

Training and Skills in the Dairy Farming Sector

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Training and Skills Development Opportunities for Dairy Farmers

Courses, Qualifications and CPD

A Report to the Milk Development Council from Delta Innovation
July 2005

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Definition of Training

Training is any identifiable, directed activity which aims to develop the skills and understanding of a person to meet their business's and their own needs.

Training is distinct from advice which is business or enterprise specific and which need not develop skills and understanding.

Training is distinct from information, the provision and uptake of which does not necessarily itself develop skills and understanding.

The outcome of training may be measured by attendance, may be certified or may more preferably be seen through assessment. Many of the outcomes will be less tangible for the individual but will be related to factors including confidence and ability.

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Areas of competence

Eight key areas were considered vital to the successful future of dairy farm businesses:

- Financial Management
- Statutory Compliance
- Environmental Management
- Business Support
- Farm Health Planning
- People Management
- Personal Development
- Livestock Technical Skills

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Methods of Working

- The definition of training and the competence framework were circulated to a total of 168 companies, organisations and individuals along with a detailed questionnaire which sought to ascertain involvement and extent of training.
- 58% response from the 168 consultancy type organisations. 98 replies from 78 organisations.
- An additional questionnaire was circulated to 42 land-based colleges/universities about their courses relevant to dairy farmers
- 7 educational establishments had in depth interviews (Myerscough, University of Reading, Duchy College, Harper Adams, Gelli Aur, Barony and SAC).
- For the 168 companies, organisations and individuals contacted there were follow-up discussions and face to face meetings (15%).

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Results

- Large numbers of organisations involved to some degree in training, largely financed via VTS or notional costs (<£50/day).
- The educational and "consultancy" sectors work in splendid isolation.
- Delivery is fragmented across the UK.
- Topics currently delivered for training do not reflect the actual needs of dairy farmers in the 21st Century.
- Too much emphasis on livestock skills (eg foot trimming). Very little on business skills or environmental issues.
- Need for a clear framework for training and skills development linking farmers, colleges and consultants.
- By working more closely, gaps in provision can be more readily identified.

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Low Uptake on Training & Skills by Farmers - Why?

- Lack of time away from farm. Key issue. Labour is scarce resource
- Many farmers have had a "bad" experience in the past and/or question the need for CPD, even at director level.
- No formal quality control for those who provide training. World of difference between a good adviser and a good trainer.
- Promotion and marketing of training activities is very poor and therefore does not reach the majority of farmers. Always preaching to the converted. Cascade principal does not work. Role of Levy Board/Assurance Schemes.

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Recommendations

- Training and skills development ought to be a major strategic issue for all Levy Boards.
- A quality "Kite mark" for farmers to recognise excellence is required, PBA - C.Agric.
- There needs to be a Register of Approved Dairy Trainers (linked to BIAC).
- A training framework needs to be developed that ensures all technical, business and personal development requirements are met on a continuing basis (CPD).
- Work needs to be conducted showing a clear link between effective and appropriate training/skills development and farm business performance.

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Recommendations (Contd)

- Training/skills development is fragmented. MDC could play a key facilitating and promotional role (web-based), particularly to foster relationships between educational establishment, consultants and farmers.
- Funding is difficult to access. Each country in the UK has a different approach as do the 9 RDA's in England. This is important as under RDPE, VTS funding is no longer national but operates on a regional basis.
- Most of those consultancy organisations training in the dairy sector in 2004/5 used the UK Dairy Academy to actually source funds and deal with the bureaucracy in return for a management fee. No longer available.

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Recommendations (Contd)

- Colleges/universities have a very good and appropriate selection of courses relevant to dairy farmers present and future but "industry" has complete ignorance of new qualifications (eg Foundation Degrees).
- Successful training should improve the competitiveness of UK dairy farming by increasing the inherent strengths of British dairy farmers but there needs to be a sea change in farmers attitude to training and skills development.

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