Employee Onboarding: Safe, Productive, and Engaged From Day One

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“Hello...uh...what was your name again? Yeah, Pete, that’s right. We’re sure glad to have you starting today, two guys left last week and I did most of the milking over the weekend. Put your stuff down over there, here’s a pair of gloves, let’s get in the parlor. Juan’s been on since 8:00 last night and he’s gotta be exhausted. I’ll introduce you around some other time and we’ll do your paperwork up at the house this afternoon. Right now we need to get some work done!”

Or.

“Good Morning Jasmine, welcome to Lakewater Dairy. We are glad to have you starting today and I know you’re eager to work with the cows, but the fact is that you and this job are really important. We need to go over a number of different things before you start work because we want you to be safe and ready to do a great job. We have a really good team of people here and we all want you to be successful. We call our program for new team members ‘Lakewater Onboarding,’ let’s go into the office and I’ll tell you about it.”
Key Points

• Onboarding can increase employee safety, performance and retention.
• Focus on the new employee as a person is critical.
• Understand the Onboarding Project and tools.
What is Onboarding?

• It’s a relatively new business term.
• It is more than orientation, which typically covers Day 1 and paperwork.
• It is the overall business process to bring new employees into the organization, complete necessary paperwork, equip them with safety and performance knowledge and skills, and make them feel connected to a worthwhile team.

• Safe, Productive, and Engaged...from Day 1!
Why is Onboarding Important?

Because it can:

• Reduce turnover
• Increase employee satisfaction and commitment
• Increase employee safety
• Increase productivity
• Increase professionalism and attractiveness of farms as workplaces, and as places to build a career
The Disappearing U.S. Ag Workforce

Disconnection from the local labor market.

Declining immigration due to increased enforcement and demographic change.

Depopulation of rural areas and social stigma against farm work.
Jobless Rate Falls to Lowest in Nearly 50 Years as Employers Ramp Up Hiring

Stronger-than-expected April job gains point toward solid growth, though fewer Americans are working.
New York’s Unauthorized Population is Shrinking

Source: Pew Research Center
Fewer Young Mexicans Looking for Work
A Stable Population

Mexico - 1980
Population: 69,330,974

Mexico - 2017
Population: 130,222,814
Population Loss in Rural Counties

Rapid growth in many nonmetro counties prior to the Recession

Nonmetro population change, 2002-08

Population loss now widespread in the Eastern United States

Nonmetro population change, 2010-16

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Census Bureau.
The Challenge

• Labor is increasingly scarce, but farmers need excellent employees in order to operate successful businesses.

• Turnover, injuries, poor performance, and noncompliance with regulations threaten employees and farms.

• How can we make the best of every employment relationship?
Onboarding Research

• High-level, planned onboarding can increase employees’ perceptions of organizational support, organization commitment, and job satisfaction. (Meyer & Bartels, 2017)

• Onboarding focused on the newcomer’s identity, strengths, and application of these to the job delivered positive outcomes such as: stronger employee relationships, less turnover, and better performance. (Cable, Gino & Straats, 2013)
Levels of Onboarding

1. Compliance: basic compliance with regulations and policies.

2. Clarity: role clarity and performance expectations.

3. Culture: values, philosophies, traditions, and norms.

4. Connection: building work relationships, finding your place, gaining commitment.

The Onboarding Project

- Identified as a priority area by New York’s Ag Workforce Development Council.
- Broad industry team engaged to develop a project that will assist farms.
Our Team

- Richard Stup, Cornell University, Team Leader
- Libby Eiholzer, Cornell Cooperative Extension
- Eileen Franko, New York State Department of Labor
- Bill Banker, Dairy Farmer
- Jessica Johnson, NY Vegetable Grower’s Association
- Tonya Van Slyke, NEDPA
- Julie Sorensen, NYCAMH
- John Sorbello, NY Farm Bureau
- Lisa Ford, Cayuga Milk
- Jessica Ziehm, Dairy Farmer and New York Animal Ag Coalition
Objectives

1. Establish a farm culture that is safe, productive and engaging.
2. Set clear, upfront job expectations that employees can fully understand.
3. Provide immediate safety training to avoid injuries.
4. Promote compliance with all employment regulations.
5. Communicate important farm policies and procedures, especially those that may differ from previous employers.
6. Overcome language barriers so that everyone can understand each other.
7. Increase employee commitment and reduce turnover.
8. Provide accessible and realistic support for farm onboarding, even when labor and time are in short supply.
Project Components

• Onboarding template for farms to easily adapt and use.
  o Overall organization and regulatory compliance.

• NYCAMH safety resources.

• Resources and learning experiences on how to train more effectively.

• Resources about employee records and training documentation.

• Dedicated web presence at Cornell Agricultural Workforce Development (agworkforce.cals.cornell.edu)
Planned Onboarding Phases

**Day 1**
- Required documentation
- Introductions
- Basic safety training
- Workplace and housing orientation
- Basic work procedure training
- Do not overwhelm the new person

**Week 1**
- Focus on work procedures and safety
- Review additional workplace policies
- Evaluate employee learning so far
- Critical time for learning and engagement
- Socialization

**Month 1**
- Finish review of policies such as sexual harassment prevention
- Complete primary procedure training
- Evaluate learning and performance
- Acculturation
Broad Training Areas in Each Phase

- About the farm
- About your job
- Legal matters
- Safety and health
- Your benefits
- Your work procedures
The Onboarding Template: A Checklist

About the Farm

1. Mission. Share the mission or vision that guides your farm business. Share important values that your new employee should know and appreciate.

2. Organization Chart.
   a) Who is your new employee’s direct supervisor?
   b) What other positions should they know about?
   c) Who should they go to for help or questions?

3. Facility Overview. Give your new employee an orienting tour about the farm.
   a) Provide a map with the location and name of buildings.
   b) Identify location of important safety resources:
      i. Fire extinguishers
      ii. Safety data sheets (SDS)
      iii. Eye wash stations
      iv. Emergency contact numbers
      v. Location of equipment operation manuals
      vi. Show location of personal protective equipment
The Onboarding Template: Compliance Tool

About Your Job

1. **Job Description.** Share a clear description of your employee’s new job.
   a) What are their most important duties or tasks?
   b) How will they learn their duties or tasks?
   c) How will their performance be measured and supervised?

2. **Work Agreement.** Go over the “Pay Notice and Work Agreement.” New York law requires that all the information in **Form LS 309** be filled out and shared, in writing, with the employee in a language they can understand. Here is the Form in **Spanish** and **Haitian-Creole**. Form LS 309 is available on the NYSDOL website in multiple languages, see the NYS Department of Labor site for more details under “Wage Theft Prevention Act” ([https://labor.ny.gov/immigrants/agriculture-labor-program/services-for-agriculture-employers.shtm](https://labor.ny.gov/immigrants/agriculture-labor-program/services-for-agriculture-employers.shtm)).

3. **Time Recording.**
   a) How should your employee track the hours that he/she works?
   b) What should he/she do if they believe an error was made in time recording or payroll?
The Onboarding Template: Customize for Your Farm

Safety and Health

1. **Safety Culture.** Share your farm’s safety expectations. (Add your reasons below.)
   a) It is important for your new employee to work safely both to protect himself/herself and to protect others.
   b) 
   c) 

2. **Top 5 Safety.** What are the top 5 safety concerns for your new employee’s job at your farm? Include any entrapment risks and hazardous materials.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Safety Risk</th>
<th>How to avoid it...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: PTO drive</td>
<td>Never work around unshielded PTO’s. Don’t step over a PTO. Don’t wear loose fitting clothing around equipment. Let manager know about any unshielded or damaged PTO shields.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
Who Should Lead Onboarding?

• Ideally the direct supervisor leads onboarding.
• One person should be responsible for seeing that onboarding is carried out consistently.
• Trainers should be qualified.
• An owner should be there on Day 1.
Compliance and Documentation of Ethical Practices

- Employment regulations
- Ethical management and worker well-being assurance programs
Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

- For clarity and confidence in employees.
- Essential for work consistency.
- Makes training much easier and more effective.
- Required by most quality assurance programs.
Training Skills

• Just because you can do the job doesn’t mean you can teach someone else, not everyone is a trainer.

• Ideally supervisors should train, next choice is designated, qualified and prepared peer trainers.

• The Onboarding Project will include bilingual workshops to teach essential training skills for supervisors and peer trainers.
### Simple Training & Evaluation Plans

**Training Plan Name:** 

**Date:**

**Learning Goals** (What should the learner know or do after the training is successful?)

1.
2.
3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What? List the important knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSA's) here.</th>
<th>Why? Define why each KSA is important so you can explain it to the learner.</th>
<th>How to teach and learn it? List any activities you will do or learning aids such as diagrams or videos.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Predip</td>
<td>To begin cleaning and sanitizing teats.</td>
<td>Explain, demonstrate, and practice with actual cows.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strip</td>
<td>Stimulation leads to good milk let-down, fast milk-out, and better udder health.</td>
<td>Explain, demonstrate, and practice with actual cows. Show video.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Evaluate Learning** (What key questions or tests will make sure the KSA's were learned.)

1.
2.
Accomplishments

• Building learning platforms
• Creating training video
Train Using: Tell, Show, Do, Review

1. Tell
Describe the procedure, and why each step is important.

2. Show
Demonstrate the procedure and emphasize key points.

3. Do
Allow learner to try, and answer any questions.

4. Review:
Are all steps in the procedure done correctly?

- Yes: Praise for a job well done!
- No: Praise for the steps done correctly.
Performance Feedback

• **S**pecific, with details
• **C**redible sources of information
• **O**n-time and frequent
• **R**elevant to performance
• **E**nds looking ahead
Connection

• Should be integrated throughout other onboarding activities.
• Welcome from ownership, relationship with supervisor, and introduction to co-workers and the team.
• Lunch, team meetings, or other planned socialization activities to build relationships.
• Consider assignment of a buddy or mentor.
Evaluation at 2 Levels: The New Employee and Your Onboarding Program

Day 1 Onboarding Evaluation Example Questions:

• Who is your supervisor?
• What are three important duties of your new job?
• How should you record your work hours?
• What are three important safety hazards on this farm?
• On what day will you be paid?

Month 1 Evaluation of Your Onboarding Program:

• Did the new employee gain the knowledge and skills needed?
• At what level is the new employee performing after one month?
  • Below, at, or above standard
• How can onboarding be improved for the next person?
Why Does Onboarding Work?

1. Gets the farm into compliance with a checklist approach and assigned responsibility for completing.
2. Helps ensure that new employees get all the safety and production training they need.
3. Strong focus on the new employee where it belongs, helping them to connect and engage.
Wrap Up

• **Safe, Productive, and Engaged…*from Day 1!***
• Organize and plan before your new employee starts.
• Four C’s:
  1. Compliance
  2. Clarity
  3. Culture
  4. Connection
• Farms gain from:
  o Less turnover
  o Safety and performance
  o Committed employees
References

