

Are you Prepared – Could someone walk into your dairy and milk your cows?

In dairy farming the one true constant is the milking of the cows. It does not matter what type of dairy you have, a herringbone, rotary or even a robot, the cows still have to be milked. So, if something were to go wrong and someone else had to step in to milk your cows, how would they go? Is there a Dairy Instruction Manual for starting up the dairy?

My family went through such an experience in September 1998. We were incredibly lucky at the time; the dairy was a pretty simple shed to run and our neighbours jumped in and were able to run the farm for us. We were joining at the time, so the bulls got let out. The dairy was a simple 20 swing over with no bells and whistles. Putting the water through was a manual process where you had to measure out the acid or alkaline and pour it into the hot water drum. Nowadays there are a few more moving bits and pieces in the dairy. Press a button for automatic dosing of the acid and alkaline, auto cup removers, stall gates, auto drafting and a computer!

My point is unfortunate events do happen. Sometimes it is something that happens not to us but to others close to us that requires our complete attention. So, the question is, could someone walk into your dairy tomorrow and milk your cows? Quite possibly the answer is yes, but would they make mistakes or miss a step in the process?

If we are prepared it will be a lot easier on the people stepping in to help. An instruction manual for the dairy is not only a great resource in an emergency, it is also very handy when inducting or training new staff. We all learn in different ways. Some people like to read things, others like visual cues like photos. Some pick it up quickly and for others it takes time to get used to a process or routine. Having a manual that takes someone through the steps on how to start and finish a milking, especially the cleaning of the plant could be an invaluable resource.

Having any bucket cows marked properly is also a must. However, would someone stepping into your shed understand what your markings mean. I had a client who was colour blind, so their marking system did not revolve around colours as I am used to, but instead certain types of markings in certain spots on the cow. But what did those markings mean? What was the difference between an antibiotic cow and a 3 titter? I had no idea. Having a photo and a description of the markings written down or displayed on a poster somewhere could avoid a mistake.

Having a trouble-shooting section for some of the little things that can go wrong that you know about could help to save a lot of time and help solve the problem. An example would be instructions for when a cut off switch trips and disables the teat spray system, showing where to go and what to do to reset the system. A picture of things to check before each milking like vacuum pump oil levels could help avoid a breakdown. A cheat sheet of important farm contacts will help if a vet may be required, or a field officer needs to be contacted.

So how do you make up one of these things. Start with using your mobile phone to take photos of each step in the pre and then post milking routines. Add anything else that you think may be of benefit like cow markings. Download these photos to a computer and organise them into a word document where you can write some instructions next to them. Print it off, put it in an A4 display pocket folder. And if you feel you do not have the time or skills to do it consider getting someone to come in and do it for you.

Hopefully, you will never need to use such a resource in an emergency, but if you do it will be invaluable for those stepping in to help.