

Farm Culture

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Art credit: GEN-Korman-Corporate-Culture-Business-Management-System

What is farm or workplace culture?

- It is not what is growing in the break room fridge!
- It is not what makes yogurt or cheese.
- Nor is it even about the incubator and the milk from mastitic quarters.
- And it is not the rules or the employee handbook.
- It is “the tacit social order of an organization” that “shapes the attitudes and behaviors” of the staff. Photo credit: Ecosystem Marketplace



“Shaping attitudes and behaviors”

- It is the attitude with which people work together in the parlor and the way they treat each other.
- It is the actions of taking responsibility for things that need to get done.
- It is the pride in the business taken by employees.
- It is the level of care for animals and equipment.



Culture therefore, is the critical element

There is a saying in business that “culture determines results”. It doesn’t take the place of strategy, but strategy’s effectiveness depends on culture.

Therefore:

culture => SCC and milk quality

culture => cow performance

culture => labor efficiency

culture => employee retention

“At this company, mental health comes first - and results follow”. INC.

Culture's impact

- It is “the understanding that the values expressed, taught and lived out by the leader of the business affect everyone in the business and the amount and quality of the work they do.”
- Culture “is a group phenomenon, . . . most commonly experienced through the unwritten rules”.
- Culture guides employees
- “Cultural norms define what is encouraged, discouraged, accepted or rejected”

If unwritten, how are they learned & followed?

- It is what is communicated a thousand ways by the boss, first, and everyone else associated with the farm, including service people.
- The less they are shared by the boss, the more they are passed from one to another in sometimes harsh ways.




Intentional culture

- Culture is often determined by default and maybe by the strongest personality on the staff.
- But intentional culture is based on core values and begins with communicating those values.
- It is reinforced by what management does and what they ask their staff to do.
- It is communicated by how management relates to staff and service people.
- It should infuse hiring, employee meetings, discipline and termination

Core values:

- These are the values that are most representative of the owner, those that describe him/her to others.
- The core values should not be “aspirational values” but rather what is actual.
- How to assess what your core value are:
 - ❖ Ask key, longtime employees;
 - ❖ Ask others who are close to you and have observed and know you;
 - ❖ Self reflection.



- If the core values identified are not where management wants them to be, the best thing to do is acknowledge that with employees, state what core values you want the business to embrace, and then model those core values. Once you have done that, it is reasonable to expect employees to follow and model those core values as well.
 - Stating core values and the resulting culture based on aspirational values can actually be detrimental to employee commitment and engagement.
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Examples:

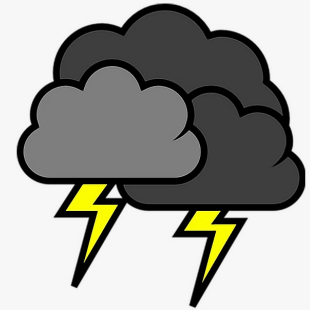
“RB” Dairy:

- Took somebody to apply for a job. The manager took time to talk about what it means to work there.
- On the way home, I asked her what she perceived the values of the farm manager to be. She was able to put her finger on 8 values communicated.

Blue Sky Farms (blueskyfarms.com):

- “We’re looking for individuals who embody the Blue Sky Farms values” . . .

Culture examples - Negative:



- “The government is against us and we cannot win.”
- “This is a lousy business and I wonder why I’m still in it.”
- “I’ve been milking cows since I was old enough to hold a milker, I really think I have this down.”
- “Which employee is going to screw up next?”

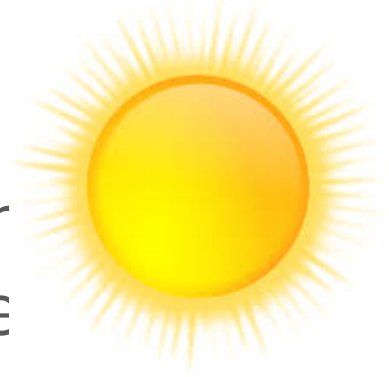
← *What might be the impacts of those attitudes* →

Art credit: ClipArtKey

on farm worker performance?

Culture examples - Positive:

- I am thankful for my employees and are working together to get better.
- Quality is how we do things.
- We're good, but we want to be great.
- We are all still learning; if you have an idea, share it please.
- We are developing a strategy to make this business more successful.




What might the impacts of these be on performance?

The culture needs to be a growth culture

- Growth of the individuals, the opportunities and of the business.
- Management has a responsibility to create a farm culture that recognizes the needs (of employees) and creates opportunities for employees (and family members) to grow in the areas of autonomy, relatedness and competence.”

As you work with farmers

- Clarify their values verbally.
 - Ask what are their expectations of employees/service providers
 - Ask them what impacts their values might have on workers.
 - Challenge them to communicate their values.
 - Base your input and services/product offerings on their values.
 - Help implement their values when you are on the farm.
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Culture summary

- There is a culture on every farm, at every workplace.
- The question is whether it has been intentionally set and whether it is positive and productive.
- Culture can be changed, but farmers may not be aware of how to do it.
- As a service person (government, academia or industry), you can guide/help farmers identify and enunciate their values.

Thank you - I appreciate your attention today and for what you do for Michigan dairy farmers!

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