has made whilst giving an opportunity for further improvement.

Tips for effective on-farm training:

- It is common for many farmers to either underestimate or under-play the complexity of on-farm tasks. This is probably because farmers are very familiar with their own farming operation and so take for granted much of the way it works.
- It is better to err on the side of over-explanation when training employees on farm. This is more likely to make them feel good because they know half of it already, rather than feeling stupid because they didn’t quite understand.
- Remember that people need time to practice a skill several or more times, otherwise they are likely to forget it.