

DAIRY PIPELINE

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Communication – Bountiful or Silent?

—Jeremy Daubert, Extension Agent, Rockingham County; jdaubert@vt.edu

Is communication on your farm an obstacle for the business? Communication is a key skill that all farm owners, family members and employees need to keep the business

“Communication is a key skill that all farm owners, family members and employees need to keep the business running smoothly.”

running smoothly. It is important to the efficiency of the farm and for progress and a bright future. Often when talking with different people on a farm or any business I will hear different concerns. The first question that always comes to mind is; “Have you told the other person what

you think?”. That is often met with an assertive “no” or “they wouldn’t understand” or “I did not know how to bring it up”.

Farmers as a whole are not always the best communicators. They are skilled at farming, herdsmanship, and business planning, but not communication. Farmers are busy, which leads to less time to focus on communicating with others. At the end of a long day where many things may have been stressful, the last thing that many people want to do is talk to someone about what may be another stressful situation. Some conversations are just difficult in nature and there is a natural tendency to put those off, shifting focus to less problematic topics.

Often families that work together all day long do less communicating than those that don’t see each other very often. “We see each other all day, what else is there to talk about?” Though working together to accom-

plish similar goals, there is rarely good communication.

I recommend having regular family and business meetings. Put them on the calendar and make them happen. Make it a priority when there is a meeting scheduled to have it. Delegate someone in charge of creating an agenda for the meeting and stick to it. If needed, invite a facilitator to the meetings to keep them moving and on track. These facilitators may or may not have any ag experience, but they need to be able to keep the conversation moving and help ensure that all parties are afforded time for input. Don’t try to do too much at one time, keep these meetings short and have them more often if needed. Discuss a single topic at the meeting and schedule another meeting for the next topic. Have them at regular intervals and schedule the next meeting at the previous one. Whether you have them once a week, once a month, or once a quarter, it is important to have these regular communication sessions.

Without effective communication, progress comes to a grinding halt. Even daily tasks can be impaired or no decisions made at all. This lack of communication can lead to the eventual death of the business, even in otherwise well managed farms. Don’t let a lack of communication be the silent killer of your farm.

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Upcoming Events

See [VTDairy](#) for details.

March 2019

[Virginia Cover Crop College](#)

["Purposeful Cover Crop Planning 101:](#)

[A New Approach for Better Cover Cropping Outcomes"](#)

March 7-Rocky Mt

March 13-Harrisonburg

March 27-Richmond

March 12-15, 2019

[Area Dairy Conferences](#)

March 12—Rocky Mount

March 13—Amelia

March 14—Dayton

March 15—Marion

March 11 & 18, 2019

Farm Estate Planning

Rockingham Extension

Office

March 16

[Dairy Judging 101 Workshop](#)

Olde Dominion Ag Complex

Chatham, VA

March 25, 2019

[Communicating with Farmers](#)

[under Stress](#)—Weyers Cave

March 28, 2019

[Communicating with Farmers](#)

[under Stress](#)—Rocky Mt

April 6, 2019

VA Spring Holstein Show

April 27, 2019

Little All-American

May 4, 2019

Dairy Judging 101

Rockingham Fairgrounds

May 17, 2019

Eastview Farms dispersal

May 20, 2019

Hokie Cow Classic Golf

Tournament

If you are a person with a disability and require any auxiliary aids, services or other accommodations for any Extension event, please discuss your accommodation needs with the Extension staff at your local Extension office at least 1 week prior to the event.



Occupational Safety at the Farm: A Growing Concern?

—Gonzalo Ferreira, Extension Dairy Scientist, Management, gof@vt.edu

Many hazards exist on farms. Some of those hazards include running tractors and equipment, bins full of grain, manure pits, and exposure to chemicals and toxic gases, among many others. Those who have not grown up in a farming environment might not be aware of these hazards. However, those who grew in a farming environment may be aware of those hazards, although their frequent exposure to them may generate an overconfident feeling that can result in negligent behaviors.

For the last years, our extension program has been tackling the issue of Occupational Safety at the Farm. Using funds from the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) through the Central Appalachian Regional Education and Research Center (CARERC) we have developed educational videos related some of the existing hazards during harvesting crops for silage and when working with or around vertical silos. These videos exist in English and Spanish and can be found in the website of Virginia Cooperative Extension (www.ext.vt.edu). Currently, we are developing new materials, which we anticipate releasing this coming spring.

Up to here, this might not be much new information to you. What it is interesting to know is that something is changing in regard to occupational safety at the farm. In the last year, it has been surprising to us the number of times we have been contacted by stakeholders asking questions related to farm safety. These calls included extension agents asking for more information addressing farm safety materials, industry companies asking to present about farm safety, and lawyers seeking experts in the subject. Even though we do not know exactly how fast and how this interest is changing, our extension team interprets there is a growing concern and awareness related to farming occupational safety.

“...there is a growing concern and awareness related to farming occupational safety.”

The question, then, is how an increasing awareness on farming occupational safety may affect farming operations. Maybe we are not ready to answer this question yet. From a preventative side, a greater awareness would likely result in a reduced number of injuries or fatalities. With no doubt, that really is very good news. From a management perspective, as with many other areas, more requirements would likely be needed to comply with safety regulations. Overall, whatever the implications are, hopefully the industry in general will have a proactive approach.

In the meantime, take some time to look around your farm and think about three to five hazards that might jeopardize the safety of your employees and family members. Once you identify these hazards, think about what potential consequences could be associated with them and imagine alternatives for minimizing their risk. Then, prepare a timeline with objectives and evaluate resources needed for minimizing such risks. After doing this exercise, you might find that being more proactive in regard to occupational safety and investing in human capital (e.g., through safety training programs) might be one of the most effective means for minimizing the occurrence of accidents and fatalities at your farm.



For more information on Dairy Extension or to learn about current programs, visit us at VT Dairy—Home of the Dairy Extension Program on the web at: www.vtdairy.dasc.vt.edu.

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