

FINDING EMPLOYMENT ON A DAIRY FARM

Your guide to a Kiwi way of life



Profitability. Sustainability. Competitiveness.

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This guide has been put together to help people like you who are thinking about a career in dairy, but aren't sure what's involved or where to start.



SO WHAT IS DAIRY FARMING ALL ABOUT?

Is it a job, a career or a way of life? Well, really it's a combination of all three.

As a job it can be pretty demanding. In fact, it is many jobs all rolled into one. Making hay and silage, laying drains, building and mending fences, sowing grass and feed crops, fixing mechanical equipment, safely and skilfully handling powerful machines, welding and engineering, helping cows give birth, managing staff and contractors, making investment decisions, business planning, soil testing – oh, and milking cows.

As a career it can be pretty rewarding. To be a good dairy farmer takes a lot of nous. You need to know about animal physiology, plant nutrition, soil fertility, business management, people management and information systems. You've got to be part scientist, part vet, a bit of an accountant and a very good manager. The more you know and the better you are at these things, the more successful your farming career will be.

As a lifestyle it is what most people who have become dairy farmers rate

most highly. They can spend time with their families, be their own boss, enjoy the outdoors, get involved in the local schools and sports clubs, meet other farmers and suppliers and have endless variety in their lives without the hassles of city life. As a way of life it can be second to none for those who like the peace and tranquillity of life in the country, who love animals, who like to work outside. Your family life, social life and work life are intermingled.

As a dairy farmer you will know that you are doing something honest and worthwhile – for yourself, for your family, for your community, for the country and for the people around the world who will benefit from the most important thing you produce – milk.

Dairy farming is building the future for us all. **It is a Kiwi way of life.**

LIFE ON A FARM

A typical dairy season starts around July/September with spring calving.

This is a busy and exciting time of the year. Days start early when farmers rise to check the calving paddocks and get the morning milking underway. There's time to go home for breakfast and see the children off to school before feeding calves and then checking cows that are yet to give birth. Looking after the welfare of the farm's livestock is vital at this time of year. Working outdoors, and with animals, is part of dairying that many farmers enjoy the most.

From October to December is peak milk production on the farm.

Most farms milk twice a day at around 5am and 3pm. The timing of milking will vary from farm to farm. Keeping the milking equipment up to scratch and maintaining a hygienic farm dairy is critical. After all, it is a food factory and its milk may end up in some far flung corner of the world. This is also the time of year for mating cows to calve next spring. As you gain experience in herd management and milk production you will need to understand the genetic options available to achieve the health, reproductive and milk component characteristics you want your herd to have in the future. Processing surplus grass into silage or hay is done now and special forage crops such as maize or turnips are planted for harvesting later in the season.

From April to May the herd gradually finishes milking for the season.

Milking stops until the cows calve again to begin the new season in July/August. This time is often used to tackle major projects on the farm such as fencing, drainage, water reticulation, shed maintenance and tree planting. It is also the time of year for planning ahead for next season. Almost all farms have budgets for feed production, milk production and financial performance.



For more information visit the Life on
Farm pages in the Go Dairy website:
www.GoDairy.co.nz

BUILDING YOUR FUTURE

Dairy farming is not for everyone, but for the right person it is a great job with plenty of opportunities, and on-farm experience is not necessary to get started. With the right attitude you can become a herd manager within a few years, a farm manager in five or six years or even run your own business as a sharemilker in the same sort of timeframe.

Employment options

There are a variety of salaried/wage positions available in the dairy industry.



Farm Assistant

A Farm Assistant is responsible for assisting in day-to-day operations. This “hands on” entry-level job is the first step in a dairy farming career. You will gain practical, hands-on experience in all aspects of day-to-day farming. On larger farms you will work as part of a team, while on smaller farms you will often work directly alongside the farm owner. In both cases you will be under direct supervision while you develop your skills and gain experience and responsibility.

No previous farming experience is required. Employers are looking for ideal personal qualities: commitment to learning, can-do attitude, team player and honesty.



Herd Manager

This is an entry-level managerial role where the individual takes some responsibility for the day-to-day operation of part of the farm or one herd on the farm. As a Herd Manager you will be responsible for tasks such as feed allocation, milking, and health of a herd. On larger farms this role may also extend to supervising allocated staff. This is not an autonomous role. You are still actively learning about duties and areas of responsibility on the farm. You will be working in direct consultation with a farm owner or manager.

A Herd Manager will ideally have at least two years' experience working on farm as a farm assistant or in a similar role.



Production Manager

A Production Manager manages the cows and grass aspects and may supervise staff appointed by the owner. They are responsible for the dairy production system – managing the cows, grass and supplement to achieve the owner's targets and works with the support of the farm owner or their advisor, focusing on productivity for the farm and responsible for supervising staff appointed by the farm owner.

A Production Manager will ideally have three to five years' experience working as a Herd Manager, Assistant Manager or 2IC.



Assistant Manager or 2IC

The Assistant Manager takes responsibility for some day-to-day operations; this may be feed allocation and maintaining the health of part of the herd. On larger farms they may also supervise staff.

An Assistant Manager will ideally have at least two years' experience working on farm as a farm assistant or in a similar role.



Farm Manager

The Farm Manager works with the farm owner's policy guidelines and business plans including managing finance, cows, grass, recruitment and supervision of staff. A Farm Manager is responsible for the financial and physical performance of the farm and as such will be highly skilled in all aspects of the farm business. On larger farms this role will also include responsibility for recruiting and managing staff.

A Farm Manager will ideally have three to five years' experience working directly on-farm, having gained an overview of all the required elements needed for farm management. They will also have some experience of managing staff.



Operations Manager

An Operations Manager works with the farm owner to develop strategy. They may supervise multiple farm managers and/or sharemilkers to ensure that the owner's strategy is implemented, acting as a coach and support. They typically supervise the operations of a number of farming units within a larger farm business. These farms may be managed by farm managers and/or sharemilkers, but it is the responsibility of the Operations Manager to ensure that the owner's strategy is implemented.

Operations Managers will ideally have three to five years' experience working as farm manager, having gained expertise in all the required elements needed for productive farm management. They will also have considerable experience of managing staff.

Business ownership

If one day you would like the challenge and possible financial rewards of owning your own business here is how dairy farming can help you.



Variable Order Sharemilker

A Variable Order (VO) Sharemilker takes responsibility for the production system. They also maintain farm infrastructure and machinery and may employ labour where required. Sharemilkers are self-employed contractors who receive a percentage of the milk income, and pay a percentage of costs, based on the amount of stock and machinery they contribute to the agreement. Income depends on both payout and production.

Sharemilkers will ideally have three to five years' experience working directly on-farm, having gained an overview of all the required elements needed for farm management. They will also have some experience of managing staff.



Contract Milker

A Contract Milker takes responsibility for the production system and maintains farm infrastructure and machinery.

They may employ labour where required and are responsible for the financial management of their own business. Contract Milker is a self-employed role but is paid on a specific dollar value per kilogram of milksolids (e.g. \$1/kgMS), therefore removing volatility in their business related to fluctuating payout. They are responsible for defined areas of expenditure and will supply agreed resources e.g. motorbike, machinery or stock.

Contract Milkers will ideally have three to five years' experience working directly on-farm, having gained an overview of all the required elements needed for farm management. They will also have some experience of managing staff.



50/50 Sharemilker

50/50 Sharemilkers are self-employed contractors who receive a percentage of the milk income, and pay a percentage of costs, based on the amount of stock and machinery they contribute to the agreement. Income depends on both payout and production. Sharemilkers are responsible for defined areas of expenditure and will supply agreed resources e.g. motorbike, machinery or stock. The level of responsibility for a sharemilker is less strategic than a farm owner. It requires the knowledge and understanding of farming at the same level as a farm manager, with the added responsibility for financial management of their own business.

A Sharemilker will ideally have 3-5 years' experience working directly on-farm, having gained an overview of all the required elements needed for farm management. They will also have some experience of managing staff.



Equity Partner

An Equity Partner is a partner in a farm business with multiple people. They contribute, with the other partners, to strategic management for the farm business. An equity partner has a significant financial investment in the business and therefore is ultimately responsible for the performance of the farm business. Equity partners may or may not be involved in farming operations. This role is similar to role of farm owner but is carried out in consultation with other partners.

An equity partner will ideally come to the role with 3-5 years' of farm management experience, and therefore have gained an overall understanding of all elements of management on-farm. Of course if they employ a competent manager experience requirements are greatly reduced.

For more information on the roles and duties involved in dairy farming visit the Dairy careers page on the Go Dairy website:

www.GoDairy.co.nz

IS DAIRY FARMING RIGHT FOR YOU?

Time for a reality check

Get a clear picture of the realities of dairy farming and make sure it is what you really want to do before you start looking for a job.

REALITY 1

The work:

It is important not to rush into this career until you understand what it entails. Here is a selection of some of the issues you should have discussed and understood before looking for a job.

- Farming is about being outdoors with animals and machinery and contending with wind, rain and sunshine
- Farming may be about animals but the ability to work with people is vital to those who want to optimise the potential of this career
- Farming is unique in that employees usually live on-farm and their employer is often their landlord
- Early morning starts are a reality but there are a variety of different rosters that can result in large variations in time off and hours worked

- Work can be physically demanding so you need to have a realistic level of fitness and health
- The farm's location will have an impact on what services and family support systems are available in the locality
- You must be able to look after yourself when working on-farm, ensuring you are eating well and get plenty of sleep
- You need to work for the 'right' people and learn from the best if you wish to develop the right skills and progress
- The financial rewards achieved depend on a variety of factors including your experience, abilities and level of responsibility.

REALITY 2**Partner and family**

A dairy farming career will also impact on your family. Without their support it is very difficult to take on any new job. It will almost certainly mean moving to a new location and different home. If you have children they may need to settle into a new school and get used to the different lifestyle that farming offers. Make sure your family is fully informed and involved in the decision-making process.

Things to consider:

- Location of the job, so that it is close to schools etc
- The impact moving to a more remote area might have on your family's social life.

If your wife or partner works, consider the impact this will have on their career and lifestyle.

REALITY 3**Understanding the career paths**

There is no fixed pathway for progression in the dairy industry. Individuals choose what they wish to achieve and how they get there. If you have no previous experience you will probably start as a Farm Assistant, which is an ideal role to learn about the industry and the jobs that need to be done. A good, positive attitude can see you progress very quickly once you have mastered the basics.

For many dairy industry employees, the ultimate goal is farm ownership. But in today's dairy industry this need not be an exclusive goal. There are many opportunities to progress through the ranks, however you must fully understand the level of commitment that this demands. Regardless of what drives you it is vital you develop and understand your own goals and then plan and act to meet them.



NOW TEST YOURSELF

Find out if dairy farming is for you. Take the 'Is farming right for you?' test.

IF YOU HAVE A LOT OF TICKS ON THE 'PREFERABLY' AND 'ABSOLUTELY' COLUMNS THEN WORKING ON A DAIRY FARM MIGHT BE JUST WHAT YOU ARE LOOKING FOR.

Is farming for you?

| Question | Preferably | Absolutely | Not Really |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| I want to work outdoors | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I want to work with animals | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I want to work with other people | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I want a job that is active and on-the-go | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I want to work with machinery | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I want a new challenge | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I want to learn new skills | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I want a job that has prospects, with opportunities to be promoted | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I want to be my own boss, one day | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I want to be rewarded for the hard work and effort I put into my job each day | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I want to spend more time with family, improve the balance between work & home | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I want a job that's practical, hands-on | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I want to work in an environment that is innovative and taking on new technologies | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I want to feel like I'm part of a real community spirit | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

FINDING A JOB

Decision made?

If dairy farming is for you the rest of the guide focuses on the seven essential steps you will need to make to successfully navigate your way through the process of finding the right job for you.

Remember: It will be better for you to choose the right job rather than the first job.

STEP 1

Getting started

There are opportunities on dairy farms throughout the country. The type of position you apply for will depend on your knowledge and skill levels and the experience you can bring to the job. Previous experience does not need to be in dairy farming. It could be anything from mechanical skills to management, engineering to electronics. If you are motivated, positive and willing to learn you will quickly grasp the basics.

Your starting point in dairy farming will depend on your knowledge of dairying, skill level and amount of equity.

Find out as much as you can. The following steps can be used as a guide.

There is considerable help and support available in the industry, so don't be afraid to ask. Check out www.GoDairy.co.nz as a first step.

The New Zealand dairy season begins on 1 June each year so most new jobs start on this date. Farm employment vacancies are advertised in the lead up to the start of the season from December to May.

Finding a job can be as simple as responding to an advertisement in the newspaper, through on-line classifieds under Farm Vacancies or on www.GoDairy.co.nz.

Talk to friends and other people who know the dairy industry. Gather as much information as possible about dairy farming and what your expectations should be. Ask them about the type of work they do, their hours and their rewards.

If you can, it's also a good idea to spend a day or a week on a farm to get to know whether being a dairy farmer is really for you.

STEP 2**Presentation**

Once you understand what a career in the dairy industry might entail and before you start applying for jobs, you need to take some time and plan how you want to present yourself to future employers.

Curriculum Vitae (CV)

Reading your curriculum vitae (or CV) is probably the first opportunity a potential new employer will have to find out who you are and what your background is. You may have an old CV lying around at home. It is important to update this and make it relevant to each job you are applying for. Using a CV template can be the easiest way to create a good one. There are examples of templates available on www.kiwicareers.govt.nz or www.seek.co.nz or you can develop your own as part of the Go Dairy placement service: www.GoDairy.co.nz

Cover letter

A cover letter should always be sent to an employer attached to the front of your CV. The aim of the cover letter is to raise the potential employer's interest in you enough for him/her to thoroughly go through your CV and hopefully invite you for an interview. A poor cover letter can ruin a great CV – but a good letter can get you the interview you want. There are examples of cover letters on www.kiwicareers.govt.nz or www.seek.co.nz.

STEP 3**Develop your job profile**

The next step is to work out what you really want or need in a job.

Use the following prompts to clarify your expectations. Build a clear picture of the job you seek, but try and keep it simple. Add any other factors you consider important.

Remember: Not every job will meet all your expectations but knowing what you need and want is the first step to finding it.

- Can the employer supply you with a clear written position description that accurately reflects the job as you understand it?
- Are you confident the employer has a reputation for looking after their staff and being fair?
- Is there a chance to learn new and relevant skills?

- Is the job in a location that meets the needs of you and your family?
- Will you be living in a suitable standard of accommodation?
- Will you have adequate time off?
- Are the working hours realistic?
- Is a fair remuneration package included?
- Will you be in a friendly working environment?



STEP 4

Start looking

Now that you have your CV and job profile written, it's time to start looking for vacant positions.

Placing a work wanted ad is a straight-forward process:

- 1** Log on to www.GoDairy.co.nz and click on the classifieds bar on the top of page menu
- 2** Click on the 'create a work wanted ad' tab
- 3** Follow instructions to complete your advertisement
- 4** When filling in the information requested make sure you are honest about your experience and sell yourself as a motivated person willing to learn
- 5** Finally check that your work wanted ad is correctly displayed by clicking on the 'View ad' button.

You can also:

- Check daily, local and industry-related newspapers for advertised positions (e.g. The New Zealand Farmers Weekly)
- Place a 'work wanted' advertisement in your local press
- Check or register with recruitment agencies
- Use the internet, check recruitment websites such as www.seek.co.nz, the jobs pages on www.trademe.co.nz

See what job opportunities are available on-farm right now.

You can also post your own situations vacant or work wanted ads. Find our on-line recruitment noticeboard at

www.GoDairy.co.nz.







STEP 5

Deciding which interviews to attend

Soon after you have applied for a job or listed your own situations wanted or classifieds ad, you should start receiving some correspondence from employers. Some responses will be positive and employers might offer you an interview while others will inform you that you are not the right person for the job. It is important that you prepare yourself for both responses.

Once you have been invited to attend an interview, it is important to gather some more information about the job before you decide to accept that invitation. You should know the:

- Location of the farm
- Size of the farm (how many cows will be milked)
- Nature of the job

- The type and standard of accommodation (e.g. three-bedroom cottage)

- Day, time and place for the interview

Use this information and your job profile from step 3 to ensure that this job fits with your wants and needs. If it does, then accept the interview and move on to step 6. If not, then you need to politely decline the opportunity of an interview.

STEP 6**Attending interviews**

Use the interview to present yourself, your strengths and qualities to the employer. It is also the opportunity for you to find out more about the position and the employer. Here are some tips of what to remember before and during an interview.

Before you leave home:

- Make sure you have clear directions of where to go and what time you need to be there
- Project the right image via your clothing and personal presentation
- Have a checklist of what you want to cover during the interview to enable you to check this position against your job profile
- Include your partner as much as you can, to check if the job also fits with his/her wants and needs

- Be prepared to go on a farm walk, so ensure you have suitable footwear!

At the interview:

- Arrive at the appointed time
- Make a good first impression
- Ask quality questions
- Give honest and complete answers
- Find out about the farm's employment history
- Ask to speak with existing or previous employees
- Ask to see the position description
- Ensure there will be an appropriate employment agreement for the role
- Do everything listed on your checklist
- Look and see how tidy the farm is
- Do not leave until you are clear about what the role entails
- Assess how well you would communicate with the potential employer

- **Do not** accept a position if offered either verbally or written, before seeking advice.

Note: A job description or position description should always be available at interview. However, it is not always possible to sign an employment agreement at an interview. Our recommendation is that before it is signed you **MUST** get it checked by an independent person.



STEP 7**Accepting or declining a job**

No-one can make this important decision for you. This is something you must take responsibility for. We suggest you use the Decision Check List below to help you decide if this is the right job for you.

Decision Check List

- ☐ Do you have enough information to compare this job to your job profile?
- ☐ Does this position match your job profile?
- ☐ Have any variations against the profile been considered and are they understood?
- ☐ Are these variations against your job profile acceptable to you?
- ☐ Is there an employment agreement and position description that clearly explains the position as you understand it?

- ☐ Has a credible independent party viewed the agreement and agreed with the question above?
- ☐ Have you spoken with previous or current employees who give you confidence in the employer's commitment to his/her people?
- ☐ Does this job genuinely meet your needs?

If you tick yes to all these questions, this job fits with your wants and needs. If you have decided to accept the offer, inform the employer in a timely manner.

Declining a Job

Not all positions applied for will be right for you. It is important you realise that this frequently happens and you should not get discouraged. Be clear about how you will handle declining a position and, if you decide not to accept the offer, let the employer know in a timely fashion. Not doing this promptly could have long-term effects on your reputation. It is a relatively small Industry and it is amazing 'who knows who'.

Dealing with being turned down

Most people have to deal with this from time to time. It is important to deal with these emotions and not to get disheartened. It is better to look at each job application as a learning process. Just move on and look for the next opportunity. When one door closes, another one opens – it is often a case of being in the right place at the right time.

Once you have got your first job on a dairy farm you are on your way. From then on it is up to you to prove your worth to the employer and to plan your own career. Your performance should be reviewed by your employer on a regular basis and you will get to know your strengths and weaknesses.

As you progress you will get to know more clearly what opportunities are available for you to progress in the way you want to.



PROGRESSING YOUR CAREER

The recent trend to larger farms and larger herds means there are now more options for people who want to become dairy farmers. Increasingly farmers recognise the need to have skilled people who want to learn the business. As a result the pay and conditions are very competitive.

Dairy farming is a highly skilled business. Many of the skills are learned on the job with the help of your employer. Other learning opportunities are available through DairyNZ discussion groups, farm consultants and company representatives. National certificates, diplomas and other tertiary qualifications will be a valuable asset for anyone pursuing a career in the industry.

The Agriculture ITO provides the opportunity to learn while you earn and Massey and Lincoln Universities provide both diploma and degree level qualifications.

For more information visit:

Agriculture ITO -
www.agricultureito.org.nz

Lincoln University -
www.massey.ac.nz

Massey University -
www.lincoln.ac.nz

As you increase your knowledge and skills you will gain increasing responsibility. In some cases this will require you to shift farms although many large operations now allow career progression within the same business.

Progression through the levels can be relatively quick for those who are prepared to demonstrate their commitment and ability to learn.

Who knows what the future will hold once you are on your way. You might even set your goals on farm ownership. With some experience in the industry you will get a clearer understanding of the opportunities it offers and plan your career accordingly.



Profitability. Sustainability. Competitiveness.

DairyNZ is the industry good organisation representing New Zealand's dairy farmers. Our work includes research and development to create practical on-farm tools, leading on-farm adoption of best practice farming, promoting careers in dairying and advocating for farmers with central and regional government.

We support dairy farmers as they progress through their career in a variety of ways:

- Our career pathway resource will help you to set goals and plan your career within the dairy industry.
- Our wide range of tools and resources will be there to support you at every stage of your dairy career, whilst you develop your skills as a farmer.
- We financially and actively support AgITO which is the largest provider of agricultural technical training in the country.
- DairyNZ discussion groups offer a great opportunity to meet like-minded farmers and learn more about farming practices in your region.
- Our website is a comprehensive source of information on-line for New Zealand's dairy farmers (www.dairynz.co.nz). It covers hints

and reminders on the basics of farming through to the latest scientific research updates and industry information. Log on and discover just how much is going on in this vibrant industry: www.dairynz.co.nz

This is the start of a great partnership between you and DairyNZ throughout your career.

MILK

IS IT YOUR FUTURE?

As a dairy farmer you will know that you are doing something honest and worthwhile – for yourself, for your family, for your community, for the country and for the people around the world who will benefit from the most important thing you produce – **milk.**

**Dairy farming is
building a future for us
all. And there are plenty
of jobs available.**

Find out what positions are available right now on-farm and place your own work wanted ad. Visit the classifieds pages of the Go Dairy website: www.GoDairy.co.nz