

Understanding the state of HRM on Irish dairy Farms

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Abstract:

Managing people outside the farm family unit is a relatively new issue for many farmers. In the context of unprecedented dairy expansion the management of employees has become crucially important to dairy farmers in Ireland. This paper explores the Human Resource Management (HRM) practices being implemented by Irish dairy farmers. Farmers were selected at random based on herd size and location. A questionnaire was developed, piloted and issued to each farmer. Data was coded and analysed using IBM SPSS version 24. The study found that farmers with three or more employees (FE 3) take significantly more time off throughout the year. The three most common recruitment practices used were 'word of mouth', online advertising and employee recommendations. Farmers in FE 3 used these practices to recruit employees significantly more than farmers with only one employee (FE 1). Significantly more farmers in FE 3 used automatic debit as a method to pay employees than FE 1 and farmers with two employees (FE 2). More farmers in FE 3 had employment contracts, issued and retained payslips compared with FE 1 and FE 2 ($P < 0.05$). In total, 9.4% of farmers with employees reported that they had an employee details form with significant difference between FE 3 and FE 1. Overall, 14.3% of the farmers had a position/ job description in place for employees. Farmers in FE 1 had the lowest percentage having a position/ job description for employees compared FE 2 and FE 3 ($P < 0.001$). Overall, 26.6% of the farmers recorded employees time worked. A higher percentage of farmers in FE 3 paid for staff training or further education compared with FE 1 and FE 2 ($P < 0.05$). The results of this study show that HRM practices used on farms are predominantly informal practices with improvements required to formalise some of these practices particularly in terms of legal compliance. With a highly competitive labour market causing a high demand for staff across all sectors of the Irish economy, farmers must focus on adopting HRM practices that will make their farm a more attractive place to work, comply with employment law, provide training opportunities and focus on the career development of their employees as part of their future business strategy.