



CENTER FOR
DairyEXCELLENCE

For Immediate Release

Media Contact: Emily Barge, 717-346-0849; ebarge@centerfordairyexcellence.org

December 29, 2021

HUNTINGDON COUNTY DAIRY FARMERS DESCRIBE THEIR APPROCH TO EMPLOYEE MANAGEMENT IN NEW PODCAST EPISODE

Allen Behrer and Pete Posnett Share Creative Ways They Engage With Farm Employees

Harrisburg, Pa. – In the Center for Dairy Excellence’s latest episode of the “Cow-Side Conversations” podcast, owner Allen Behrer and herdsman Pete Posnett of Willow Behrer Farms in Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania shared their unique approach to employee management. With more than 20 dairy farm employees, their team milks approximately 1,000 cows and farms close to 2,000 acres. Using video tools and other engagement strategies, Allen and Pete described how they cultivate employee buy-in to achieve their performance goals.

They opened the podcast by identifying their individual roles on the dairy operation. Allen is part owner with his father and is responsible for the dairy side of the operation, including cow and heifer care. He also assists with accounting and crops. Pete is in charge of herd management as well as human resources and employee management. With 21 full-time employees and five part-time workers, their goal is to train employees on the bigger purpose behind their daily responsibilities.

“Employees are people, and they are our number one asset on the dairy. Without good people in place, we don’t run. It takes a good quality team to make things happen and get the work done every day,” Allen shared in the podcast. “One of the goals we have with that is teaching the ‘why.’ We do a lot of trainings on how to do things such as our milking procedures. Pete has made the trainings very detailed and includes step-by-step procedures.”

Pete went on to describe the wide range of training modules and videos he has created for employees. He shares some of the training videos with employees through text messaging applications and during initial onboarding. Pete is currently using a 3D program to design a training about broadening employees’ horizons with milking systems. The program allows them to visually see how the milk tracks through the system and flows through the line.

“It gives them more of a base knowledge for what they’re doing every day and helps them realize the importance of what we do day in and day out,” Pete said. “It also gives them a chance to ask questions. I can actually zoom in on a certain part of the milk system, get inside the pipe, and walk around.”

Allen and Pete view these innovative trainings as a way to define goals for their employees and bring out their team’s best performance.

“With the trainings you build, I think it’s always important to never lose sight of the individual people. That individual person in front of you who you’re training is more important than the training itself,” Pete shared in the podcast. “We have an ability through education to really bring the best out of them. Part of treating people well is defining what’s expected of them, and through the years, we’ve found that people have really answered the call well.”

To help their team achieve specific performance-related goals, Allen shared the bonus program they created to generate buy-in from employees and give them incentives and accountability. The goals revolve around how much milk is loaded onto the truck every day, how many cows are in the hospital pen, somatic cell count, and the number of new cases of mastitis.

“If they hit those four goals [and the metrics we outline with them], they get a \$100 bonus added to their check for the month,” Allen explained. “If they achieve 100 pounds of milk in three consecutive days, they also get \$1 per hour added to their paycheck. That one is a little harder to achieve.”

Pete posts updates and metrics weekly and also has a digital feed looping in the break room to show which employees are in the top spots related to those performance goals. “It gives them some accountability and they do strive for those goals. It’s a little bit of friendly competition among shifts. It’s also a form of daily feedback, and it’s really powerful to them,” Pete added.

Throughout the podcast, Allen and Pete shared several other creative strategies they use to engage with farm employees:

- **Consider how animal welfare can boost employee performance.** “There are a lot of profitable practices that can come alongside [animal welfare]. When we’re treating an animal well, she’s going to let down better for you in the parlor, she’s going to make more milk, and parlor flow can increase. And it makes happier employees when they’re treating the cows better,” Pete said.
- **Use performance reviews to show appreciation.** “When Pete does a 90-day or annual review with employees, we’re looking at how they’re handling their work and giving them praise for a job well done. On the flip side, we share what they have to work towards more. I know all employees like that kind of feedback. If we’re not out there telling them they are doing good or that they have to improve, it makes it tough for employees. It’s one of the things we’re working on,” Allen explained.
- **Keep the owner involved in employee training.** “It’s really powerful having an owner stepping in. Just their presence can add validity to the training, meeting or celebration. Having leadership there makes a huge impact on employees,” Pete said.
- **Teach the bigger purpose.** “One of Pete’s drive-home messages is, ‘What is the reason we’re here?’ To produce milk, which turns in to food for people to eat. For Christmas, I made up little gift bags for all employees and put different dairy products in them to drive home that message,” Allen added.

- **Let employees lead certain aspects of the training.** “The most powerful trainings we’ve ever held have actually been run by the employees and not by me. The best way to learn something is to teach it, so they’re getting that out of new employee training, too. They’re learning themselves and it’s really solidifying in their minds,” Pete explained.

Throughout the podcast, Allen and Pete reminded listeners that their employee management strategy is an extensive process and takes significant fine-tuning.

“Doing these types of trainings, especially like Pete has done with the videos, doesn’t happen overnight. It’s a long process and you have to be flexible and willing to learn along the way,” Allen said. “It’s an ongoing process for us, and we try to continue to get better. Finding that great person to help you is key.”

Pete also encouraged other dairy farm owners to have patience with employees and remember the reason they go to work every day.

“Remember that your employees are working through the night. The things we do are pretty extraordinary. If someone makes a mistake, try to make a mental note on whether it’s their first mistake of the day or first mistake of the year,” Pete added. “Have patience with people. What we do is a pretty tough job and requires a lot of commitment. It’s a noble thing. I appreciate everyone out there who partakes in this profession we call agriculture.”

Allen and Pete were recognized by the National FARM Program in 2021 for their efforts in workforce development. To listen to the full podcast interview, visit www.centerfordairyexcellence.org/podcast. The podcast is also available on [Spotify](#), [Apple Podcasts](#), and [Amazon Music](#). With a new episode released each month, Behrer and Posnett’s interview is second episode in the second season. The podcast was designed to share real-time farmer insight, tricks of the trade, and inspiring stories from dairies across Pennsylvania.

###

The Center for Dairy Excellence is a non-profit organization initiated by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture in 2004. Bringing together people from more than 40 different dairy organizations in Pennsylvania, the Center’s mission is to enhance the profitability of the dairy industry by empowering people, creating partnerships, and increasing the availability and use of resources. Learn more at centerfordairyexcellence.org.

Center for Dairy Excellence ▼ 2301 North Cameron St., Harrisburg, PA 17110 ▼ 717-346-0849 ▼

www.centerfordairyexcellence.org