

WORKING CONDITIONS OF DAIRY FARMERS

Taking into account

Agriculture in general, and dairy farming in particular, are very demanding sectors in terms of work. The annual workload, the day-to-day activities and the physical aspect of the work all need to be considered. The size of the dairy cattle is increasing steadily all around Europe, activities are diversifying, administrative tasks become more numerous and complex. However, workforce resources are not increasing as fast, or are even decreasing in several countries.

As a result, dairy farmers are confronted with several challenges regarding their work organisation. On family farms, there is often less assistance from volunteers, and wives/husbands work more often outside the farm. At the same time, farmers aspire to have more

free time, and have a better work-life balance, to be in harmony with their family and the society. New technologies are developed to answer at least part of these challenges, but these also have limitations, like associated costs, not to mention the fact that the adoption of such new technologies often requires changes in a farmer's mindset and habits.

To attract new candidates and, more importantly, make sure that they want to remain active for several years or even decades in dairy farming, it is essential to describe and build models of sustainable dairy farms with a promising future, from an environmental, economic and social point of view.

Three main frames are work-related: the organisational, economic and identity frame

- An **organisation** structuring activities over a period of time
- A **productivity factor** essential for competitiveness
- An activity that builds the **professional & personal identity**

We usually identify **three main frames** connected to issues of work and/or labour in farming. In the **organisational frame**, work is seen as a system of interactions between the workforce, livestock and crop management, equipment and buildings, and available financial resources. This system needs to be managed and organised. In the **economic frame**, labour is con-

sidered as a **production factor to optimize**. Finally, in the **identity frame**, the farmer receives a central position, and work is considered as **an activity that builds the professional and personal identity of farmers**.

These 3 ways of looking at 'work', makes it clear that **multidisciplinarity**, where issues like economics, ergonomics, sociology or livestock farming systems engineering are all considered, is necessary to approach the labour-related challenges that farmers are facing.

FARMER CASE

Gaec Noury developed an 'Employer Alliance' with other farmers to reduce their workload

Gaec Noury has created, with four farms in their neighbourhood, a group of employers, in order to reduce the costs associated with hired employees. Individually, working with hired employees, even for part-time, would be almost impossible. However, by sharing the time and skills of their two employees with other farms, this is feasible, and contributes to the overall sustainability of all farms in the alliance.

It does require careful organisation and planning, and a pro-active attitude, but professionally, they can combine their management strengths and the larger, easily and quickly available, workforce, increases flexibility. From a personal point of view, they have the pride of reinforcing the employment on their territory and strengthening the relationship with their neighbourhood and community.



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How to discuss labour issues with dairy farmer?

To focus on your working conditions, you need to identify and deal with your professional and personal goals, and find a sustainable balance for your farm. Based on this, you can identify and test possible options/solutions. In this way, you will build an organisation in line with your goals and expectations, often a source of compromise but essential for finding a sustainable balance.

There exist several ways to assist farmers to find solutions (multidisciplinary approaches)

- 1st level: Get farmers started to think about the issue = **raise awareness with quiz, short surveys, meetings...**
- 2nd level: Analyse the system with the farmers, compare to benchmarks = **individual/collective diagnostics**
- 3rd level: Study solutions connected to their situation, use some benchmarks = **Project study / Case study**
- 4th level: Act: trial and implement solutions = **Action Plan**

Solutions can be organized in three main categories (some examples are listed below):

- Simplify your practices (flexibility)
- Delegate / Recompose the workforce
- Invest in equipment, in building

Solutions are in most cases compromises and are selected in function of farm objectives, skills required, level of flexibility and reversibility, cost / time ratio...

From labour issues discussed with farmers to socially sustainable livestock farms in your region:

If you want to build a socially sustainable system, you need to evaluate the possible solutions for your farm and investigate the impact on six dimensions:



Simplify your practices	Delegate or Change workforce composition	Equipment or building investment
13 milking per week (only 1 on Sunday)	Shared employee	Milking parlour / Milking Robot
1 milking per day (part or all the year)	Replacement association (employees)	Automatic Feed Station
Block calving, closing milking parlour	Mutual aid / job exchange bank	Total Mix ration wagon feeder
Forage purchase	Heifers reared away	Building organisation
Simplify grazing / stop maize silage	Farms merging	High water-pressure cleaning systems
Reduce the daily feed ration delivery (cows / heifers / calves)	Delegate seasonal activities (crops, administrative tasks...)	Precision livestock farming: sensors, automata, data analysis...
Milk for calves: Yoghurt milk, 6 deliveries per week.	Equipment Co-operative with driver, self-propelled mixer wagons with driver	Computer and hardware
Simplified Cultivation Techniques

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More information (e.g. quiz, tools, surveys, testimonials, solution collections... in French):
www.agro-transfert-rt.org/projets
www.idele.fr/reseaux-et-partenariats
bit.ly/2Q3oBmp

