

**Mentoring
For
The Rural Sector:
Identifying the needs of the Participants**

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**Katrina Knowles
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Introduction

When British explorer Captain James Cook first sighted Mt Taranaki from off the Taranaki Coast in 1770 he described it as an interesting hill. Little did he know that the hill would ensure a climate that would dictate the fate of the province as a dairy farming region.

As early as the 1400's with the arrival of the ancient Maori, survival depended on innovative development of agriculture. Dense bush with peat floors, prolific wildlife among them the gentle giant Moa (birds) a coastline alive with fish and good sandy volcanic soil ideal for vegetable crops they had brought with them.

British colonisation, Maori land confiscation and the long Taranaki land wars of the 1860's created a tumultuous history for a province where a love of the land would remain ingrained. Early settlers were faced with danger, isolation and hard toil. Homes to build, land to clear and relationships to develop with the local Maori. There were no laws, constitutions or regulations no schools, hospitals or churches. Conditions that would challenge the strongest mind among them.

In those early days farmers would pride themselves with their degree of self-sufficiency. Every farmer had at least his house-cow to keep him and maybe a nearby township supplied with milk and butter. As early as the 1850's there were dairies on the Banks Peninsula producing substantial amounts of cheese. The first dairy factor, in the sense that it processed the production of several herds, was established in 1871 by a group of eight men on a property on the Otago Peninsula this was the first co-operative Dairy Company to be established in New Zealand.

In Otago and later the West Coast the discovery of gold changed the dynamics of supply for farming as people were attracted to New Zealand in search of their fortune the population changed in 10 years from 60,000 to 250,000 this resulted in growth for agriculture as they endeavoured to feed the new comers.

The late 1870's saw the introduction of refrigerated shipping which opened the world markets to New Zealand allowing meat shipments to England.

In 1887, Chew Chong, a Chinese immigrant trader, established a sophisticated butter factor in Eltham, Taranaki and Henry Reynold, a Cornishman, who established the Anchor brand with the first factory in the Waikato at Pukekura, near Cambridge.

In 1940 Oliver Duff, in his book, *New Zealand Now*, described a number of New Zealand's occupation types, he tells what New Zealanders then thought a farmer ought to be:

“If he was poor after fifty years of work and worries that was the fate of farmers: and had to be. Farming was a calling and not a job; a privileged calling. For obviously the farming population was always limited. You couldn't increase the number of acres.Then the number of farmers of all kinds was only one in ten of the total population.

The land was not short of farmers: farmers were short of land. As time went on science would intensify the problem...Two men would produce what three produced now, with less effort, and at a lower cost to the consumer.”

In the early days families could suffer from the remoteness and be disadvantaged through lack of educational and social opportunities. City folk often saw farmers as yokels with no cultural finesse.

Farming was a life fraught with problems which were usually practical ones and lead the way to the “do it yourself” Kiwi ingenuity attitude which many New Zealand farmers still aspire to.

Urbanisation of the farmer and his family occurred gradually after the 2nd world war. As big cars and fast roads brought farmers close to town so to it saw the closure of schools and children travelling further on the improving roads to bigger schools reflecting more urban values due to the proportion of urban pupils and teachers. From this point on more and more farming children looked for careers and education that took them away from the farm and into professions.

In 1973 the United Kingdom became a member of the European Economic Community and agreements were reached on the removal of customs tariffs between members, the setting of a common customs tariff for imports from non-member states and the abolition of barriers to free movement of labour, services and capital between member states.

As a result of this New Zealand would have to “run faster to stand still” a quotation we have heard readily since then as year on year we need to increase productivity to stay competitive.

In the 1960's as the UK began negotiations to enter the EEC, New Zealand felt cast aside and sought to survive this challenge. Through the Agricultural Development Conference it was identified that farmers could do better no research was seen to be necessary to lift productivity by as much as 100% farmers just needed to move on from the lifestyle and act more business like.

Farmers were encouraged to push the boundaries and take all commercial risks of a market-orientated economy. Performance in the 60's lifted with farmers working collaboratively to increase productivity. In the early 1970's sheep and beef markets slumped and with no support from the Government farmers felt the effects which drove a fresh approach for the 1970's, a feeling of being let down by the manufacturing sector, who were more interested in adding value to imported raw materials than developing products from farming's raw materials. The growth of stock units in the 1960's was 30% by the 1970's this had reduced to less than 4 %.

The end of the 1970's saw the Leadership of the three producer boards aged and with no real succession plan in place the government of the day saw its opportunity to resist the pressures of the Producer Boards and pressure was put on the sheep industry to take over the national wool harvest and market it under the co-operative structure that had traditionally controlled dairy production and marketing. This was the beginning to the breakdown of the power the producer boards had enjoyed as the executives of the producer boards lost contact with where the power really lay, with those on the land.

Traditional agricultural farming started to loose the stage to energy and mineral farming which could offer New Zealand an alternative. Had the Agriculture sector taken for granted the resources it had available to it and lost its way?

Serious domestic inflation through the 1970s and the early 1980s coupled with only minor movements in world prices for pastoral products led to government subsidies for traditional farming which in turn orchestrated the demise of New Zealand's defence against political barriers in other Western countries.

In 1980 a book produced by the Ministry of National Development, called *Growth Opportunities in New Zealand*, failed to recognise the need for motivation of the people involved in farming. While it was noted that pastoral farming would remain the mainstay of the New Zealand economy it failed to recognise that farmers would need some key drivers to ensure they were prepared to take the risks around pushing productivity. Questions were starting to arise around the ability to market produce into a world suffering food shortages but not requiring the western diet that we as a nation were producing. Government leadership had no affiliation to farming and therefore there was no commitment to assist.

1985 saw the sudden removal of all economic support and incentives for farming by the Labour Government and this ensured a sudden drop in income for all pastoral farmers. The saviour for farmers came in 1988/89 by way of a boom in international commodities this gave rise to the hope of a more realistic economic base.

1980-2000 saw the amalgamation of the small country co-operatives to form larger more viable options as the industry moved forward needing to be more competitive on the world stage. New Zealand was seen as operating the lowest cost pasture based system in the world. To maintain the competitiveness on the world markets New Zealand needed to invest heavily in research and development. The lack of foresight from Directors of many small co-operatives meant they had not kept up with advancements to keep the factories modern and as capital investment was required, to upgrade plant and technology, the call on their pay out to shareholders was so great that they had left themselves no option but to amalgamate with neighbouring companies who had ensured they had a capital investment programme that had been funded through retention of earnings.

Some 146 years on from the first colonisation of Taranaki the landscape for farming has changed. No longer do we clear the land or process our milk on farm as our ancestors did. We no longer have a Taranaki based Dairy company much to the disappointment of many mature farmers who feel they made the sacrifices to ensure the success of the Kiwi Dairy Company.

The amalgamation of Dairy Group and Kiwi Dairies has given us Fonterra, a global company with many complicated compliance issues for farmers and international challenges for the company.

The Taranaki landscape still boasts several smaller farms that have been in the family for generations, the family farm is very much alive and only low debt structures will ensure the health of these as a business as everything around them grows to encompass the needs of rising costs associated to our modern day global farming business.

The Business of Farming in 2005 and Beyond

As we look forward into the next decade we can predict more farm amalgamation forced on us by the need to remain competitive and for financial survival. Most dairy farmers are now seeing returns on capital of around 3% - 4% as land prices reflect alternative use values.

Fonterra insists that there is a need for farmers to increase their productivity year in by 4% to remain competitive. "Running faster to stand still".

Large scale farming and multiple ownership generate their own issues that will need to be dealt with in the future, with some 45,000 plus on farm employment opportunities in our industry the next wave of issues will revolve around research and development but also ensuring that our people are equipped to carry out the on farm tasks, manage the business side of farming but most importantly build the relationships which will ensure retention of the people in our industry.

Farmers have moved from practical hands on toilers to being business managers and employers a change that many of them have not taken the time to prepare for.

After years of working in seclusion on the farm taking care of all of the tasks it is hard for them to hand over the responsibilities to others and also to accept that their own role has changed and they need new skills to manage the people they so heavily rely on.

The Dairy Industry needs to ensure it has a succession plan in place that

- Ensures the growth and development of its people
- Identifies and trains tomorrows leaders
- Encourages the highly motivated to succeed.
- Evolves new ownership structures to allow young people into the ownership arena
- Manages the socialisation within the rural sector
- Training and Education at all levels

Continued...

- Pastoral care
- Mentoring
- Support networks
- Rural facilities are maintained and upgraded
- Ensures a pride for those who aspire to be professional Farm Managers/Variable Order Sharemilkers /50-50 Sharemilkers and Farm Assistants. Giving them the best tools we have to be the best they can be.
- Acknowledge that land ownership is not the only measure of success.
- Equip these people with the skills to make wise off farm investment to create a future beyond the physical work of farming.

Thus creating pathways for success of the next generation of New Zealand Farmers ensuring that the current generation can realise the equity in their assets for retirement and that New Zealand farming has a future beyond this point. That future will only be possible if people are encouraged to invest themselves into this industry.

The future of the industry is also in the hands of our leadership of today. As Fonterra looks to changes in capital structure they must take into account the impact any changes will have for future generations of farmers and not only focus on creating wealth for the current shareholders of the company but ensure there is a future for the next generation of farmers with pathways to ensure the succession of the industry into their hands.

Training and Skills Transfer are a vital part of the Succession plan

“Farmer training has evolved from a relatively small-scale, regionally-based activity, into a major nationwide business. For much of the history of farming farm training happened informally out of a desire to share knowledge and on a need to know basis.” *Our Story The Growth of Farm Training in New Zealand*

In the early 1970’s the Federated Farmers had introduced the Farm Cadet Scheme managed by the Agriculture Training council. This council was set up to administer the Farm Cadet Scheme and ensure that qualifications were in place.

The goal of the Scheme was to recruit young school leavers onto the land and with Provincial Field Officers in place their wellbeing was monitored during their farm placements. At the height of the scheme there were some 1000 cadets in training.

The success of this scheme hinged on the farmers participation and willingness to open their homes and share skills with these young people with these young people often being treated like a member of the family.

June 1990 saw the advent of the Farm Education and Training Association (FETA) a national body to oversee Agriculture Education.

In 1991 skill shortages were being identified throughout many New Zealand based industries and the Government announced an Industry Skills Training Strategy to assist with increasing the quality and quantity of training available.

Industry Training Organisations were set up to set national skills standards and qualifications, develop standardised assessment arrangements and administer on and off-job training.

In 1993 FETA piloted the ITO training model and in 1995 FETA changed its name to the Agriculture ITO.

The business of Agriculture Education grew

TOTAL INCOME

1991 \$ 1.3 million
2003 \$14.8 million

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

1991 \$851,000
2003 \$9.3 million

INDUSTRY CONTRIBUTION

1991 \$392,000
2003 \$1.7 million

CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS

1991 Farm Cadet Scheme targeted School-leavers
2003 Over a third of 5,865 trainees aged 30 plus.

With an evolving industry comes the evolution and changes to the needs of the people involved in the industry.

Research Question:

Are the needs of our Rural Farming Community being catered for with the Training Services currently available to them?

Method of Research

One on One interview with 28- Farm owners, 12- 50/50 sharemilkers and 15- farm assistants.

- This identified the need for ongoing training with only 3 out of the interviews suggesting that training was worthless.
- 19 of those interviewed were employers and all agreed that training was adding value to their business.
- 3 farm assistants said the only reason they attended training was so they could go off farm.
- 12 farm assistants wanted to achieve qualifications and gain skills to advance their career.
- 42 of the interviews would like to see more topic specific short courses. They had attended Dexcel held seminars on topics but found they needed more follow up and found the Agriculture ITO courses ran for too long and often had topics they weren't ready for.
- Unit Standard assessment put them off attending courses as they already felt there were issues around getting these completed.
- All interviewees agreed that managing relationships was the one thing that had let them down in the past and would like to learn more skills around this.
- 3 employers suggested that a quick course to get employees up and running with milking matters would be a huge advantage before season start.

When asked if they had considered using mentors/coaches to assist them with their goals?

- 4 farm employees were working under the Agriculture ITO Modern Apprenticeship scheme and found that very dependant on the mentor.
- All but 3 of the other interviewees would like to know more about a mentoring system and what it could offer them.
- Farm owners were keen for business mentoring and human resource management mentoring.

The small farms of Taranaki offer many opportunities for young farmers to achieve their dream of share milking. Often though these opportunities come before they are fully prepared and so ongoing assistance through mentoring and coaching is very essential as they move through the transition, often from farm assistant to variable order share milker in a season. They will bring with them a strong practical skill base due to the nature of farm size in Taranaki working one on one with an employer will give them excellent practical skills but the business and life skills need nurturing

Case Study-1

Case Study 1; Variable Order Sharemilkers

Position: Milking 900 cows, employing 3 fulltime and 2 part time staff.
Employer lives on farm.

Dairy of contact; Monthly visits plus phone contact as required

Process; Monthly meetings were held to discuss issues around staff management, and management of the relationship with farm owner who lived on farm. Other issues were identified from this.

Situation One

As this couple had employed friends to work for them as opposed to advertising positions they were encountering some issues around the expectation from the staff that they would be “good mates” and be lenient on their staff.

Good rosters were in place with good time off and excellent living conditions and facilities were provided by the farm owner.

This couple had trouble dealing with the issues because of their two very different personalities and this then became an issue in their relationship.

Mentoring required:

To get the couple to take the emotions out of the situation so that they could identify the issues and in doing so not look to find blame, but look at how in the future they could manage things to try and avoid the situation occurring again. They must take the time to agree on outcomes with staff before this are conveyed to staff.

Situation Two

Need to identify the importance of business management time as opposed to physical work in the business. Currently trying to cram the business management and planning into evenings as opposed to recognising that time set aside for this will give more value. Very capable in the area of business planning and farm input planning but quality time not being apportioned.

Mentoring required

- Get them to recognise the importance of planning to enable them to sell the plan to all involved and gain buy in.
- Work smarter not harder.
- Relationship Building
- Time Management
- Self awareness
- Managing stress

Case Study-2

Case Study; Variable Order Sharemilkers

Position: Milking 240 cows,
Employer lives off farm.

Diary of contact; Monthly visits plus phone contact as required

Process; Monthly meetings were held to discuss issues around growth of business, plus development of skills for the individuals so they can contribute to the team their areas of expertise.

Situation One

Female is a very strong personality. Male is lacking confidence and self esteem.

Mentoring required:

Encourage personal development to bring the Males confidence up to level that he can contribute to the partnership. Ensure that Female is getting opportunity to improve and educate herself but taking partner along with her.

Situation Two

Business growth. Variable order share milking condition not large enough for financial growth to achieve desired goals.

Mentoring required

- Male requires the confidence to promote his skills and then the opportunity for a 50/50 position can be realised.
- Skill base for career advancement already in place
- Requires confidence and relationship building skills.
- Networking will also add value and create opportunities.

Case Study-3

Case Study; Trainee Farm Manager (18 years old)

Position: Milking 200 cows,

Diary of contact; Monthly visits plus phone contact as required

Process; Monthly meetings were held to discuss time management, skill levels, self care, work ethic and communication.

Situation One

House not being looked after, nutrition and self care needs improvement.

Mentoring required:

Requires skills related to pre-employment training and nutrition.

Need to get client to identify these needs for him so that he will buy into actions that can help correct the situation.

Relationship building skills required.

Situation Two

Farm skills

Mentoring required

- Go on farm and work along side to identify confidence and skill level for particular jobs.
- Look at on job assessment to establish comfort levels around various tasks.
- On job mentoring with a focus on practical skills would assist.
- Once needs assessed then could attend relevant off job training or get on job training for practical skills. E.g. Fencing.
- This young person would have been helped immensely by a live in pre employment course.

Case Study-4

Case Study; Farm Assistant

Position: Milking 340 cows,

Diary of contact; Monthly visits plus phone contact as required

Process; Monthly meetings were held to discuss managing relationships and working in a team.

Situation One

Practical skills to carry out job were excellent. The nature of the position relies on working as a team as there are 3 farms that share equipment. In the past has demonstrated the lack of ability to communicate well with other staff members and has previously left good jobs due to inability to get along with others.

Mentoring required:

Communication and relationship building skills required.

Types of Mentoring/Coaching required

- Self awareness
- Identifying personalities and how to work with them.
- Communication skills
- Leadership training

Case Study-5

Case Study; Farm Assistant

Position: Milking 900 cows

Diary of contact; Monthly visits plus phone contact as required

Process

Monthly meetings were held plus phone contact as required

Situation One

Young school leaver who was finding being in the work force difficult.

Generally poor at following instructions and losing interest in position.

Communication skills were required to convey to the employer that his skill level was not up to the employer's expectations and that he had no confidence or skills to carry out many of the tasks.

Mentoring required:

- ❖ Employer- Business mentoring
- ❖ Relationship building
- ❖ Systems design to ensure that tasks were made easier
- Employee- pre employment skills required
- Employer to work along side to lift skill level
- And build relationship between employer/employee to open channels of communication.

Case Study-6

Case Study; Farm Owner – multiple ownership

Position: 5 farms with managers – variable order share milker in place

Diary of contact; Monthly visits plus phone contact as required

Process; Monthly meetings were held plus phone contact as required

Situation One

The trust of one of the share milkers was being questioned due to events where it was believed cows had not been milked on 2 separate occasions for the night milking.

With this client the focus was on how to assist him in managing his staff and improving his communication skills.

Mentoring required:

Instigate discussions with share milker re the situation it was established that milking had occurred but later than normal due to personal issues. Discussions were held around this and the issue was resolved. Farm owner had been reluctant to approach the share milker re this issue as did not want to cause animosity between them. Situation was resolved and they were both encouraged to speak more openly with regard to what was happening.

Types of Mentoring/Coaching required

- Needed to look at up skilling in Human Resource management
- in particular hiring of staff,
- job descriptions
- The setting of expectations.
- Communication
- Relationship building

Conclusion

In years gone by farming was looked at as a life style option for people who wanted to work outside. It was not considered to be a desirable career option for most but was for those who had no other options. It involved hard work and long hours.

Today farming is looked at as a good career option with huge opportunity. For skilled and motivated people there is an enormous amount of potential to develop a very successful career in the multibillion dollar business of farming.

With an ever evolving industry it is extremely important that the Agriculture Education system continues to grow.

There is a huge need to maintain the training in the basic areas of cow and pasture management while offering further training in areas that advance and enhance on farm production. There is also a need for the Agriculture ITO to lead the industry in identifying the genuine needs for training as our industry evolves.

The cases studies as outline in this document are just an example of the studies I have undertaken in my research to complete this assignment, throughout the last 30 years I have worked beside farmers and have experienced the evolution of the small scale farm to large scale employer. I have worked as an Agricultural tutor for the past 6 years where I have been privileged to hear the discussions of the students with regards to their farming careers and taken the time to coach those who have found the going tough and taken great pleasure from working with those who are focused on their career and achieving.

In my role as a Fonterra Network member I have discussed many topics with farm owners and their employees and the one thing I have gained from this is the perception they have of how our industry organisations are being managed and the funding they contribute is being used.

The conclusion that I have drawn from my research is the need for an established Industry organisation to take leadership in a collaborative approach with other industry organisations to address the issues that are facing our farmers today.

The most important of these issues being the PEOPLE

- Support
- Mentoring life skills
- Socialisation
- Employee assistance programmes
- Topic specific short courses
- Business mentoring
- Communication
- Relationship building
- Investment opportunities

Attraction, retention and ongoing training of the people in our business will ensure a strong primary base is in place for our industry.

There is also a need to ensure that all aspects of training are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that the needs of the current environment are reflected and this will ensure we are being proactive not reactive to needs.

Dairy Farmers currently pay a fee to Dairy Insight called the Dairy Insight Levy. It is the perception of many farmers that private business is accessing these funds to build profitable business for themselves and the outcomes for farmers is not the focus. A more collaborative approach to the use of these funds is needed if the vote to retain the levy is to have positive outcomes. It is the perception of many farmers interviewed that this money is being used irresponsibly with no outcome for the farmers. The Industry needs to promote the value that this investment is adding to the Industry for the whole of the supply chain.

The industry has several organisations already funded by industry that could take a collaborative approach to a project of this nature. Agriculture ITO and Dexcel are the most obvious due to them already having the resources and people in place to manage a project of this nature.

In 2000 the Modern Apprenticeship Scheme was introduced by the Government to help more young people (aged 16 to 21) to get into industry training due to the serious skill shortages in the 90's.

The Modern Apprentice is assigned a coordinator/mentor to assist them with staying on track through their studies and to offer them and their employer support in setting goals and expectations for the Modern Apprentice. The employer and Modern Apprentice are both present at a 3 monthly visit with the mentor to ensure the approach is collaborative and that opportunities are recognised to ensure good outcomes for the Modern Apprentice and the business they are working in. History has demonstrated that this has the potential to dramatically increase the chances of succeeding. It is a model that could be used for the wider industry to drastically improve outcomes.

We need to re-instate the pride that farmers once had in being farmers and make them aware of what they have to celebrate. Of major concern is the inability of Farmers to take pride in what they have achieved. They appear to be in self denial as though they can't acknowledge their own success in case people think they are "lucky" or "have it easy".

Dairy Insight currently funds the "Windows to Dairy" and "Go Dairy" programmes in an endeavour to encourage people into the Dairy Industry, the question we need to ask is could we do more good for the profile of our industry if our participants were encouraged to stand up and be proud of their achievements and acknowledge their own success?

Let people know that you can be proud of being a farm assistant or a farm owner as long as you do it to the best of your ability. We need to remove the pressure that land ownership is the only measure of success for young farmers. Investment opportunities in commercial property can return as much as 12 % return on capital as opposed to 3-4% for dairy land, so encouraging knowledge growth with regards to this type of investment could lead to achievement of land ownership or financial security, which ever is the target of the farmer while enjoying a very successful career as a professional farm manager or share milker.

We need to learn to accept that there is no wrong or right when it comes to personalities we are all different we just need to manage our different personalities and make the most of the skills and opportunities that we have. While some of us enjoy the risk of business others require more security around them which gives us the diversity of people for the roles in our Industry.

Great things will come from instilling a positive attitude in people, as it has been proven in other industries that a happy and safe work force will assist increased productivity.

This project is the first phase in an ongoing project. Phase one has been to identify the needs of the participants, Taranaki Dairy Farmers, phase two will be to work with Industry organisations to ensure the uptake of this information when formulating training/coaching programmes for the future.

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