



Empowering people to make a difference

Since Farm Business Manager Mark Johnson introduced new approaches to health and safety on the four farms he manages, there have been fewer incidents and productivity has increased.

While initially Mark faced some resistance from workers, his team from the 2,460 hectare Sweetwater Station near Kaitia has now embraced the move.

The Sweetwater cluster of dairy farms is managed by Landcorp. It has 17 full-time staff, plus casual and relief milkers. The farms used to follow an 11 days on, three days off roster system, but three years ago they switched to a four-two system instead.

Sadly, it was a personal tragedy, the loss of Mark and wife Sarena's son Zac, which led to the changes around health and safety.

"Eleven-three was what most good employers were doing at that time – but I saw that was too long for the young ones to work," said Mark.

"Zac had been working 11-days in a row and trying to cope with life's emotional dramas, as you do when you are young. Getting up to milk cows at 3.30 am takes its toll.

"I want you to tell your mates if they did something, that you're calling them out on it because you care about their safety. That was the start of change."

"Losing Zac made me think 'What are we doing here'? How can we look after people better both mentally and physically?"

"We identified fatigue as one of our key risks. If people are bugged, things get broken and people can get hurt. It was costing us and ACC in accidents to people, equipment and property. "

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Initially, younger staff weren't keen on a roster change. "They wanted every second weekend off but that wouldn't work without them working more days in a row.

"We started talking openly about health and safety, and how we wanted people to have a good work-life balance. We agreed to a three month trial and at the end we asked for their feedback. None of them wanted to change back because they were feeling better, enjoying life much more and having more time with their families.

"That simple change helped a lot. It didn't cost us any extra and people became more efficient in their work."

In 2014, Landcorp launched a broader push to show that the key reason for caring about H&S is looking out for your mates. "We still felt people saw me as the 'overseer' imposing H&S compliance, said Mark.

"So we called a 'no blame' meeting. I talked about the responsibility of everyone to call people out if they see them doing things that are risky. I asked them outright to call out work mates there and then.

"No-one said a word. I said I had seen a few things, but wanted to give them a chance first. Silence again.

"It doesn't take long to assess a situation and what could go wrong, before you jump on a tractor."

"So, I stopped the note-taking and said "This is a free for all'. I want you to tell your mates if they did something and you are calling them out on it because you care about

their safety. Finally one guy stood up and described some unsafe behaviour he had seen.

"I said 'Good that someone has the guts to make a difference'. Then everyone else began standing up. It went round the whole room, I think everyone had something to say.

"That was the start of change. We agreed we were going to start calling people out and that doing so was not being a nark. We all live and work closely together and we want everyone to go home safely and in good health, at the end of each working day."

"Good H&S practice doesn't cost you more money or a lot of your time," said Mark. "It doesn't take long to assess a situation and what could go wrong, before you jump on a tractor."

Regular toolbox meetings get the entire team talking openly about potential hazards and any safety or health concerns.

"Near misses are shared across all the farms," said Mark. "So if something happens at one, we can prevent it happening at the others. Nothing is missed, it's a good system and it's working.

"For us, the health and mental wellbeing goes side-by-side with safety. It all starts with the body and mind. People here feel better and fewer mistakes are being made.

"Productivity has improved, so have team dynamics and culture, because people are showing they respect one another and care about others' welfare – and that is all out in the open.

"No one walks past anything risky without reporting it. Together, that's just how we roll now."

WORKER ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

The best outcomes are achieved when a business and its workers work together on health and safety. Worker Engagement and Participation is about having planned ways for:

- > workers to give input on issues which will (or are likely to) affect their health or safety. This includes asking for and taking into account their views and
- > workers to improve work health and safety on an ongoing basis (eg by raising concerns or suggesting improvements).

This will help you and your business to make better decisions – and keep your people and productivity thriving.

KEY POINTS

- > Positive leadership on health and safety means better efficiency, productivity and team dynamics.
- > Respecting workmates includes calling them out if needed.

For more examples and information visit worksafe.govt.nz
