

Why learn more?

While working on a farm is hard work, it is not necessary to do specific training, is it? It is a job your father did before you and you grew up learning much from him, so you know what the job involves, right? Wrong. It is essential that you are trained and make sure that you improve your animal husbandry and other skills so that you can better contribute to the farm's overall performance.

As a worker, you must make sure that your knowledge and skills in animal handling, observation and routine care are updated through training every now and then. Also make sure that you always have written procedures to follow and access to the latest record keeping systems for your animal care or handling duties.

You should know that the dairy industry has dramatically changed in recent years. New processing technologies, shifts in consumers' preferences and changes in economic conditions have changed the way dairies and dairy farms operate. It is undeniable that the forces of the economy have pushed increased efficiency in animal production. In their efforts to lower per-unit production costs, small-scale operations are becoming fewer in number and more cost-effective large-scale operations are increasing in size so that there are fewer, but larger, dairies.

You should also know that while the concentration of animals is increasing, there has been a decrease in the number of workers employed. Increasing the number of animals per worker may increase your risk of injury and illness. Injuries and illnesses on the job are costly and damaging to both you, the worker, and your employer.

Recent studies show that the two main causes of workers' injuries (fatal and non-fatal) are machinery and animals. Machine-related accidents include tractor roll-overs, being run over by tractors and being entangled in rotating shafts. Animal-related injuries include kicks, bites and workers being pinned between animals and fixed objects. Other causes of injuries include chemical hazards, confined spaces, manure lagoons, the unsafe use of power tools, and the improper use or lack of personal protective equipment.

Having a training programme will help strengthen your health and safety programme by highlighting hazards you regularly face. This will help you and other employees to reduce the chance of injury. This can help prevent job injuries and illnesses. Regular training will help you and other farm workers to avoid dangers, and keep the lines of communication open between you and your employer, and shows your employer that the workers are serious about promoting safe work practices.

Always make sure that in the safety training, some of the most common risks in the dairy industry are covered. It must include topics as listed below:

- Identifying hazards (risks)
- Controlling hazards
- Machinery safety
- Animal safety
- Planning for emergencies

It is also good for you to always be updated on:

- Basic feeding and nutritional management
- Knowledge and understanding of the farm's herd health plan and emergency animal care plan
- How to handle and move injured animals
- How to diagnose common illnesses and provide care
- How to recognise early signs of distress and disease and when to notify a supervisor
- How to administer animal health products and perform routine animal health procedures
- How to recognise extreme weather stress and how to respond
- Understanding flight-zone and point of balance
- How to use handling and restraining devices
- Handling and preparation of cows in the milking parlour
- Avoiding sudden movement, loud noises or other actions that may frighten cattle
- How to safely handle aggressive or easily excited cattle
- Record-keeping procedures, such as how to record treatments that have been administered

To ensure your training keeps up with the times, speak to your employer or contact Jas Wasserman at the Institute of Dairy Technology at 082 490 2465 or 012 843 5600. The Institute also offers training in milk hygiene, milk harvesting, caring for animals, heat detection and artificial insemination.

Agri Connect has also published a training guide to assist farm workers in learning more about this important industry. Discuss this with your employer or contact Charlene at 012 843 5710 for more information. 