

TECHNOLOGY TOOLS

By Tom Wall

Cameras: Your Most Valuable Tool

Whenever dairy owners ask about surveillance cameras, I usually get the feeling they're struggling to justify this business decision because of a "personal dilemma" regarding trust. In other words, they think cameras would be helpful, but they don't want to send the message "We don't trust you."

Let's be honest, it's not that you don't trust people. The reality is some people can't be trusted. That's why there's a lock on your tool chest, a password on your email account, and a truck scale at the end of your driveway. A surveillance camera is just another tool that helps managers to "trust, but verify." Cameras can also be used to support and reward positive performance.

When considering cameras at your dairy:

You get what you pay for.

Chances are you've checked out camera systems that are priced from a few hundred dollars to a few thousand. So what do you really need in a camera system?

- **Clear picture:** If the cameras and/or monitors don't provide a clear image, the surveillance system is basically useless. No, hi-def equipment isn't needed, but there should be enough clarity to at least identify who and what you're observing.
- **DVR Memory:** Without the ability to record and save footage for more than a few hours/days, you'll be stuck watching camera footage in real-time to see what's going on. The best part of a DVR system is that you can fast forward through archived footage at your convenience.
- **Internet Access:** If you already have high speed internet at the dairy, I recommend you install a system you can watch from anywhere. The next time you can't sleep, fire up your laptop or iPad and see what's going on at the dairy.

They're only valuable when you use them.

Regardless of how much you decide to spend on a camera system, they're all a waste of money if you don't watch the footage on a regular basis.

The good news is that everyone will respect the cameras when you first install them. But once employees realize you're not watching, they'll eventually revert back to how they worked when you didn't have cameras. So what's the solution?

Cameras can help get better performance when you're not there and are generally well-received by the best employees.



Schedule an hour every week to watch random footage (in fast forward) from a few shifts. When you see something that should be addressed, write down the date/time code of the clip and a description of what was done well or poorly. Then, bring each shift

into your office to show them the footage and discuss what you saw. And that leads us to the final, most important, detail...

Use them effectively.

How can surveillance cameras help you be a more effective manager and get better results with your team?

- **Reprimand "bad employees":** This is usually the first (and only) thing people think of when we talk about surveillance cameras. And yes, they're partly correct. One of the main reasons to have cameras is to catch and prevent people from doing "bad stuff."
- **Recognize "good employees":** On the other hand, having cameras can also be positive. When employees follow protocols and work hard, the cameras (and hopefully you) will see who your most valuable and trustworthy employees are. When you discover milkers doing everything well, show them the "good footage," thank them, and reward their performance when it's time for their evaluation. They'll appreciate that you're paying attention and that you recognize their hard work.
- **Use the footage as evidence:** Nobody likes sifting through the messy details of a "he said/she said" scenario. When milkers say they got kicked in the parlor or when a treated cow gets milked into the tank, get everyone's version of what, when, and how it happened. Then, find the recorded parlor footage from that specific date/time and watch what the camera saw.

Ultimately, surveillance cameras can be the some of the most useful management tools you have at the dairy. If you utilize them effectively, you'll get better performance when you're not there, and your best employees will like them as much as you will. □

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