

Build business performance, by people

The most productive, profitable farm businesses don't just have a great leader – they have a great team.

Whether running one dairy farm, or 70, one true variable in a farm system is its people – something illustrated well by Dairy Holdings Ltd.

“High levels of performance on a farm is not necessarily a good sharemilker or manager, but a good sharemilker or manager and the support of all staff – having everyone on-side,” says Colin Glass, Dairy Holdings Ltd General Manager. “We have similar set-ups across all our farms so the biggest variable we have is people.”

Following previous HR work done with QFENZ (Quality Farm Employers of New Zealand), Dairy Holdings began working with Investors in People NZ Ltd in 2008, to further develop structure for staff across the company's 70 farms.

“We found the initial QFENZ work valuable and it aligned that the farms

which were best in the HR process, were also the most productive and profitable units,” says Colin.

The Investors in People Agribusiness Standard is used to benchmark farm businesses, with 12 key standards to be met before a farm receives its accreditation. The standards cover four categories – farm planning, training and development, managing people and compliance.

In the first year, 36 farms went through the Investors in People assessment process, with 22 achieving full accreditation against the criteria of the Investors in People Standard.

All received an action list, often centred on helping train individual staff and build them a personal development plan (which identifies the on-farm learning that takes place); along with having a more



Colin Glass, Dairy Holdings Ltd general manager.

structured approach to planning each day and setting work routines.

“At first some operators were reticent about the process, wondering what's in it for them, but after receiving the first assessment results, farmers started to embrace it more and more,” says Colin. “It's important everyone is talking and communicating.”

Since 2000, career progression within Dairy Holdings has leapt ahead – one-third of 50/50 sharemilkers have gone on to buy a farm, along with many lower-order and 50/50 sharemilkers moving through the company's ranks.

Aligning people and business

Investors in People NZ Ltd, the holder of the international standard Investors in People, helps businesses improve performance by maximising its people.

In New Zealand this framework has been well-used in large herd operations, but is applicable for all farm businesses, no matter how small.

“With three people on-farm, everyone has to be really clear about roles and responsibilities – daily meetings to identify priorities; a planning session at key parts of the season, such as calving and mating; and staff who are able to multi-skill,” says Stuart Burgess, Investors in People managing director.

“There's a real value in external eyes, as it can really give clarity for a business,” says Stuart. “If farm plans have specific objectives and are well communicated, then people on-farm will understand what those goals are and what part they play in achieving them.”

Common target areas

Two key target areas consistently crop up – developing management and supervisor ability on a day-to-day basis; and creating an environment where staff learning and development is well planned and reapplied on-farm to improve performance, including on-the-job learning.



Stuart Burgess, Investors in People managing director.

“Kiwis are not good at giving consistent feedback, often issues are swept under the carpet. People genuinely want to feel valued and know that they are contributing to an organisation,” says Stuart. “A lot of the time, communication style is key.”

Stuart says often it's as simple as managers giving specific feedback on a job done well.