



DIBS

**Dairy
Issue
Briefs**



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Plummeting prices in the dairy industry are creating critical cash-flow and long-term survivability issues on Ohio's 3,328 dairy farms. These issues are also likely to be causing significant stress and strain among family members and farm employees. OSU Extension's Dairy Working Group, a collaboration of OSU Extension Educators and Specialists discuss:

Communication during times of stress

With all that is happening on the farm, you may think business and family communication is the least of your concerns. However, open and honest communication is even more important during times of high stress. Communication matters because your farm operation is made up of people, and people feel more comfortable when they know what is happening within the business, even if the news is not good. Good communication can help to build trust, promote understanding and motivate those involved in the farm, whether they are family or non-family employees.

Withdrawal and lack of communication sends a clear, negative message about the future to employees and family members. It will appear as if management is giving up rather than trying to adjust to meet the challenges before them. Communication is certainly a challenge during difficult times, but if conducted effectively it can help lead your farm through stressful times.

Communication should not stop at the barn door. By staying in touch with outside advisors such as your lender, feed and seed dealers, accountant, agronomist, nutritionist, veterinarian, Extension educator, etc., you can gain valuable information to help make decisions concerning your operation. By keeping these lines of communication open, you will build strong relationships with this support group that can be very helpful in times of high stress for your farm.

Communication takes time and effort. It is easy to say "I'll do it tomorrow." However, too often tomorrow comes and goes, and there has still been no effort made to increase communication between management and employees or within the family. Stressful situations make it even more difficult to find time to communicate, as everyone is consumed by working to keep up and worrying about what will or could happen. It is during these times of high stress that it is critical for management to make time to communicate with employees and family members.

One way to find time to communicate with employees and/or family members is to hold a family business meeting. This will provide an opportunity for the manager to share the current situation and for those involved to understand what is happening within the farm business. The group can then discuss the situation and develop an action plan to meet the challenges the farm is facing. The current situation may be bleak, but by communicating, the manager is letting those around him/her know that they value them as a part of the farm team. Other ways to communicate may just be sitting down in the farm office for ten minutes of uninterrupted time, talking while working together, or scheduling a set time each day to catch up with one another.

Finally, understand that people communicate differently depending upon their personality characteristics. While some personalities are action-oriented and will want to get all the issues out in the open and get started on solving the problem immediately, others will need more time to understand the issues and then think about the issues before they begin to explore ways to tackle them. It will take an effective manager to recognize the differences in communication styles and adjust accordingly. The important thing to remember is to include employees and family members as much as possible by keeping the lines of communication open.



Communication involves both talking and listening. These components are each discussed in more detail in DIB# 20-09 and DIB# 21-09, which are available on-line at <http://dairy.osu.edu>.

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More DIBS are posted on-line at <http://dairy.osu.edu>.

References

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