

Operational Contingency Planning on the Dairy Farm

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The catch-phrase of the time we live in is “Keep-Safe”. But, what will happen on your farm if you get sick or injured? Who will milk the cows and carry out the basic day to day duties? Being fair and honest with yourself and your family, you should have a contingency plan in place.

If you don't know where to start, try writing down instructions on how the main tasks should be done. These written instructions, in the business world, are called “Standard Operating Procedures” or “SOP's”. Some far sighted farmers and many farmers who have different staff or students working from time to time are already accustomed to how well this works. However, it is important for all dairy farmers to put in place a backup system with a friend or neighbour that might be able to help if the need arises. The best way to ensure the work is carried out properly is to have standard operating procedures (SOPs).

It is important to understand that if your situation changes it will probably happen very quickly and you will not have much time to put plans in place last minute. This coupled with the stress of such a situation will more than likely mean that you will miss out or give poor direction on key tasks. You could also have to give instruction over the phone rather than face to face.

SOP is a document consisting of step by step instructions on how to complete a particular job or procedure on the farm.

A well written SOP will:

- **Provide Direction**
- **Improve Communication**
- **Reduce Training Time**
- **Improve Consistency**
- **Allow somebody help out in the case of an emergency**

The simplest SOP to begin with could be a summary of the key tasks of the day, written in a clear and orderly way. However, there should be a clear SOP for each of the key work areas. Some of these key areas could include

- **Concentrate Feeding of Animal Groups:** If your cows are being fed with a diet feeder, write out your diet on a sheet. If you have a different diet for different groups make sure that each menu is written out individually and identify which shed is getting which mix. As we move into late spring/early summer most of this feeding or even herding will be based out in the field or even on a separate farm land-block.
- **Calf-rearing:** How are calves fed? Are they getting milk powder or whole milk? What volume of feed is each group of calves getting? What are the procedures and timelines towards weaning?

- **Milking:** A more complex (but crucial) area is going to be the milking parlour. Milking machines have become a lot more complex and the control boxes for the various machines are very different. This is particularly the case with newer machines. The various controls on your specific make of milking machine is going to be very different to the controls on your neighbour's machine, even if you and your neighbour both have a similar type parlour he or she may have very different controls to your machine. The location of isolation switches, water heater controls, taps etc. will all be different in each parlour. The washing procedure that you are using, particularly if you have moved to a chlorine free wash, will most likely be different to your neighbour's.

The SOP will make the task for someone who is coming in to help out easily manageable. Write out a step by step guide for the various tasks. This should include items such as:

- Setting up machine for milking
- Setting up machine for washing, and daily wash procedure
- Turning on the milk tank after a wash
- Washing the milk tank after a collection

The SOP could include photos of key items around the parlour, such as control boxes. Having them on the phone might be useful if someone is ringing you for directions – it's easier to explain what buttons to press if you are looking at them on a screen. Some farmers write their notes on a photo and send a photo-message through Whatsapp or a similar media. Also, items in the parlour can be labelled with a laminate sheet, which can help to direct people. Control switches should be clearly marked with a permanent marker and labelled to describe its function (ie control for "Water Heater", "Auger", "Air Compressor" etc.)

Example Milking Routine SOP:

1. Wet down area
2. Monitor white board for any changes and or updates.
3. Take **extra care** regarding painted cows.
4. Wear gloves and **stay clean** throughout milking.
5. Feed the required amount to the herd.
6. Pre spray all cows (allow spray work for 30 seconds).
7. Strip all cows in the am (any red or blue cow stripped **disinfect your hands** afterwards).
8. **Do not** strip orange cow's blank quarters.
9. Wipe quarters of all cows using paper towel (use new paper after wiping blue or red cows)
10. **Dump antibiotic or waste milk.**
11. **Sterilise clusters** that had a red or blue cow milked. Wash liners with water hose and spray teat spray up afterwards.
12. Post-spray all cows.
13. Treat any cows if needed, **spray cow and update the whiteboard.**
14. Clean equipment and yards thoroughly.

Spray Paint	Action Required
RED	Dump milk
GREEN	Milk okay for bulk tank
ORANGE	3 teater cow
BLUE	High SCC – Wash cluster after milking
YELLOW	Once a day milking



Cows marked with an orange spot in one quarter **must not be milked in that quarter.** Double check what quarter by looking at white board.

Cows milk **must** be dumped. **Check white board to see actions for these cows.** Once withdrawal period is over check quality of milk by CMT test, if clear spray cow green.

CMT Blue cows regularly to see if SCC is increasing, if so treat accordingly and **paint cow to red and record on white board.**

KEEP WHITE BOARD UP TO DATE, CLEAR TO READ AND KEEP FRESH PAINT ON AFFECTED COWS.

The modern dairy farmer makes full use of the dairy wall (or office wall, if located next to the milking parlour). White boards are an essential communication resource. Wall charts should be accessible to everyone who works on the farm. They should be clear and easy to understand, making full use of numbering and colour –coding where appropriate. Obviously to aid all of this cows should be numbered clearly (ideally freeze-branded), but so should your fields and paddocks. Laminated farm maps should be fixed to the wall and also copies made available to take away when needed to complete tasks out on the farm.

Changing times call for people to think and act differently. If you haven't already done so, start today, and write up your first SOP. If you already have a series of SOP's for the operation of your farm, revisit them and revise them where necessary. Also take a look around your Dairy or farm office, and ask yourself, if you were a new worker, could you operate the farm from the guidance posted on the wall. Keep safe, but also, keep comfortably prepared!



Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for Milking