

What is onboarding and why is it important?



When anyone starts a new job on a dairy farm, there is an awful lot to learn. 'Onboarding' is the process your new employer and team go through to welcome you into the business and to help give you the best start in your role.

Onboarding should be done over the course of about three months, and it is really about making sure you know what is expected of you at work and how to keep yourself safe while building a platform for good communication going forward.

The onboarding experience is extremely important for both you and your new boss; it helps to start building trust and it sets the tone for your employment relationship.

What good onboarding looks like

Before you start, your new boss should

- File your CV, application form, reference information and records of any previous training you have received
- Give you an introduction to the area, community (include doctors, banks, schools, community groups)
- Give you an introduction to the farm business
- Prepare your accommodation
- Prepare Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), tools, and any vehicles you will be using
- Gather the appropriate documentation for completion on day one of employment
- Talk through and sign the employment agreement and job description with you

Day 1 of employment

Your new boss should



Talk through and together you should sign the:

- Property inspection form
- Tenancy Agreement



Get you to complete a:

- Tax IR330 form
- KiwiSaver deduction form



Begin the introduction to your new job which may include:

- A high-level summary of the business and what they are trying to achieve
- Introductions to who works on the farm, who is responsible for what, and reporting lines
- Farm layout and hazard identification
- Emergency contacts
- Recap of employment conditions (hours of work, timekeeping, pay system, breaks, rosters)

- Health and safety induction, and signing of the health and safety acknowledgement form
- Discussion of key parts of the Farm Policy Manual (e.g. smoking, alcohol and drug policy, expected behaviour and conduct, communication, discipline)
- Discussion about performance reviews and your trial period (if applicable)
- Discussion about training opportunities going forward



Plan week 1 with you:

- You should have a copy of the roster, and know what time you need to turn up to work and where
- You should have an idea about what you will be doing each day – you may be shadowing a work mate, or you may be left to do some tasks by yourself

Tips for employees in their first week

- Make sure that you have read, understood and signed an employment agreement and job description before you do anything else on your first day! This is an important legal requirement and protects both you and your employer.
- Take a pocket-sized notebook with you to work. You will have a lot to take in, and making notes of people's names, tasks to do, questions to ask will help take pressure off you to remember everything.
- Take your phone with you so you can use your camera to take photos/videos of how to do tasks, or to pass onto work mates if you're not sure about something.
- Request a copy of the farm map on your first day, this will help you orientate yourself and get to know paddock names so you know what paddocks your teammates are referring to.
- Make sure you have each of your team mate's phone numbers, and that you are a part of any WhatsApp or Messenger team chats – this way you can ask any of your team mates for help without always relying on your new boss.
- Ask as many questions as you can in your first few weeks. No question is a silly question, your teammates will appreciate your interest in the business and how they do things. Make sure you write down some of these answers so that you are not asking the same questions over and over!

What to expect in your first ninety days

You may be working alongside your new boss each day, or perhaps alongside a work mate. It's important that as your first few days and weeks go by, you keep communicating well with your boss or mentor – this will help to build trust, and allow your employer to address any issues that might affect how much you enjoy the job.

While you should be communicating with your boss every day, it is recommended that you have an official 'catch up' every 1-2 weeks in your first month, and at least monthly thereafter.

Advice for communicating with your boss in the first ninety days:

- Make sure you communicate if you are unsure about how to do something. Your boss will appreciate you being honest about this, as mistakes on farm over spring can be very costly.
- Make sure you communicate any concerns about the job. It's likely that you will be tired and your body will ache in your first few weeks if you are not used to early mornings and working physically. Make sure you tell your boss this so that they can help ease you into it the role more slowly, if need be.

- Make sure you tell your boss if something isn't right with your accommodation, the PPE that you have been provided or the safety of your workplace – it's important for you to have good living and working conditions for you to perform and be happy.
- There will be a number of skills and farm operations you will need to learn about in your first few weeks. Your new boss may use your job description to make a training plan of skills and operations for you to learn - but if not, you can be proactive; talk to your work mates and begin this list for yourself. Your initiative will be much appreciated by your boss and team as they come into a very busy time of year in spring. Remember to have your notebook and/or phone handy to help you retain details of the skills and processes you learn.
- Ask your boss what they need out of you as an employee. Are they happy that you call them at any time with questions? Do they have any 'pet hates' in the workplace that you should know about? e.g. cleanliness, people not putting tools away, timesheets or maintenance registers not being completed, swearing, etc. By understanding these expectations early, you can be sure to start your job on the right foot.
 - Indicate to your boss or mentor how you perform best at work
 - Are you driven more by the challenge of learning new things and progressing quickly, or is working in a high trust team environment with lots of fun more important to you?
 - Do you prefer to be mentored by someone when learning new things, or do you prefer to work independently where possible and work things out for yourself?
- Is the best way for you to learn by being shown, by doing, or by reading up on things or given a diagram?
- It might be interesting for you to learn more about your boss or mentor on a personal level. How did they get to where they are today? What are their goals going forward? These conversations lead to stronger relationship building and mutual understanding.