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## Blough dairy farm comprehensive safety & training manual

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BLOUGH DAIRY FARM COMPREHENSIVE SAFETY & TRAINING MANUAL

A Creative Thesis and Reflection Submitted

In Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Designation

University Honors

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Having worked on Blough's Dairy Farm since July of 2021, it has been both my personal experience as well as a general observation that feelings of role ambiguity and task uncertainty, as well as the need for more in depth safety procedure documentation are the three primary challenges generating inefficiency, restricting productivity, and ultimately inhibiting this organization from reaching its full potential.

When workers lack the necessary training and procedural knowledge required to perform organizational tasks successfully, or are unsure if a task is even their responsibility to begin with, the efficiency and productivity of the organization as a whole suffers. Unless employees are provided with clear and consistent task-relevant guidance, feelings of task uncertainty or ambiguity will prevail. This data is echoed perfectly in the sentiments of Farm Manager Josh Blough who explained "I feel that with a small business like ours, job descriptions are difficult to create. I say this because everyone may at some point have to do someone else's "job" which can lead to frustrations"(J. Blough, personal communication, September 14, 2021). The incredibly interdependent organizational nature of Blough's Dairy Farm coupled with the relative lack of standardized procedural information and limited access to relevant clarifying information creates the perfect breeding ground for a wide range of mistakes and inefficiencies to emerge. For one thing, recurring errors in pasteurization procedures such as improper valve tightening and closure, and confusion about system operation in general have resulted in countless easily avoidable mistakes. This is also an issue with colostrum storage where improper handling or packaging renders the product useless. Furthermore, procedural competence and confusion surrounding tasks such as calf and cow stall cleaning and rebedding, initial afterbirth care for calves, and what to do upon discovering a cow that has contracted mastitis or some other

illnesses are only a few procedures not uniformly understood or conducted in a standardized manner by all employees.

Now, this is not to say that Blough Dairy Farm employees lack training, are incapable, or simply do not care about their work because that is absolutely false. Rather, employees lack easy access to the necessary information required to successfully carry out their specific duties and are not being routinely instructed or effectively held accountable to do so. This is directly consistent with research done by Rizzo et al. (1970) who found that when there is a lack of information on responsibilities or role expectations, individuals will engage in trial and error approaches to meet the expectations of their supervisors. Essentially, when workers are unsure how to accomplish a task, they either guess and make an attempt, or do nothing and avoid the issue which leads to varying standards of performance within the organization and has a negative impact on performance overall. This is exactly the case at Blough's Dairy Farm where it is not so much that employees are lazy or simply do not care, but rather more so grounded in a lack of procedural knowledge and sense of task efficacy. When workers are unsure how to do tasks like rebedding calf pens or deep cleaning the parlor and have no way to easily obtain feedback, they will sometimes make an attempt which entails running the risk that the procedure is being done incorrectly. However, more often than not, when faced with role ambiguity or procedural uncertainty, employees will simply avoid addressing the issue entirely. While there are a variety of specific contextual reasons for this avoidance, the primary underlying cause of the hesitation is grounded in the fact that employees would rather not perform a task they are uncertain about--especially those related to animal care--due to the fear of performing the task incorrectly and potentially harming the animals or risk causing other damages.

While seemingly numerous, these challenges are by no means insurmountable or illustrative of organizational failure. Rather, these recurring errors and miscommunications are indicative of the inherent need for standardized role and task clarification as well as procedural documentation within the organization and I truly believe there is an immense amount of opportunity for growth within this business. As a Communication Studies and Psychology double major, it was truly a dream to construct my Creative Thesis Project under the expert guidance of Dr. Dobosh in order to create a comprehensive safety manual and an introductory training manual for Blough's Dairy Farm.

The Blough Dairy Farm Comprehensive Safety & Training Manual Creative Thesis project resulted in the creation of two separate manuals organized with the intention of targeting the many organizational challenges outlined above. In the end, both a Safety Manual and an Introductory Training Manual were created and tailored to meet the specific safety and training needs for Blough's Dairy Farm. These manuals were brought to life as both physical documents and were also saved digitally on a flashdrive which was given to Josh Blough post completion of this project on May 12, 2022. The inclusion of a digital version of the materials will allow for updates and revisions should any future modifications be required. This will allow the manuals to grow with the business and retain relevance for years to come.

The Blough Dairy Farm Safety Manual includes proper legal safety documentation as well as more accessible information for eight key agricultural safety areas as was specifically requested by Josh Blough. The eight OSHA topic areas that lie within the scope of this project include: a Hazard Communication Program, Guarding of Power Take-Offs (PTOs), Horizontal, Upright, and Bunker Silo Safety, Skid Steer Loader Safety, Confined Spaces, Grain Handling, and lastly Hazards: Animal Handling and Farm Structures. The majority of the information was

obtained directly from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration website with each section containing a variety of information ranging from basic informational pamphlets to technical legal documentation. Information was organized in this manner in order to make the content accessible to everyone as much of it could mean the difference between life and death. Overall, the compilation, organization, and review of these eight OSHA topic areas and the relating procedural documents they necessitate will allow the farm to maintain legal compliance while also making for a safer work environment for all employees from this point on.

Similarly, training information was obtained primarily from the National Dairy Farm website. Training information was organized into individual sections and includes information pertaining to all milking procedures, newborn calf care, equipment cleaning, as well as a section on frequently asked questions and answers with the ultimate goal being to provide adequate role and task clarification. As such, the creation of this training manual will directly address organizational struggles with role ambiguity, task uncertainty, while also offering practical solutions meant to mitigate more minor organizational difficulties and frequently asked questions. While intended to be supplementary to onboarding training, the manual is meant to clarify the exact steps necessary to carry out milking procedures by providing sufficient task knowledge should any confusion or complications arise. Ultimately, the creation of these well documented standardized procedures and accompanying detailed implementation plan will be useful in improving worker accountability and will allow for employees to more easily overcome challenges and obtain clarification without needing to constantly consult with a supervisor which will improve both individual worker efficacy and efficiency of the organization as a whole.

Overall, I found this experience to be both incredibly challenging yet also incredibly rewarding and informative. Despite being overwhelming at times with just the sheer amount of

information that needed to be organized and included, I am very pleased with the resulting final product and learned a great deal of helpful information along the way. Seeing as the ultimate goal of this project was to create something that Blough Dairy Farm employees would engage with and would be useful to them, I am very happy with how the manual turned out. All major areas of employee confusion and inefficiency surrounding the milking process especially, were clarified in detail within the Introductory Training Manual. All relevant safety information as requested by Josh Blough was covered in depth within the Safety Manual. Although there are still farm procedures that could have been addressed such as feed mixing protocol, those areas will be included in future updates as the manual is intended to be a living document meant to be updated as the organization grows and evolves.

Ultimately, the information covered in the Blough Dairy Farm Introductory Training Manual, along with the appropriate OSHA compliant safety documentation organized in the Blough Dairy Farm Safety Manual will serve to both improve safety and directly combat feelings of task uncertainty and role ambiguity commonly experienced by farm employees. The creation of these manuals will not only aid in mitigating worker confusion, error and the resulting inefficiency by clarifying job descriptions and procedures, but will also serve as a valuable training resource and explanatory guide that employees will be able to consult during times of uncertainty for years to come. Overall, by making the necessary safety and procedural information accessible to those who need it, the organization has become both a safer and more productive workplace already. Fewer mistakes have been made since the manuals were introduced to employees and it truly warms my heart whenever I see one of my coworkers flipping through the pages to look something up rather than just avoid the task. In the end, I am grateful for all who were involved in this process as it would have been impossible without their

continual support, guidance, and contributions. Just as I had hoped, this experience has truly proven to be a unique and amazing opportunity to engage in meaningful work applying what I have learned during my time here at UNI in an organizational setting, and for that I will always be grateful.



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