Identifying current challenges and research priorities to guide the design of more attractive dairy farm workplaces in New Zealand

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Abstract

Globally, dairy farmers face issues with attracting and retaining high quality staff. In this study, a qualitative research method was used to explore the current challenges in relation to people on farm, the approaches currently used by farmers to make dairying more attractive and productive for people, and perspectives on the challenges for attracting/retaining people on future farms. Current challenges were in the areas of recruitment, productivity, skills and learning, farm/industry structural issues, and impact of farm profitability on ability to implement new people practices. Participants’ vision of the future dairy workplace was one that is highly dynamic, more open to consumers and the community, and largely data-driven. We suggest that dairy workplace research priorities focus on the design and testing of new systems to provide people with meaningful work and a good lifestyle without compromising profit. Specific priorities include: using new ways of connecting and communicating to create engaged and effective teams; developing flexible farm teams who deeply understand their role in value chain and the consumer connection; defining the opportunity for technology to make the job easier and more enjoyable; developing farm systems that are safe, innovative, and a good career; and helping farming businesses demonstrate their people performance to consumers.