

# Ag Workforce Development

Richard Stup, Ph.D.

[www.agworkforcedevelopment.com](http://www.agworkforcedevelopment.com)

richstup@gmail.com

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## ***Motivation Theory Applied to the Dairy Workforce*** ***Part 2 of 2***

Dairy managers can draw important lessons from Maslow's theory of motivation. First of all, those dairy managers who attempt to maintain a stable workforce while paying subsistence wages and providing an unpleasant workplace may begin to understand why this is virtually impossible. High quality employees can find jobs that provide good working conditions, meet their income needs, and provide a reasonable level of personal and financial security. Those jobs not meeting the minimum requirements for physical and safety needs simply will not hire and retain quality people.

Those dairy employers desiring a high-performing and committed workforce need to move beyond the minimum requirements and create an atmosphere that meets people's social needs. How would your employees answer the following questions that relate to social needs?

- Do people feel that they are an important part of the farm's success?
- Do people interact in a friendly manner?
- Is there a common area on the farm where people can socialize?
- Are there opportunities for people to work together to get jobs done, or must they always work alone?
- Do people feel that they are part of a group that is working toward worthwhile and understandable goals?

If your employees would answer yes to all or most of these questions, then it is likely that some of their social needs are being met at work. People will tend to stay at the farm because they feel welcome and valued, and that their work has a purpose greater than earning a paycheck.

According to Maslow, once social needs are met, people will seek to satisfy their need for esteem. This includes both self-esteem and the esteem of others. Wise managers can harness this need for esteem and direct it toward activities that benefit the farm. The most basic way to help people build self-esteem is to assign them to tasks that are challenging, yet within their ability to achieve. As they master one challenge and move on to the next, their confidence and self-esteem will grow. Unfortunately, many dairy managers make the mistake of overwhelming new employees with responsibilities and not providing enough training. This can destroy an individual's self-esteem and cause him to quit a job because he thinks he can't do it.

The second esteem dimension is the esteem of others. Dairy managers can supply this need by simply expressing appreciation on a regular basis for quality work. Positive feedback of this kind can be a powerful source of motivation, as workers strive to live up

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to the manager's appreciation. On the other hand, a lack of appreciation expressed by management is almost always a de-motivator. Managers that do not reward high achievement will receive work that just meets the minimum acceptable standard. After all, why try harder if no one really cares?

The highest need in Maslow's theory is that of self-actualization or self-fulfillment. Dairy managers rarely tap this need, but it has great potential. Workers with a relatively low performance potential may actually reach self-fulfillment by mastering a task that others might consider simple. Self-fulfillment depends on the individual. Dairy managers can motivate highly talented and valuable employees by turning over some of the strategic management responsibility for the dairy business.

Motivation is a difficult concept to grasp, and an even more difficult variable to manage. No manager can directly cause an employee to be motivated, it must come from within the employee. However, the manager can work to create a physical, social, and organizational environment that encourages people to be motivated.