



Department of Animal Sciences and Industry

To make sure you recruit and retain the best possible people for your business, you should do some serious thinking about the first 30 days of your relationship with your employees.

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THE FIRST 30 DAYS WITH A NEW EMPLOYEE

A recent study by Ernst and Young concluded that recruiting and retaining key personnel is the single largest concern of the 400 fastest growing companies in the country. Is your business one of those 400? Probably not. Should you be concerned about finding and keeping quality employees? You bet. To make sure you recruit and retain the best possible people for your business, you should do some serious thinking about the first 30 days of your relationship with your employees.

It begins with the recruitment and selection process. Before filling any position, you must first know that position inside and out. Many employers take this step for granted but it is perhaps the most important. Analyze the job in detail. Include: physical and mental requirements, licenses and permits, skills and abilities, and personality characteristics. Do not take anything for granted. Finish with a detailed and specific job description. This will help you recruit the right kind of applicant and offer that applicant a good preview of what the job will entail.

How do you know if an applicant and a position will be compatible? It is usually a good idea to run the applicants through some hurdles, or a series of evaluation tools. In many instances, one hurdle must be "cleared" before an applicant can advance in the selection process. Some examples of hurdles include: written applications, written tests, oral tests, interviews, practical tests, and reference checks.

A hurdle is only as effective as its delivery so be thorough when developing and administering these tools. Applications, tests, and interviews can help evaluate the quantitative aspects of the job and an applicant's knowledge. Practical tests often reveal information about the applicant that isn't necessarily black and white—like common sense, willingness to ask for help, and hands-on ability. People you know and trust are the only references you can really rely on to give an accurate picture of a potential employee. Even then, people have different perceptions and personalities so references should be considered cautiously.

The last thing about the selection process to remember is that evaluation goes both ways. While the applicant might not get the job if he or she does not perform well, you might not get a great employee if you do not put your best foot forward, too.

Training employees is absolutely vital in preparing them for success. They will need advice on everything from the informal relationships among coworkers to their specific job responsibilities. Frequently, it is helpful to instigate a mentor relationship between new employees and existing employees who know the ropes. Utilizing another employee for this purpose allows the new employee to feel like they have a friend within the business. Likewise, the mentor may feel

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complimented when trusted with a large responsibility like mentoring a new co-worker.

Performance evaluations should be done on a regular basis for everyone within your business. This is especially true for new employees. We all know it is best to stop bad habits before they start. Training new employees and reviewing their progress regularly for at least three months may prevent future problems. When an employee is new, instruction and guidance will most likely be viewed as helpful. After the employee has been on the job for a while, the same instruction or guidance might be viewed as insulting or criticism. Evaluations should start early and continue throughout the employee's career.

The best thing you can do while training is to create the kind of environment where employees are not afraid to ask questions. Those environments help employees and managers work together to help the team become its best. Take the time to listen to both questions and ideas. New employees may bring a new ap-

proach to old problems. Utilize this fresh perspective.

Recruiting, selecting, and training the right people for your business is a significant challenge. There are no easy solutions to these problems because every situation is so unique. The best advice for managers who are looking to build a qualified workforce is to be innovative, persistent, and realistic. Recognizing the strengths of your business and people will help your employees turn their jobs into their careers.

K-State is sponsoring a two-day conference on employee management which will feature the leading experts in the nation on the topic of agricultural employee management. This conference is scheduled for August 10-11, 2000, at the Hyatt Regency, Wichita. For more information, contact Sarah Fogleman (316-431-1530) or check out our website at: www.oznet.ksu.edu/employee

Mark your calendars now and plan to attend this groundbreaking event.
Sarah Fogleman, Extension Agricultural Economist, Southeast Area Extension

BEEF STOCKER 2000

A survey of health, nutrition and management practices and attitudes of the Kansas Stocker Segment

Animal Sciences and Industry and the Food Animal Health and Management Center in the Veterinary College

The Kansas beef industry has a dominant role in the state's economy, contributing over 4 billion dollars in cash receipts in 1998 (1999 Farm Facts for Kansas). A combination of approximately 4 million feeders and stockers imported into the state, in addition to the calves derived from the 1.5 million head resident beef cow population supply the demand necessary to sustain the 5 million head annual capacity of the Kansas feedlot industry.

While many agree that the stocker segment provides a vital role in the overall prominence of the Kansas beef industry, little data is presently available that would

support these assumptions. Thus, a survey instrument was developed with the overlying objective of characterizing and appraising health, nutrition and management practices and attitudes of stocker operators and their operations. With the results and identified priorities in hand, educational programs will be developed and research efforts will be oriented to better support this segment of the Kansas beef industry.

Kansas Stocker Profile

About 80% of the responding stocker operators ranged in age from 36 to 65. Collectively, the stocker producers that

responded to this survey indicated that they either purchased or managed about 825,000 head of stocker cattle in 1999. About two-thirds of the respondents indicated they managed the same number of stockers the previous year, while more than 20% indicated that more stockers were handled in 1999 compared to 1998. More than 75% of the respondents indicated that they own the cattle that they manage. About 18% indicated that they own and custom manage the cattle in their care, while the remaining 5% indicated they primarily manage stocker cattle on a custom basis.

Only 37% of the respondents indicated that their stocker operation was based solely upon one growing environment. The remainder indicated numerous combinations of forage types and feedstuffs that their stocker operation was comprised of. Native pasture was determined to be the primary growing environment for 44% of the survey respondents followed by drylot (23.48%), tame pasture (9.62%) and winter cereal pasture (7.45%). Within each primary growing environment, numerous combinations of tame pasture, native pasture, cereal pasture and drylot were indicated. These results suggest the majority of stocker producers have tremendous flexibility to adapt their operations to ever-changing environmental and market conditions.

There were large regional differences where predominate type of stocker growing environments existed. Tame pasture was the predominate growing system in the northeast and southeast, where brome-grass and fescue are prevalent. Native grass was the predominate forage type in the south central and southeast. With the exception of southeast Kansas, the drylot was a significant method of growing cattle in all regions of Kansas. Cereal pasture was the predominate growing environment in south central and southwest Kansas.

Stocker producers prefer to obtain stocker management and health information from their local veterinarian. Other sources indicated were University publications, State and county level Extension

beef programs, meetings/seminars and other producers/neighbors.

Kansas Stocker Calf Profile

About one-half of the survey respondents purchased stocker calves with involvement from out of state (36%) or local order buyers (14.5%). About 37% of respondents purchased stockers either from the local livestock market (25.5%), a regional market (11.3%), another producer's cowherd (3.7%), or raised from his/her own (.1%) cowherd. Only 2.4% respondents acquired their stockers through video marketing.

Overall, about 60% of the respondents purchased Kansas calves. When broken down by estimated calf numbers rather than percentage of respondents, Kansas calves represented only 25.1% of the survey population. The majority of the respondents' stockers were British or British cross (57%) while 35% reported using continental or continental crosses.

Almost 80% of the cattle purchased/managed were calves. Almost two-thirds of the respondents reported the management of steers. Over 90% purchased or managed stockers that weighed between 301 and 600 pounds. About two-thirds of the stocker population represented in the survey weighed between 426 and 550 pounds.

Survey Instrument Design Process

Fenske Companies, Billings, Montana, formatted the 45-question survey instrument. The questionnaires were distributed in October of 1999 from a mailing list developed from state and area beef specialists and county extension agents. Additional names were obtained from a Pfizer Animal Health stocker operator list. In sum total, 3,749 beef stocker producers received the survey.

By using this method to obtain names of stocker producers, it is possible that some active producers were not identified. Therefore, the producers who were identified may not be completely representative of the stocker industry in Kansas. However, there was no complete list of Kansas stocker operators

The results of this survey will provide considerable insight into a relatively unstudied industry and will aid us in identifying areas for extension efforts and further research.

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
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Kansas Feedlot Performance and Feed Cost Summary*

Gerry Kuhl, Extension Feedlot Specialist, Kansas State University

FEBRUARY 2000 Closeout Information**

| Sex/No. | Final Weight | Avg. Days on Feed | Avg. Daily Gain | Feed/Gain (Dry Basis) | % Death Loss | Avg. Cost of Gain/Cwt. | Projected Cost of March-Placed Cattle |
|----------------|--------------|-------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|--------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Steers:17,943 | 1,241 | 136 (122-158)) | 3.36 (3.08-3.67) | 6.23 (5.83-6.58) | .87 | \$43.76 (41.72-45.85) | \$42.80 (41.00-45.00) |
| Heifers:20,912 | 1,137 | 133 (126-144) | 3.15 (2.88-3.53) | 6.33 (5.87-7.05) | 1.18 | \$45.51 (39.65-48.62) | \$44.40 (43.00-46.00) |

| Current Feed Inventory Costs: | Mid-March Avg. Prices | Range | No. Yards |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|-----------|
| Corn | \$ 2.11/bu | \$ 1.95-2.22 | 6 |
| Ground Alfalfa Hay | \$60.27/ton | \$53.00-70.00 | 6 |

*Appreciation is expressed to these Kansas Feed-yards: Brookover Ranch Feed Yards, Decatur County Feed Yard, Fairleigh Feed Yards, Hy-Plains Feed Yard, Kearny County Feeders, Pawnee Valley Feeders, and Supreme Cattle Feeders.

**Closeout figures are the means of individual feedyard monthly averages and include feed, yardage, processing, medication, death loss and usually sold FOB the feedlot with a 4% pencil shrink. Interest charges normally are not included.

K-State, County Extension Councils, Extension Districts, and U.S. Department of Agriculture Cooperating. All educational programs and materials available without discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, or disability.

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