

Onboarding

An orientation guide for your Apprentice's first days

Your Apprentice's first days can be overwhelming. There are so many things they need to learn, just to get off to a good start. The first few days set the tone for the whole two-year Apprenticeship, so how you introduce your new Apprentice to your farm, family members and other employees will have long-lasting effects, either positive or negative. "Onboarding" is what companies call this orientation process. This tip-sheet provides some guidelines on what to include in your onboarding process.

Avoid an "information overload" in the first few days by concentrating on an overview, not details!

On the first day

Give the Apprentice a thorough tour of the farm. You may have already given your Apprentice a tour of the farm during the interview process. Another one will refresh and reinforce what they've already seen and heard.

Give them:

- A map of your farm
- A notebook and pen
- An employee handbook

Introduce them to:

- Your family and other employees
- Your community (grocery and other stores, public library, other points of interest)

Keep them safe

- **In a walk-through of the farm point out potential hazards and safety protocols, i.e. milkhouse chemicals, bulls, silos, manure pits, other chemicals, PTOs and other machinery.**
- **Before the apprentice's first animal contact, explain the concept of low stress animal handling**

The first few weeks

- For the first one to two weeks have the Apprentice work by your side and if there are different areas of responsibilities, have him/her rotate through these areas. The Apprentice should get an overview of what it takes on a daily basis to run the operation.
- After providing the initial overview, next train the apprentice in detail on the first task that is important, i.e. milking. Depending on how fast an Apprentice learns, limit the amount of details you present at one time. Explain, demonstrate, let the Apprentice try, correct if necessary and once they are comfortable with the task, then let him/her practice. (See sidebar next page for an example)

Explain not only the "how" but also the "why".

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General Training Guidelines

- Consider using the following steps to teach a new task:
 - Give an overview of the process, including why you do it the way you do
 - Demonstrate the task while explaining each step
 - Ask if they have questions
 - Have the Apprentice try each step
 - Give constructive criticism, ask for questions
 - Have the Apprentice try the whole process
 - Allow them time to practice
- Written Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are a good way to introduce tasks – the apprentice can study them in preparation
- Start with the most important tasks on the farm and those that you will be having the Apprentice do routinely.
- Gradually introduce more tasks as they master the first ones.
- When proficient in some tasks, eventually transfer responsibility.
- Praise more than you (negatively) critique. Be specific in what they did well and what not so well. Be thoughtful about giving constructive criticism.
- Once apprentice becomes more proficient and has area(s) of responsibility, encourage initiative and independent thinking by showing that you are valuing their input.

Keys to success

- Make sure your Apprentice understands their compensation package and work schedule. At least 1 to 2 days off per week is appropriate. Make sure they have scheduled time off for family time or taking care of personal business.
- Good communication is probably the single most important factor in the success of an Apprenticeship.
- Be willing to transfer responsibility for tasks when the Apprentice is ready. This is how they learn management skills (the “Whys”).
- Remember that your Apprentice is there to learn--they are not simply hired labor.

Teaching how to milk

Start with an overview:

- Describe the steps of the procedure.
- Explain the “why” for udder preparation:
 - To avoid milk contamination (including quality premiums)
 - To avoid mastitis causing bacteria entering the udder
 - To stimulate let-down; explain Oxytocin, it’s antagonist Adrenalin, its duration in the blood stream.

Demonstrate each step:

- Pre-and/or post dipping. Explain importance of task being done correctly: complete teat coverage, etc. Let Apprentice practice
- Stripping and wiping. Again explain details and why: single towels, use of different places on the towels for each teat etc. Show different techniques on how to get milk out of the udder.
- Attachment of the milking cluster. Show proper attachment of milking cluster, i.e. not sucking air, and whatever else is unique about your particular cluster
- Reattachment. Next explain under what conditions to reattach an automatic take-off (if applicable). Without take-offs, explain when milking is considered finished and how to properly take off the cluster, i.e. shut off vacuum first, wait a second to let out vacuum, remove.

Practice

- Continue milking with apprentice until he/she is comfortable and proficient with all tasks before leaving them on their own.
- How quickly apprentices learn this and other processes/techniques varies greatly. It could be a couple milkings or a couple weeks. Adjust your teaching style to the apprentice’s learning style.