



Season 3, Episode 1: Sow Farm management with Chris Blevins & Lance Dunbar

Chris Blevins, Cactus Family Farms, and **Lance Dunbar**, Carthage System, discuss the importance of sow farm management and building a strong team of employees.

Recruitment

Labor shortages are an issue in every industry and the swine industry is no exception. In order for a sow farm to be productive, a company must successfully recruit the right people. Word of mouth is still one of the most powerful recruitment tools in the agriculture industry. Employees speaking positively about your operation within the community is a way to draw the attention of prospective employees. It is also important for companies to be involved within the community through youth activities, such as 4H and FFA. This involvement helps demonstrate future career options to youth and identifies key individuals for recruitment down the road. Demonstrating career path opportunities also goes a long way in enticing new hires. Many new hires are coming from non-farming and non-swine backgrounds. Therefore, the pork industry must aim to create a welcoming, warm and exciting environment. This includes drawing interest by explaining the science behind the on-farm technology being utilized. Most importantly, be adaptable and open to changing your recruitment approach.

Retention

Once you have recruited a promising new employee, your work is far from over, retention is a process that should always be top of mind. Have regular conversations with employees to keep them engaged and understand where they aspire to take their career. Some people do not want to be managers, but strive to be the best in their current role, ensure you are supporting those aspirations. Offering professional development opportunities can help employees become more invested, and better understand their role within an organization. Explain why the tasks they perform every day are important to the success of the business. When implementing new procedures, understand not everyone learns in the same manner. Provide multiple teaching and learning tools. This can include hands on instruction, educational videos, and written standard operating procedures. Another critical component to employee retention, is allowing for flexibility of schedules and supporting a healthy work life balance.

Finding success

An engaged, positive, and hands on management team can go a long way in cultivating a successful sow operation. Ensure managers feel supported when reaching out for assistance or direction. Team work and cohesiveness are also important contributing factors. As a manager, everyone on your team feeds off your actions and energy. Therefore, it is critical for managers to maintain a positive can-do attitude. Employees will follow your lead. Identify individuals you believe would make good leaders and develop those individuals with proper training and direction. People are your greatest resource in raising happy pigs and a successful business.

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