



Advisory Teams

Group Efforts Can Improve Business Performance

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Operating a family dairy business is one of the most complex and challenging jobs a person can have. It requires a diverse set of skills to manage finances and human resources, plus be a nutritionist, a mechanic, and a specialist in animal care and crop production. Add to all this the challenges created when profits fluctuate wildly because of the increasing variability in both input and output prices.

Faced with these multiple challenges, effective leadership teams on dairies – whether it's a husband and wife, large family partnership, or sole owner with key hired labor – must continue to develop and advance their management, leadership and communication skills. In addition to the traditional approaches to hone skills, such as extension meetings, trade magazines, college courses, and one-on-one coaching, a tool used by more and more successful businesses is advisory teams.



" Profitable ideas and solutions are brought forth by our vet, consultants, agribusiness representatives and our family all sitting together for a Dairy Profit Team meeting. During these difficult times, the meetings help us to make the right decisions", Pete Wagner, Dairy Producer

Advisory teams are a small number of people, both within and outside of the business, who meet periodically to discuss, plan, reflect and provide input on issues facing the business. Through the involvement of a diverse group of people in a formal structure, advisory teams can improve the performance and communication of the management and leadership team on a dairy. A dairy's management group forms an advisory team to help improve the business' ability to meet major goals and reach outcomes.

Value of Advisory Teams

Advisory teams provide value to a dairy in the following ways:

- Improve communications among service providers and the management team. All people involved in making decisions on a dairy can consistently be on the same page concerning directions, changes and the decision-making process
- Help focus efforts of the business towards meeting or addressing specific challenges.
- Provide more ideas on possible changes, approaches or solutions. With more people at the table discussing options, management can draw upon people with different experiences and backgrounds.
- Provide an environment for support and training of the management team. The on-farm people involved with the team will feel more involved in and take more ownership of the business. They have a voice in the process.



- Move the businesses forward. Some businesses become stagnant over time, unwilling, unable, or not sure what to do next or how to handle change. Working with an advisory team, a dairy business may more effectively reach decisions and make the changes necessary to move the business forward.
- Decrease the odds of a poor decision being made. With multiple people providing input on issues, the decision making process is improved. Consequently, the decisions made by the owners/managers of the business have an increased chance of being successful.
- Make the management team more accountable. Were decisions made and implemented? Is the change working as planned? If not, what needs to be done next? An advisory team decreases the chance of something being missed, shrugged off or ignored.



“Our family finds that the Dairy Discussion Team meetings help our farm to never stop looking ahead. If a business does not look ahead, it will eventually be out of business. The meetings give us a chance to evaluate and compare where we are and enable us to compete with other farms in the dairy industry.”, Mike, Mark, & Neil Stanton, Dairy Producers

Getting Started

Setting up and using advisory teams take time and effort. The first step is learning more about what is involved with starting a team: What roles people can play, who can serve as a facilitator, what should be the focus or initial topics, and who will serve on the team? A few resources to help with this process are:

Contact your local farm business management extension educator. The person can help you begin the process of forming an advisory team.

- Ask your trusted agriservice providers about advisory teams. They may have experience with other teams.
- Work with a business management consultant.
 - Dehm Associates LLC.; <http://www.dehmassociates.com>
 - Western NY Farm Credit; www.farmcreditwny.com
 - First Pioneer Farm Credit; www.firstpioneer.com
- New York State Farm Viability Institute – Support for teams in New York. <http://www.nyfvi.org>
- PRO-DAIRY Website – The Manager – has useful articles for both production and management areas. Specific articles concerning advisory teams in August 2005 and August 2008 issues. <http://www.ansci.cornell.edu/prodairy/manager.html>
- Penn State Dairy Alliance Website. Comprehensive source of information associated with Advisory Teams. <http://www.das.psu.edu/research-extension/dairy/teams>