

Covid-19 Update – Adapting your farm team to the “new normal”



Information correct as at 14:00pm on 15.05.2020

- Remind the team to maintain hygiene and distancing as per Government guidelines
- Review practices implemented at the beginning of lockdown
- Plan how you are going to effectively manage the team in the medium and long term as rules are gradually relaxed

Dairy farming and agriculture in general have not been affected to the same extent as many other industries during the past 6 weeks of lockdown. Critical farming operations have continued, albeit with some short-term amendments to working practices and staff rotas to comply with the requirements of social distancing and isolation where required. However, when the Covid19 lockdown commenced in mid-March, many non-essential or non-time critical business practices were suspended in the hope that this would be a short-term situation.

It is now becoming increasingly clear, following Sunday's announcements, that whilst rules are being relaxed (in England at least) we will not be “back to normal” any time soon. This means a couple of things for you and your farming families and teams:

- **Keep up the good work** – All the guidelines in relation to hand washing and hygiene and social distancing are still applicable and should be strictly practiced. It is still good practice to ensure that high contact areas and surfaces or implements that external visitors (tanker drivers, vets etc) are in contact with are frequently washed and wiped. It is human nature for things to ‘slip’ over time, but it is important you as the business manager lead by example and keep reminding those you work with to do the same.
- **Review & tweak** – Some short-term measures or emergency procedures put in place may not be suitable, sustainable, or practical for the medium term and may need to evolve as time progresses and Government guidance relaxes. Many farms with larger farm teams amended shift patterns to reduce contact with others and to accommodate employees with parental responsibilities. Now some children may be going back to school and employees’ partners going back to work, there may need to be further discussions about how you ensure shift patterns work for the business and employees.
- **Re-introduce routines with new ways of working** – Many on-farm meetings were suspended in the first instance to comply with the lockdown requirements. Many meetings with external farm team members, such as the bank manager, consultant or advisor have been reintroduced in some way using video calling technology or at distance. If you have not already, now is the time to think about how you can safely reintroduce team meetings, training sessions and one-to-one reviews internally with employees. You and your employees have, no doubt, exponentially increased your confidence in using technology over the lockdown period and we think you can use some of the below technologies in your business over the medium and longer term:
 - **WhatsApp** – Many teams already successfully use WhatsApp to communicate basic information. You can also share photos and videos which are much more effective and time efficient to communicate complex messages such as explaining how to mix the footbath solution or where the grease nipples are on a particular machine. You can also group call up to 4 people via WhatsApp if not everyone uses Facetime.
 - **Zoom** – Great for larger teams and allows multiple participants to video call. Useful for farms who have split shifts or who are running multiple sites where employees are not currently seeing each other (even at distance). It is difficult to get the same level of interaction as a face to face team meeting, but it can be valuable in making sure the team feel connected with each other and as familiarity increases so will the contributions and interaction. Zoom is also effective for running one-to-one meetings

with individual staff members, including annual or scheduled reviews where being able to see each other is important. Running a team training session on Zoom by sharing your screen and using training videos is also a great way to make sure you are providing adequate training for any new employees and keeping your existing team fully trained.

The Kite people team are available virtually (or on-farm as appropriate) to support you with the effective management of your employees both now and on-going. We can offer help with; recruitment, facilitating employee reviews or team meetings or training sessions drafting contracts of employment, dealing with employee issues such as poor performance or contract breaches.

For further discussion or to help with any questions that you may have, please contact Consultant Support on consultantsupport@kiteconsulting.com or 01902 851007 / 07542 403225

