A Field Topic

Fieldmen: Planning Their Work

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ABSTRACT

Most milk producers, co-op leaders and plant managers feel their fieldmen are doing a good job. The fieldman's basic job is as the milk plant's personal contact with its member producers. The fieldman's basic reasons for contacting member producers include: milk quality, Grade A and Manufacturing Grade milk requirements, flavor control, dairy farm building plans, milking equipment installation, herd health, sales and financial arrangements for purchase of equipment, member relations and dealing with member's problems and complaints. The fieldman also works for his milk plant in procurement of new members, hauler relations, membership meetings, administration and record keeping, and cooperating with sanitarians. Along with the foregoing, fieldmen must maintain proper personal habits in dress, vocabulary, smoking and driving. There have been too few rewards given these industry ambassadors, who must fill the varied roles of troubleshooter, psychologist, sanitation specialist and salesman. In the interest of energy conservation and driving time, a daily plan of farm calls in a given area should be worked out by the fieldman. Most fieldmen can best work out their own plan of work, taking into consideration location of the farm and urgency of calls to be made.

Speaking from personal experiences as a fieldman, I can tell you a fieldman could manage his time much more efficiently if he were not frequently called upon to do unscheduled jobs, such as an errand above and beyond the normal call of duty to help a member — or possibly even speak at an annual meeting!

I tried to enlist the aid of a ghostwriter for this discussion, but was told, if a fieldman has a difficult or undesirable task to do, he should get it done — not procrastinate in the hope it will go way.

But, back to the unscheduled jobs requested of a fieldman, which throw the routine out of whack. It is more worthwhile to help out a producer in a pinch and keep his goodwill than to keep a rigid daily routine.

Each request for help must be considered, however, to see if you are being moved into the position of an errand boy for the possible benefit of one producer and neglect of others.

Surveys indicate most milk producers, co-op leaders, and plant managers think their fieldmen are doing an excellent job. In my opinion, there have been too few rewards given these dairy industry ambassadors, who must fill varied roles as psychologists, sanitation specialists and salesmen.

But, despite the fact the professional receives far too little public acclaim, is often underpaid, works long hours and is continually on call, he has set an enviable pattern for dedication, integrity, and concern for his clientele. In a study of attitudes toward their jobs, most fieldmen indicated they enjoyed their work and liked working with people.

KNOW THE JOB

Since fieldmen work with dairy farmers, whose livelihood is production of milk, it is only right to mention that milk is probably the most regulated agricultural product in America today. It involves price supports; standards; health, safety and environmental regulations; and the list goes on. In many instances, Government regulates the flow of products, sets minimum prices, and makes the rules under which we operate, involving many departments and agencies.

Basically, the fieldman functions as the milk plant's personal contact with its member-patrons. He is the dairy plant's goodwill ambassador to its members, most of the time welcome, but at times not as welcome as he might like to be. There are many reasons for the fieldman to contact the member, but they can be basically categorized as quality, Grade A requirements, flavor control, farm building plans, milking equipment installations, arrangements for purchase of equipment, member relations, dealing with member's problems and complaints. Member relations can include milk price and this can lead to some quite lengthy discussions. More and more interest is developing regarding component pricing of milk. The fieldman must be aware of how this system would affect the paychecks of the producer members in his working area.

The fieldman must also be active in several other areas, which would include: procurement of new members, hauler relations, membership meetings, administration and record keeping, cooperation with sanitarians — and he must show respect for competitive organizations. He must also maintain proper personal habits and cooperate with fellow employees, fieldmen and others.

Milk quality is by far the main reason there is such a position as dairy plant fieldman. Since this is his main reason for being around, it is very important he be knowledgable in this field.

There are many tools for the fieldman to use in assisting the producer to produce high quality milk. Among these are the numerous tests done by every dairy plant. The fieldman must be familiar with these tests — raw count, pasteurized count, keeping quality (some refer to this as PI plate count), etc. Any of these can be an indication of the care
given milking equipment. Milk quality standards are more rigid today than those of a decade ago, because of longer shelf life of finished products in today's market place.

Care of milking equipment is very important. No other piece of equipment on today's dairy farm will get a careless operator into trouble faster than a faulty or incorrectly operated milking machine. Lack of proper sanitation will increase the bacteria content and poor operation will contribute to poor udder health, resulting in high leukocyte counts and even sporadic, excessively high, bacteria counts.

Many dairymen do not have a complete understanding of the milking machine's operation. You, as a fieldman, need to be familiar with requirements to give effective advice. The fieldman must be in a position to help the dairy producer set up a cleaning program to be followed after each milking, being certain there are no shortcuts in the cleaning procedure.

The rubber parts used in milking — especially inflations — must have special treatment to remain in good condition. Inflation replacement should be based on number of cow milkings.

So the fieldman must be thoroughly familiar with cleaning and sanitizing compounds and their various uses, and be positive there is an adequate supply of hot water for thorough equipment cleaning. An increasing number of dairymen rely entirely on automated C.I.P. milking systems, so beginning and ending water temperatures are becoming more and more important. An adequate amount of hot water for the wash cycle, with tepid water for the prerinse and final rinse, is a necessity.

Fast cooling of milk in a properly operated bulk tank will sometimes hide the sins of poor cleaning and sanitizing of milk equipment. Also, a tank which is too small can cause quality problems, along with a loss of milkfat from churning before the milk is cooled. So he must be aware of these angles.

Other information available to the fieldman — and which he must know how to use — includes screening tests and direct microscopic readings for somatic cells, indicating mastitis problems in the dairy herd. A cryoscope reading indicates the percentage, if any, of added water. Needless to say, this is becoming an increasing problem in many organizations. An inhibitor test will indicate the presence of antibiotic contaminants in the milk.

An "acid degree value" (ADV) test, done routinely on milk pipeline milkers, indicates rancidity levels. Fieldmen must be thoroughly familiar with pipeline milkers, along with milking management, as related and interrelated to rancid flavor development in milk.

The fieldman must be completely familiar with the Grade A milk requirements for the milk shed in which he operates. Generally, these requirements differ very little throughout the country, except for specific interpretations.

The requirements for production of Grade A milk are spelled out in detail in the Grade A Pasteurized Milk Ordinance (PMO), a publication of the FDA and U.S. Public Health Service. The fieldman must be able to translate and interpret these requirements for members so they can and will maintain a Grade A status — a farm score of 90 or better.

The dairy farm which is clean-appearing on the outside will most likely be the same on the "inside," as outside appearances would usually be indicative of the farmer's overall operation. In most instances, we find such a clean-appearing farm will also produce high quality milk.

Another area where the fieldman must be knowledgeable, or prepared to quickly obtain information, is in construction and building plans. What is acceptable? Many questions arise on various types of barns, disposal systems, and milkhouse plans, and occasionally the fieldman must make suggestions for improving proposed construction or remodeling.

The fieldman must know what is required when milking equipment and bulk tanks are being installed. However, he must avoid involving himself with brand names, unless the equipment under consideration is unacceptable. Of course, the exception would be a dairy plant which is involved in selling and installing a certain brand of milking equipment.

Most herd problems are related to some extent to an inadequate and/or malfunctioning milking system. So it is an absolute must that the fieldman understands how a milking machine works and knows the requirements for an adequate system. The requirements of a milking system installed today are much different from those of a system installed some 10 to 20 years ago.

As milking herds become larger, milking systems also become larger and more sophisticated. It then becomes a must — for the dairyman — that the maintenance on this equipment be done on schedule. The idea of preventive maintenance is beginning to take hold, but it is safe to say milking equipment, as a whole, is still the most neglected equipment on many dairy farms. A properly functioning system can be neglected but temporarily appear to perform adequately. However, wear and tear on the herds are progressive, and eventually the time comes when such neglect takes a heavy toll in the dairyman's milk check.

The fieldman must know about herd health, especially in all areas relating to causes and control of mastitis. He must make use of tools and testing devices, as they can tell him a great deal and be an aid in educating the dairyman. The use of a strip cup and CMT or MQT cowside tests are important in detecting problem cows.

Some dairy organizations have made laboratory facilities available for culture of producers' samples to identify specific types of infection. Knowing and working with veterinarians improves relations and further aids understanding of herd health problems. Another “must”
which cuts into the fieldman’s “off” hours, is milking time calls. This is the only way to find the cause of some problems. A milking time call can tell you in short order if the dairyman knows how to milk a cow. This may sound like a bold statement, but many people who are milking cows do a very poor job — especially in properly preparing the cow.

Proper milking must be coordinated with milk let-down process of the cow. It is necessary to be somewhat familiar with the internal structure of the udder and how milk is actually made, to understand the significance.

The problem of antibiotics in the milk supply seems to require more and more of the fieldman’s attention and time. This situation always involves unscheduled extra time, miles, sampling, explaining, testing and usually retesting, a great deal of tact, hopefully, along with the possible loss of milk by the dairyman or plant — or sometimes both.

Processors cannot make cheese and cultured products from antibiotic milk because desirable bacteria will not grow, nor, are antibiotic residues acceptable in any milk, whether for fluid or manufacturing use. The milk from just one cow treated with 100,000 units of penicillin can cause detectable residues in the milk from 1000 untreated cows.

Lack of communication is perhaps the most common cause of antibiotic-contaminated milk. A study reported 40% of accidental adulterations occurred in this manner. It is extremely important to follow label instructions for dosage and withdrawal time, along with proper identification of all treated cows so anyone concerned with the milking operation will know which cows should not be milked in the routine manner.

Most dairy organizations have set up very specific, rigid procedures with regard to milk found to contain antibiotic adulterants. Also, many milk plants offer some compensation for milk which must be discarded on the farm due to such accidental contamination of the supply, but only, and I repeat, but only, if the producer notifies his milk plant or lab so a sample can be tested before the milk is picked up by the hauler and commingled with the load. Many milk plants are not paying producers for milk which is found to contain antibiotic adulterants.

Many milk plants are involved in financing or assist in arranging financing for dairy and related equipment, such as bulk tanks, pipeline milkers, standby power generators, etc., for their members. So the fieldman becomes involved in setting up the necessary paperwork for the purchase of such equipment by the producer.

ASSISTING PRODUCERS

Again, member relations is an all-important segment of a fieldman’s plan of knowledge for keeping producers and haulers posted on association affairs. It is important to work closely with haulers, since most haulers have the closest and most frequent contact with members. A conscientious hauler is invaluable to the fieldman in performing effective field work with dairymen. Haulers should be consulted often, and fieldmen must be aware of the hauler’s needs and problems. The purpose and function of the organization the fieldman represents should always be kept before the membership.

Fieldmen must be prepared to discuss and assist in solving producers’ problems and complaints. These can include malfunctioning equipment, possible errors on milk weights and checks, insect and pest control, and information on approved fly sprays and spray materials for various areas of the dairy operation.

Uppermost on the list of producers’ complaints would be milkfat test variations. There are many, many reasons for these variations, but it is important to know the relationship is a complicated process.

Breed and inheritance play major roles in the milkfat production of a dairy animal. The types of feed, preparation of feed, forage quality, and more important, the ratio of forage to grain, may have individual and combined effects which may cause milkfat tests to be below what are considered the normal inherited levels.

Cooperation with sanitarians needs the fieldman’s attention. Fieldmen must work with sanitarians to help members meet regulatory requirements and maintain a satisfactory rating, and, in turn, strive to make a uniform interpretation of the PMO.

Show respect for competitive organizations — they will always be around. It is well to keep on speaking terms and learn to live with such people. One should not make the practice of “running down” the “other guy.”

Along with all the previously mentioned items of performance which affect how the fieldman plans his work, he must maintain proper personal habits. His vocabulary must be kept clean, and smoking habits must always be respectful of others. A proper image goes a long way in establishing a good working relationship with the producers. Important in creating this proper image are personality, individual mannerisms and character.

A smile is contagious. Sometimes the success of your call at the farm starts when you get out of the car. In the case of being new in an area, possibly a new producer, or a prospect, make certain you have the dairyman’s name correct. A man’s name is the dearest and sweetest sound to him. In talking to a dairyman, don’t say, “I was just driving by.” It tends to make the dairyman or prospect feel unimportant. Don’t gossip. In speaking, stand close to the individual you are talking to, but not rubbing noses or bellies. Proper individual mannerisms are important. Fingers can be used to point out items of importance, but never at an individual.

Two practical items often overlooked in public relations are “Garb and Gab.” Dress according to the occasion; obviously social calls and
service calls require different "duds." Clothing should be conservative enough for the roles of troubleshooter, communications specialist, and company ambassador; yet, should show enough style so you will not appear "behind the times."

The "gift of gab," we are frequently told, is the key to success in our professions. Yet rarely are we good listeners. We seem to live in a world where it is mistakenly believed a true leader is one who babbles continually and is able to dominate every situation. It is important to be humble and sociable — not overbearing. It is equally important to tell the truth, and if you don't know, conscientiously say so.

The discerning fieldman recognizes the problems, attitudes and feelings of the producers by being a good listener. He recognizes there can be two sides to every problem, and looks at both sides.

He is able to "read between the lines" and sense any innate hostilities or suppressed criticisms. With this in mind, he can respond with tactful speech that is "seasoned." His suggestions for solving problems will then be more palatable.

Psychologists tell us there is great therapeutic value in airing problems with one who is sympathetic and understanding. Accordingly, it seems producers would be more inclined to follow the suggestions of those who have a sympathetic ear.

The fieldman's car should be kept in a clean and orderly appearance. I've heard comments about the fieldman who tells the dairyman how to get things shaped up around the farm, and then drives off in a dirty car in which everything, including his supplies and records, is a mess. Good driving habits for safety and to avoid criticism and accidents are also essential.

The fieldman is expected to and should participate in dairy-related organizations, such as the local fieldmen's association and sanitarians' association, and he can now participate in the IAMFES. Such organizations give dairy fieldmen an opportunity to improve their image, professional stature and technical knowledge of subjects related to their work. He should subscribe to and read appropriate periodicals, such as Hoard's Dairyman, and other farm magazines to keep up-to-date on present and new technology related to dairy farming and milk production. All of this makes him better qualified for his job. As a general rule, education is a commodity we all seem to try to get the most out of for the least input.

PLANNING WORK

In all of the previous comments, nothing has been mentioned about how to actually plan day-to-day work. The active, energetic, hardworking fieldman is in the best position to determine his own monthly, weekly and daily work plan.

Different organizations have different job outlines — and probably give certain goals or procedures. The locale in which he works and type of producers he serves also have a bearing on how the fieldman schedules his work.

Today dairy farmers account for only about 0.1% of America's population. The distance between active dairy producers becomes longer. In the interest of energy conservation and making the most of his time, a daily plan of farm calls in a given area should be outlined so a minimum amount of time and miles will be expended in driving. The conscientious fieldman will not waste his time or the time of his dairy farm constituents.

IN SUMMARY

In summary I would like to say, "public relations" holds all of this together. Public relations is selling yourself by being interested, optimistic and enthusiastic about the job at hand — being informed on all aspects of milk, the industry, and your organization.

We are all more alike than we are different. The little difference is attitude. The big difference is whether it is positive or negative. Successful people make a habit of doing things unsuccessful people do not do. Your public relations approach is essential in helping the producer understand what his association stands for, and your assistance is needed to help him operate more effectively, and that association policies are made in the interest of the members, and benefits to the association are reflected back to the producer-member. Remember, the fieldman is the organization's contact with its producer-members.

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