



Human resources

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Introduction:

Swine production is supported by 4 pillars: genetics, nutrition, management, and health. The term management is a wide one and includes different areas such as buildings, equipment, and people to run them. Anyone knowing the pig business will agree on the importance of the human team force in achieving results. But unfortunately, when talking about employees we often hear just about associated problems: their scarcity, difficulty to find good ones, communication difficulties or lack of commitment with the project etc.

The first step to solve problems is to look what others do. We like to benchmark farm's productivity and try to explain differences based on genetics, nutrition, health, but personnel is seldom considered responsible for the difference. In the best scenario, when benchmarking employees often what's compared is their cost as percentage over total production cost or some ratios which would like to measure their efficiency: sows/employee or working hours/sow/year. Selection, educational programs or motivation techniques, which could be some of the tools to reduce employees problems, are never compared as they are seldom used, leading to some of the problems the sector is suffering.

Creating a good team, it is not an easy task and requires time investment from ownership or top management positions.

Selection:

One of the frequent complaints among farm owners is the difficulty in finding staff. A few years ago, in most of the farms the owner worked, helped by one or a few workers. Today, because of the narrow profit margins generated by pig production, farms have increased their size, seeking to optimize the tasks and therefore the necessary profiles have changed: we need people who can work with animals and who understand their behaviour but also that they are able to work in a team and for some positions that they are competent to manage people. It is for this reason that the selection process will be an important element in human resource management.

To be able to select, we have to attract people who want to work on the farm and for this we have to be aware of what are those points that may be attractive to future candidates.

- The fact that work is located outside the cities may be an inconvenience for some, but an incentive for others.
- The growing size of the farms has made it possible to optimize tasks and ensure worker's free time. This advantage can also be found in smaller farms when they used batching systems, since these allow to concentrate work in certain periods, freeing up time in others, allowing a better organization of free time.
- Some of the positions on the farm could be part-time, which, in rural settings, could represent an advantage for certain profiles that should not be underestimated.
- The modernization of farms has made jobs less heavy, and jobs can be filled by both women and men.
- Working on a pig farm has always been associated with dirt and a bad smell. The order and cleanliness of the farm must be present in all areas, but especially in those intended for workers: well-equipped showers, clean dining room, work clothes supplied by the company, etc.
- The clothing offered and its maintenance are not minor elements when it comes to attracting potential workers.

In any selection process it is necessary to clearly specify what is required of the worker and what is offered. It is, therefore, essential to know what are the requirements of the working position that is intended to be covered. Requirements for an area supervisor are not the same as those for a farrowing house worker. For each position, it is necessary to identify the specific tasks to be carried out and what profile is required. In this way, the chances of having the correct profile increase and limit the surprises that new workers may get.

Education:

We often hear complaints about worker training, but few companies have designed training processes for workers, with clear differentiation between what is offered to a new hire or what is considered continuing training. Most often, a new employee comes to his job site and has at most a supervisor to follow him for a few days. This is great, but it should be complemented with a more theoretical training that allows them to understand they you carry out certain tasks and the importance of them. A good example can be the person in charge of washing the delivery rooms, if they understand that a good cleaning is necessary to eliminate the pathogens present in the room and thus prevent diarrhoea problems and they are explained how it should be done and why, their work makes sense and stops being a heavy routine. Training must not only develop or improve specific skills, but must also introduce the worker to the company, making him or her a participant in its business vision and values.

Continuous training should be previously designed and in companies with complex structures it should be an essential element to achieve promotions and salary improvements. Continuous training should be scheduled regularly, for example a few hours each quarter, during working hours and accompanied by a meal or snack that allows relaxation and communication between workers. Training often doesn't just go in one direction. These encounters can be very useful in recognizing possibilities for improvement or finding solutions to problems.

Training should not be considered a cost, but rather an investment in workers that will improve their efficiency, reducing the replacement rate and therefore being highly profitable.

Motivation:

Motivation on farms is often synonymous with money and perhaps it should be understood in a broader way, in fact, the previous point could also be understood as motivation, since there are certain profiles, especially among young people where training is itself a motivation.

Promotion is another method of motivation and should always be associated with training, as we have already commented previously, and naturally with greater responsibility and salary, but unfortunately the opportunities for promotion in small or medium-sized companies are lower. In these cases, the motivation must be derived from the achievement of objectives that are clear in which there is a part that reflects the group work and another the particular work of each one. But it is important that in achieving these objectives the relationship with other colleagues is also valued. Selfish and unsympathetic attitudes with the other members of the team should not be rewarded, even if they allow achieving the particular objectives.

Today's society highly values free time and especially the younger generations who enter the world of work. Work, even on the farm, must be combined with free time. It is true that animals need to be cared for every day of the week but a good shift structure that adequately compensates for holidays, for example with longer weekends or with more daily free time will be valued by the worker and also considered as a motivation.

Conclusions:

All the points discussed are important in order to have good teams of people on the farms, but we must not forget that in order to have time to educate and be able to offer free time in an attractive way, we must consider that when calculating staff needs, vacations and possible leave must be taken into account, and therefore, it is possible that the personnel needs are greater than those considered in the past. However, increasing the cost of personnel should not be scary when it represents less than 10% of the cost of production (6-7%) and its impact can be tremendous. In large farms its impact is even greater: the effectiveness of human resources (workforce), measured as weaned per worker, is much higher in big than in small farms.

References:

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