

Induction and Onboarding Guide



Delivering
for Dairy

Induction and Onboarding Guide

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
How to Use This Guide	4
The Dairy Capability Guide at a Glance	5
Employee Induction and Onboarding Process	6
Before Day 1	8
Before Day 1 – Employer Checklist	9
Sample Employment Contract	10
Sample Position Description	13
Week 1 - Induction	15
What a First Day Might Look Like	18
Week 1 - Induction Checklist	20
Week 1 - Induction Checklist	21
The First 3 Months – Onboarding	22
The First 3 Months – Onboarding Plan	24
Feedback and Development	27
Using the DCG Capability Matrix	29
DCG Capability Matrix	31
DCG Capability Matrix	32
Common Mistakes When Inducting New Employees (and How to Avoid Them)	33
Dairy Australia Resources	35

Introduction

Welcome to the Induction and Onboarding Guide.

This guide has been developed to support dairy farmers in preparing for, inducting and onboarding new employees on farm. It provides a simple process, practical checklists and templates to help employers introduce new staff to the farm business, explain expectations and support employees as they develop the skills needed to work safely and effectively.



Starting a new job on a dairy farm can be a significant adjustment. Bringing a new employee into a team is not just about filling a vacancy, it involves change and adaptation for the employee, employer and existing team members. A structured onboarding process helps reduce uncertainty, support a safe working environment, strengthen positive team dynamics, improve employee retention and increase the likelihood of a successful, productive team environment.



This guide focuses on the first stages of employment – preparation, induction and the first three months of onboarding. It also introduces tools such as the Dairy Capability Guide, coaching guides and training resources that can support capability development and ongoing employee management on farm.



The People in Dairy website provides a wide range of practical tools, templates and resources to support farmers in managing people on farm. Templates referred to in this guide are available on the Dairy Australia People in Dairy website.



Please note that this guide is intended as a practical starting point only. Workplace requirements, legal obligations and recommended practices can change over time. Farmers should always refer to the People in Dairy website and relevant government sources to ensure they are using the most up-to-date information and resources.

How to Use This Guide

This guide provides a simple, structured process to help farmers prepare for, induct and onboard new employees on farm.

It includes practical checklists and templates to support each stage of employment, from before day one through to capability development.

You can use this guide to:

- prepare for a new employee before their first day, including completing required paperwork and organising practical arrangements
- introduce the employee to the farm during their first week, covering safety, routines and workplace expectations
- support the employee through their first three months using structured onboarding, coaching and capability discussions
- review capability and identify training needs using the Dairy Capability Guide and Capability Matrix



The checklists and templates can also be used to record key discussions and training completed during induction and onboarding, helping maintain clear and organised employee records. Additional templates and resources are available on the People in Dairy website and should be used alongside this guide.



The Dairy Capability Guide at a Glance

The Dairy Capability Guide (DCG) helps farmers define the knowledge, skills and behaviours required for different roles on a dairy farm.

While this booklet focuses on induction and onboarding, these stages also form part of the broader Dairy Capability Guide framework. The DCG supports the entire employee journey, from recruitment through to ongoing development. The DCG is available from the Dairy Australia Resources links on page 35 of this booklet.



The DCG is used to support induction and onboarding by helping farmers clarify role expectations, assess capability and identify training needs as new employees develop their skills.

More broadly, the DCG can be used to:

- define role expectations before hiring
- guide induction and onboarding training
- assess capability using the Capability Matrix
- support Training and Development plans and feedback discussions
- structure performance and capability check-ins



Employee Induction and Onboarding Process

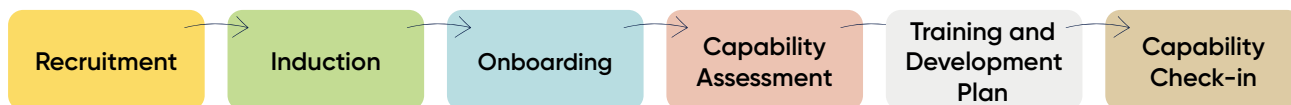
Induction and onboarding are different stages of the employee experience.

Induction (Week 1) focuses on helping a new employee start safely and understand the basics, including safety, farm routines, team introductions and role expectations. Induction helps an employee start the job safely.

Onboarding (the first three months) focuses on building capability and confidence through ongoing training, coaching, feedback and increasing responsibility. Onboarding helps employees succeed in the role long term.

This guide follows a four-stage process to support new employees from preparation through to the end of a 90 day onboarding process:

Before Day 1 – Preparation	• Complete employment paperwork and compliance requirements • Confirm role expectations, pay and conditions • Organise practical arrangements (who will greet the employee, PPE, accommodation, contacts) • Set clear expectations before arrival
Week 1 – Induction	• Introduce the employee to the farm, team and routines • Cover key safety information and workplace policies • Provide close supervision and buddy support • Begin training on core tasks
Months 1–3 – Onboarding	• Build skills and confidence through structured training and coaching • Gradually increase responsibility and independence • Provide regular feedback and check-ins • Identify capability gaps against their position description and training needs
End of Month 3 – Capability Review	• Assess capability using the Dairy Capability Guide and the employee's position description • Confirm strengths and development areas • Develop or update the Training and Development plan • Transition into ongoing performance and capability discussions



Induction and Onboarding

Week 1	Induction, safety, basic routines
Month 1	Familiarisation, capability and skill development
Month 2	Increasing responsibility and independence
Month 3	Capability Assessment, Training and Development Plan



Before Day 1

The pre-employment process plays an important role in setting a new employee up for a positive and successful start. Clear communication before day one helps the employee understand their role, expectations, working conditions and what they need to bring or prepare. When paperwork, employment terms and practical arrangements are organised early, it reduces confusion, prevents delays and allows the employee to begin with confidence.

A well-managed pre-employment process also supports the employer. It ensures legal, payroll and compliance requirements are met, safety obligations are considered early, and both parties start with clear and shared expectations. Preparing properly before the employee arrives means less stress on the first day, smoother onboarding, and more time to focus on training and building capability.

The **Dairy Capability Guide** should be used from this stage to help clarify role expectations and required capabilities. The Guide provides a consistent framework for understanding the skills, knowledge and behaviours needed for success in different farm roles, which helps employers set clear expectations from the beginning and match recruitment decisions to the needs of the farm.

Taking the time to complete these steps before the employee starts helps create a professional first impression, builds trust from the outset and sets the foundation for a safe, productive and positive working relationship.

The Dairy Capability Guide helps farmers:

- define expectations before employment starts
- align job descriptions to real capability requirements
- identify what a new employee should already know vs what will be developed through induction and onboarding
- set a clear starting point for training and performance development

Hiring Backpackers and Visa Holders

Many dairy farms employ backpackers and other visa holders to help meet workforce needs. While the induction and onboarding process is generally the same as for any employee, employers must ensure the worker has the legal right to work in Australia before employment begins. Before the employee starts, complete and record a visa work rights check using the Australian Government's Visa Entitlement Verification Online (VEVO) system. Employers should also confirm any visa conditions that may affect the employee's work arrangements, such as restrictions on the type of work, employer, location, or length of employment.

Backpackers are often employed for shorter periods than other workers. While all safety, compliance and role specific induction requirements must still be completed, employers may choose to prioritise induction and onboarding activities that are most relevant to the employee's role and expected length of employment. This can help employees become productive more quickly while ensuring they receive the information and training required to work safely and effectively.

When inducting backpackers or workers who are new to Australia, it may be helpful to spend extra time explaining farm terminology, workplace expectations, and safety requirements to ensure they understand their responsibilities.

Before Day 1 – Employer Checklist

Use this checklist before a new employee starts to ensure all essential documents and information are provided.

Before Day 1 – Employer Checklist	
Area	Action to be Taken
1 – Employment & Legal Documents	☐ Employment Contract (Federal Award Template) - Signed by both employer and employee before or on commencement. - Dairy Australia template includes minimum legal requirements. - Contract templates available on Dairy Australia's People in Dairy site – Contracts and Agreements The People in Dairy
	☐ Tax File Number (TFN) Declaration - Completed by employee. - Information entered via accounting/payroll system
	☐ Fair Work Information Statement (FWIS) - Must be provided to all new employees, legal requirement on commencement. - Found on the Australian Government Fair Work Ombudsman site – Fair Work Information Statement – Fair Work Ombudsman
	☐ Pastoral Award (MA000035) (or another applicable award) - Employee must have access to the Award applying to their employment. This can be provided via a digital link or hard copy. - Award viewer: Pastoral Award 2020 [MA000035] – Fair Work Ombudsman
	☐ Superannuation Choice Form - Employee must be given the option to choose their own fund. - Found on the Australian Government ATO site – Superannuation standard choice form Australian Taxation Office
2 – Role & Expectations	☐ Job Description - Provide employee with role description (Templates available on Dairy Australia's People in Dairy site – The position description The People in Dairy) - Update to reflect farm-specific duties. - Use the DCG to align job expectations with required capability levels for the role.
	☐ Position Classification / Level Confirmed Correct classification under the Pastoral Award documented.
	☐ Pay Rate & Hours Confirmed in Writing
3 – Payroll & Administration	☐ Bank Details Collected
	☐ Emergency Contact Details Completed
	☐ Proof of Work Rights Verified (where applicable, VEVO check completed and recorded)
	☐ Super Fund Details Recorded
	☐ Copy of relevant licences provided (drivers licence, forklift licence, etc.)
	☐ Payroll System Setup Completed
4 – First Day Practical Arrangements	☐ Start Date and Start Time Confirmed
	☐ Work Location / Farm Address Confirmed
	☐ Who to Report To on Arrival Confirmed
	☐ Contact Phone Number Provided (in case employee is delayed or lost)
	☐ Parking / Access Instructions Provided (gate codes, entry points etc.)
	☐ What to Bring Advised (boots, clothing, PPE, lunch, etc.)
	☐ First Day Plan Explained (induction, training, introduction to team)

Sample Employment Contract

<insert business name>

EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT

(For Permanent Award Employees of National System Employers)

This is an employment contract

BETWEEN <insert company name/partnership/other name > the Employer

AND

<insert employee's full name> the Employee

1 Commencement Date

This employment contract commences on the <insert commencement date>.

2 Probation

2.1 Employment is subject to the satisfactory completion of a three-month probation period.

2.2 The purpose of the probation period is to enable the employer and the employee to assess their suitability and capability to work together.

2.3 During the probation period the employer or the employee has the right to terminate the employment with one week's notice for any reason and without any repercussions.

3 Award

The Pastoral Award 2020 and the federal industrial laws govern this employment contract.

4 Employment Category

4.1 The employee is employed as a full-time permanent/part-time *[delete where not applicable]* <insert position title> to undertake the duties as outlined in the attached position description, and such further or other duties reasonably required by the employer in respect of which the employee has the skills to perform and which may include working for an affiliate or related entity of the employer. *[attach position description.]*

4.2 By signing this employment contract, the employee agrees that s/he has disclosed to the employer all information including medical and workers' compensation information that could reasonably be held to be relevant to his/her ability to perform the role and duties as described in this clause and the attached Position Description safely and competently.

5 Employment Classification

The employee is classified as a <insert classification>.

6 Ordinary hours of work

[full-time employees]

The ordinary hours of work are <insert ordinary hours of work>.

OR

[part time employees]

The days of work and the daily starting and finishing times will be presented on fortnightly rosters and will be rostered within the following regime:

<insert expected days and hours of work and starting and finishing times>

Work performed in accordance with the fortnightly rosters and subsequent submission of a completed timesheet will be taken to indicate agreement pursuant to clause 10.3 of the Pastoral Award 2020.

7 Overtime/Additional hours

7.1 The employee will be expected to work reasonable additional hours.

7.2 This contract anticipates that the employee will work <insert number of overtime/additional hours anticipated to be worked >

8 Remuneration

8.1 The rate of pay is <insert pay rate> per hour/per week *[delete where not applicable]*.

8.2 The rate of pay for overtime is <insert pay rate>.

8.3. The employer will pay the employee weekly/fortnightly *[delete where not applicable]* into a bank account/by cheque/in cash *[delete where not applicable]*.

Sample Employment Contract

(continued)

9 Annual Leave

[full-time employees]

- 9.1 The employee is entitled to four weeks paid annual leave for each completed year of service with the employer. Annual leave accrues throughout the year and from year to year.

OR

[part-time employees]

The employee is entitled to annual leave of four weeks per year calculated on a pro-rata basis according to the number of hours worked each week. Annual leave accrues throughout the year and from year to year.

- 9.2 The employee is entitled to an annual leave loading of 17.5% for all annual leave taken or paid out upon termination of employment.

10 Personal/Carer's leave and Compassionate Leave

"Immediate family" is defined as follows:

- a) A spouse, child, parent, grandparent, grandchild or sibling of the employee;
- b) A child, parent grandparent, grandchild or sibling of a spouse of the employee.

[full-time employees]

- 10.1 The employee is entitled to 10 days' paid personal/carer's leave per year for personal injury or illness. Personal/carer's leave accrues throughout the year and from year to year.

OR

[part-time employees]

The employee is entitled to paid personal/carer's leave of 10 days per year calculated on a pro-rata basis according to the number of hours worked each week. Personal/carer's leave accrues throughout the year and from year to year.

- 10.2 The employee can use their personal/carer's leave as paid carer's leave for the purpose of caring for a member of the employee's immediate family or household who requires care or support because of personal injury, illness or an unexpected emergency.
- 10.3 The employee is entitled to two days unpaid personal/carer's leave per occasion for the purpose of caring for a member of their immediate family or household who requires care or support because of personal injury, illness or an unexpected emergency.
- 10.4 The employee is entitled to two days' paid compassionate leave per occasion for the purpose of attending the funeral of a member of the employee's immediate family or a member of the employee's household or for spending time with a member of the employee's immediate family or a member of the employee's household who has a personal injury or illness which poses a serious threat to his or her life.
- 10.5 The employer may require medical evidence or a statutory declaration for any period of personal/carer's leave or compassionate leave.

11 Public Holidays

[full time employees]

- 11.1 In accordance with the National Employment Standards, the employee is entitled to a day's paid leave for public holidays which fall on days when the employee would ordinarily work.

OR

[part time employees]

In accordance with the National Employment Standards, the employee is entitled to be paid for the hours they would ordinarily work on public holidays which fall on days when the employee would ordinarily work.

- 11.2 If the employee works on a public holiday he/she is entitled to be paid at double time.

12 Community Service Leave

The employee is entitled to 10 days' paid jury service leave or unpaid leave to attend a voluntary emergency management activity as provided for in the NES. The employee must provide evidence of the need for the leave if required to do so by the employer.

13 Long Service Leave

The employee is entitled to long service leave as provided for in the National Employment Standards or state legislation.

Sample Employment Contract

(continued)

14 Parental Leave

The employee is entitled to Parental Leave in the form of Maternity, Paternity or Adoption Leave as provided for in the National Employment Standards.

15 Flexible Working Arrangements

The employee is entitled to make a written request for flexible working arrangements once the employee has completed 12 months continuous service.

16 Family and Domestic Violence leave

The employee is entitled to leave to deal with family and domestic violence in accordance with the National Employment Standards.

17 Superannuation

The employer will make superannuation contributions to a fund nominated by the employee. The superannuation contribution will be not less than that required under the *Superannuation Guarantee (Administration) Act*.

18 Termination

18.1 The following minimum notice periods apply to termination of employment:

Employee's period of continuous service with the employer at the end of the day the notice is given	Period
1 Not more than 1 year	1 week
2 More than 1 year but not more than 3 years	2 weeks
3 More than 3 years but not more than 5 years	3 weeks
4 More than 5 years	4 weeks

18.2 If the employee is over 45 years of age and has worked at least two years of continuous service with the employer the period of notice will be increased by one week.

18.3 Payment in lieu of notice will be made if the appropriate notice period is not required to be worked.

18.4 The employee is required to give the employer the same amount of notice as a minimum. This does not include the extra week based on age of the employee. If the employee does not give the employer notice and the employee is over 18 years of age, the employer can deduct up to one week's pay from the employee's termination payments.

18.5 If the employee has been given notice of termination he/she is entitled to up to one day off without loss of pay to look for work.

18.6 The period of notice to be given by the employer will not apply in the case of dismissal for serious misconduct that justifies instant dismissal, including conduct which causes imminent and serious risk to the health or safety of a person or the reputation, viability or profitability of the employer's business; attendance at work under the influence of alcohol or drugs; sexual harassment, theft, fraud, assault in the course of employment or refusal to carry out a lawful and reasonable instruction.

19 Other Benefits

[Other benefits e.g. accommodation can be listed here.]

SIGNED

THE EMPLOYER

THE EMPLOYEE

DATED

Sample Position Description

Farm/Company Name

Position Description

Position Title Farmhand (FLH 3)

Work Location Address, site

Reports to: Title of Manager (not person's name)

☐ Full-time

☐ Fixed term

☐ Part-time

☐ Casual

Position Summary:

As a Farmhand you are responsible for contributing to the success of the dairy farm via a diverse range of tasks such as milking, attending to livestock, pasture work and farm maintenance. Your primary purpose is to complete jobs on time and effectively, however as dairy farms are diverse and complex businesses your daily tasks will vary depending on seasonal needs.

Experience needed:

- At least 12 months experience
- Additional training will be provided on-the-job or through external training providers

Qualifications that are useful:

- Certificate 2 or 3 in Agriculture

Certificates or licences required:

- Driver's licence

To be successful in this role you will need:

- Proven problem-solving skills
- A history of effectively following instructions and standard operating procedures, to achieve successful outcomes
- Demonstrated ability to work independently, under supervision or as part of a team to achieve business goals
- A genuine, demonstrated interest in agriculture
- A track record of punctuality and reliability in past roles/activities
- The ability and willingness to positively represent your farm business and the dairy industry in general
- A demonstrated commitment to improvement and learning
- The ability to effectively follow directions, policies and procedures to contribute to farm goals, improve sustainability and the environment and contribute to a safe, positive work environment
- The ability to communicate effectively, displaying professionalism and engagement with the farm team
- Health and safety and animal welfare is a priority of our farm business. Health and safety and animal welfare policies, procedures and behaviour MUST always be adhered to

Personal Health

- Appropriate fitness to effectively perform inherent requirements of the position. These include, but are not limited to, working with animals, working with chemicals with the use of personal protective equipment, working in the presence of crops, grains and seeds, walking through paddocks and around the dairy, operating farm machinery and equipment, putting cups on and off cows, lifting, opening and closing gates and working outdoors in all seasons.
- It is recommended that you speak to your doctor about undertaking a Q Fever test and vaccination and discuss your doctor's recommendation with your manager

Dairy Capability Guide

This position aligns with the following level of the Dairy Capability Guide:

Apply: You have the capability to consistently complete tasks independently, requiring only periodic reviews of performance of the task(s). You can recognise when processes are not operating according to procedure and will report this to your supervisor.

Sample Position Description

(continued)

Key responsibilities:

To achieve successful farm outcomes, you are responsible in the following areas:

Milking, Health and Nutrition - you'll ensure the health, safety and welfare of our livestock and safely produce high milk quality, through daily tasks such as:

- Independently applying safe milking operating procedures and policies.
- Independently bringing cows to and from the dairy and practicing safe handling of livestock procedures.
- Notifying and reporting any cattle health concerns to your supervisor.
- Independently apply calf rearing processes according to policies and procedures

Feed-base management - you'll help maintain a successful feed-base for our livestock by:

- Independently preparing stockfeed and feeding cattle.
- Completing crop and paddock duties as required.

Soils, Water management, and Irrigation – You will independently apply the irrigation plan as directed by:

- Laying, operating and repairing irrigation and/or drainage pipes as directed
- Applying the irrigation plan.

Vehicles, Machinery and Farm Maintenance - You must comply with Work Health and Safety procedures when operating farm machinery and equipment, assisting with cleaning and maintenance, and performing other farm tasks, including:

- Using all farm machinery and equipment, including quad bikes, in accordance with Work Health and Safety procedures.
- Maintaining cleanliness of milk plant and applying safe food practices.
- Maintaining general cleanliness of farm property and completing farm maintenance and improvements.
- Safely applying and storing agrichemicals using correctly fitting personal protective equipment.

Increasing general farm effectiveness through activities which might include:

- Applying practices to improve sustainability and the environment.
- Applying digital technology to collect and report data.
- Communicating effectively, and professionally and engaging with farm team.
- Other duties as directed by your supervisor within scope of training, skills and knowledge, or to safely work towards increasing your capability and skills.

Other important links:

Pastoral Award: [FWO - Award Viewer - MA000035 \(fairwork.gov.au\)](#)

Fair Work Statement: [Fair Work Information Statement - Fair Work Ombudsman](#)

Casual Information Statement (for Casual staff only): [Casual Employment Information Statement - Fair Work Ombudsman](#)

Dairy Capability Guide: [DFCF Overview | The People in Dairy](#)

Week 1 – Induction

Employees are more engaged and productive when they understand the goals of the business. Take time to explain your farm's aims and how their role contributes to farm goals. Providing early introductions to the farm, co-workers, and the responsibilities of both the new employee and their team members helps establish clear expectations and foster positive working relationships.

Use the **Induction Checklist** (on page 20-21) to make sure all essential information is covered during the first few days. The first three days are especially important for building confidence and establishing safe work habits. New employees should be closely supervised during this period, ideally shadowing an experienced team member or working with a buddy.

Close supervision helps prevent mistakes, reduces safety risks and gives new employees the opportunity to ask questions as they learn. It also allows their manager and colleagues to confirm understanding and ensure they are settling into the role before moving toward more independent work.

During induction, begin introducing the **Dairy Capability Guide**. The Guide helps explain expected behaviours, skill levels and responsibilities for the role, giving both the employee and supervisor a shared understanding of capability expectations from the beginning.

Week 1 Focus

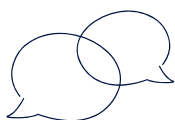
- Complete the induction checklist and safety requirements
- Introduce the employee to the team, routines and expectations
- Provide close supervision and buddy support
- Train on core tasks using Safe Operating Procedures (SOPs)
- Explain safe work practices during every task
- Check understanding regularly and encourage questions
- Begin discussing capability expectations using the Dairy Capability Guide



Farm Workplace Policies	Farm workplace policies set clear expectations around behaviour, safety and how workplace issues are managed. They help create a safe and respectful workplace, improve consistency across the team, reduce safety and legal risks, and support good staff retention. Policies work alongside Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) by outlining how people are expected to work and behave on your farm.
Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)	SOPs explain how key tasks should be completed to ensure work is done safely and consistently. They help maintain standards, reduce risk and make training easier when multiple people are performing the same tasks. For example, consistent milking hygiene procedures help reduce mastitis risk and maintain milk quality. The Dairy Capability Guide supports SOP training by helping supervisors identify the level of capability required to perform each task and where additional coaching or support may be needed. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) explain how tasks should be completed, while the DCG helps define the level of capability needed to carry out those tasks safely, confidently and consistently.
Templates and Resources	Templates to help develop Farm Workplace Policies and SOPs are available on Dairy Australia's People in Dairy site: Farm Workplace Policies – Farm Workplace Policies The People in Dairy Standard Operating Procedures – Standard Operating Procedures The People in Dairy Note: The policies listed in the induction checklist are not exhaustive. They should be adapted to suit your farm's operations, risks and workplace requirements, and additional policies may be needed depending on the work undertaken.



Practical Tips



- Involve existing staff in onboarding to help explain roles and demonstrate tasks
- Identify training needs early and include them in the Training and Development plan
- Ensure regular check-ins occur during the first two weeks
- Explain farm terminology and routines clearly – avoid assumptions
- Hold team meetings soon after the new employee commences to help them connect with the team
- Use visual aids such as whiteboards, calendars and task lists
- Consider assigning a buddy for the first week
- Choose a buddy who is supportive and a good role model

Explaining Farm Terminology

Dairy farms often use shorthand terms that are familiar to experienced workers but new to others. Taking time to explain these early helps reduce confusion and build confidence.

Encourage supervisors and team members to:

- Avoid assuming prior knowledge
- Explain terms as they arise during tasks
- Check understanding and invite questions

Examples of common terms that may need explanation include:

- Bringing cows in, springers, drafting, backing gate, wash cycles, cups on/off

Clear communication early on helps new employees learn faster, work more safely and feel more confident asking questions.

Farm Culture and Expectations

Every farm operates differently. Clearly explaining your workplace culture early helps new employees understand what is expected and how the team works together.

This may include:

- Communication expectations (how and when to raise issues)
- Punctuality and reliability
- Teamwork and supporting others
- Animal welfare standards
- Work quality and accountability

Employees who have worked on other farms may be used to different standards.

Explaining that things may be different on your farm to where the employee worked previously is part of change management as the new employee transitions from one workplace to another. Being clear from the beginning helps avoid misunderstandings and supports a smoother transition into your workplace.

Explaining the "Why" Behind Tasks

Training should focus not only on how tasks are done, but why they are done that way.

When employees understand the purpose behind tasks, they are more likely to:

- Work safely and consistently
- Make better decisions when working independently
- Stay engaged and take ownership of their role

Examples include:

- Milking hygiene → supports milk quality and reduces mastitis
- Animal handling → improves welfare and reduces stress
- Pasture management → supports feed quality and farm productivity

If there isn't time to explain something in the moment, make a note and come back to it later. Understanding the "why" is key to building capability and long-term performance.



DCG Tip

Use the Dairy Capability Guide to explain what good performance looks like for this role and the level of capability expected. Capabilities can be included in:

- Job descriptions
 - Induction
 - Onboarding plan
 - Feedback discussions
 - Capability matrix section
-

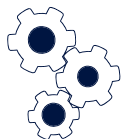
What a First Day Might Look Like

Every farm is different, but a structured first day helps reduce uncertainty and build confidence.

A typical first day may include:

Morning	• Welcome and introductions to the team • Overview of the farm (size, system, goals) • Explain the plan for the day • Provide PPE and discuss basic safety requirements
Mid-morning	• Farm walkthrough (dairy, yards, sheds, amenities) • Explain key risks and safe work practices, particularly emergency procedures, no-go zones and incident reporting • Introduce basic farm terminology and routines
Afternoon	• Observe or shadow key tasks (e.g. milking, feeding, moving cows) • Demonstrate simple tasks with supervision • Encourage questions and check understanding
End of Day	• Recap key points • Confirm start time for next shift • Ask how the employee found the first day





A clear and structured first day helps employees feel welcomed, supported and more confident returning on day two.



Week 1 – Induction Checklist

Use the Induction Checklist to make sure all essential information is covered during the first few days.

Week 1 – Induction Checklist			
Employee Name:			
Supervisor:			
Start Date:			
Task / Activity	Date	Employee Initial	Supervisor Initial
Introduction to the farm ☐ History of the farm and business ☐ About the farm – cows, milking system ☐ Goals of the business ☐ Culture and values – Code of Conduct ☐ The team – Organisation Chart ☐ Who's who – reporting lines			
Terms and Conditions of Employment ☐ Position description ☐ Probationary period ☐ Hours of work ☐ Leave requests ☐ Pay method and frequency ☐ Rosters and timekeeping explained			
Health and Safety on Farm ☐ PPE explained and provided (Day1) ☐ Equipment issued ☐ First aid location show ☐ Reporting hazards/injuries process explained ☐ Emergency procedure and assembly points			
The Farm Map ☐ Site tour completed ☐ Farm map provided ☐ Break locations and amenities shown			
Meet the team and Communication ☐ Introduced to team members ☐ Meet supervisors and coaches ☐ Communication methods discussed e.g. WhatsApp group, mobile numbers			
Dairy Learn – Dairy Australia Online Training Platform ☐ Create Dairy Learn account ☐ Enrol in 'Starting Your Career in Dairy' courses ☐ Complete 'Starting a job in dairy (Safety and Livestock)' course			

Week 1 – Induction Checklist

(continued)

Task / Activity	Date	Employee Initial	Supervisor Initial
Farm Workplace Policies Core policies: ☐ Code of Conduct ☐ Drug and Alcohol Policy ☐ Social Media Policy ☐ No Bullying Policy ☐ Children in the workplace Policy ☐ Accommodation Guidelines (if applicable) Health, Safety and Compliance: ☐ Q-Fever Policy ☐ Injury, Incident and Near Miss Reporting Policy ☐ Biosecurity and Hygiene Policy Machinery and Equipment: ☐ Quad Bike Policy ☐ Equipment, Vehicles and Machinery Use Policy Animal Welfare: ☐ Livestock Handling and Animal Welfare Policy			
Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) ☐ Chemical Handling ☐ Quad Bikes ☐ Side by Side Vehicles ☐ Two Wheel Motorbikes ☐ Using Tractors ☐ Milking Machinery and Procedure ☐ Working with Livestock ☐ Newborn Calf Procedure ☐ Feeding Calves ☐ Dairy Maintenance ☐ Chainsaw Use ☐ Use of a Telehandler			
Notes: 			

The First 3 Months – Onboarding

Research shows that employees who receive structured onboarding are more likely to stay in their role and perform confidently. Investing time in the first three months reduces safety risks, improves productivity and strengthens team culture.

Starting work on a dairy farm can be a big adjustment, with new tasks, routines and safety requirements to learn. Onboarding is the structured process that helps a new employee settle into the farm, understand expectations and become a confident, capable member of the team.

Onboarding is not a one-day event. It should continue over the first three months of employment. A well-planned onboarding process helps build trust, improves safety, reduces mistakes, supports staff retention and sets clear expectations early. It also allows you to identify training needs and develop employee capability in a planned and supported way.

The Dairy Capability Guide should be used throughout onboarding to guide discussions about capability, expectations and development. It provides a clear framework to assess progress, identify gaps and support ongoing development conversations between the employee and supervisor.

Month 1 – Capability Assessment & Development

After induction, the focus shifts to building skills and confirming capability.

- Review early performance and check understanding of procedures and animal handling
- Identify skill gaps and training needs
- Use the Dairy Capability Guide to assess current capability levels
- Develop a clear Training and Development plan based on identified gaps
- Increase responsibility as confidence and competence improve
- Provide regular feedback and clarify expectations

Months 2–3 – Building Independence

During months two and three, the focus shifts to strengthening capability and embedding the employee into the team.

- Continue structured training and coaching
- Increase ownership of daily tasks as capability develops
- Hold regular feedback discussions and development check-ins
- Monitor progress against expectations and capability goals
- Confirm long-term fit within the team and role

The onboarding and probationary period should be used to support, train and assess new employees, ensuring they have a fair opportunity to demonstrate their skills, work ethic and ability to integrate into the farm team. At the end of this period, employers should be able to make an informed decision about whether the employee is suitable for ongoing employment.

Good Onboarding Includes

- Clear communication and expectations
- Written and verbal instructions
- Health, safety and animal welfare training
- Introduction to team culture and values
- Ongoing feedback and regular check-ins
- Identification of capability gaps and a plan to address them
- Coaching and support matched to the employee's experience level



A strong onboarding process helps employees become confident, productive and safe more quickly. Investing time in the first three months sets up both the employee and the farm for long-term success.

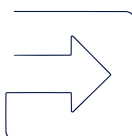
The Capability Matrix from the Dairy Capability Guide can be used to formally assess the employee's capability across key areas of dairy farming. This assessment helps identify strengths, highlight areas where further training may be needed and inform the employee's ongoing Training and Development plan.



Dairy Australia Coaching and Onboarding Guides

The Coaching and Onboarding Guides available on the People in Dairy website are designed to support farmers when training and supporting new employees. They can be used to:

1. Prepare for training discussions – Review the guide before meeting with the employee to understand the key topics and tasks that should be explained.
2. Support on-farm coaching – Use the guide while demonstrating tasks to help structure the conversation and ensure important safety and process steps are covered.
3. Encourage learning and discussion – The guides include prompts and questions that help check understanding and encourage employees to ask questions as they learn.



Using the Coaching Guides alongside your Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and the Dairy Capability Guide helps ensure new employees receive clear, consistent training during the induction and onboarding period.

The First 3 Months – Onboarding Plan

The purpose of this plan is to support the new employee through their first three months on farm by setting clear expectations, reviewing capability development and identifying any training or support required. Use the Dairy Capability Guide (DCG) to guide capability discussions, identify strengths and capability gaps, and document development actions during onboarding.

The First 3 Months – Onboarding Plan			
Employee Name:			
Supervisor:			
Start Date:			
Month 1 – Settling In & Capability Assessment			
Task / Activity	Date	Employee Initial	Supervisor Initial
Focus: Transition from induction to skill development and early capability assessment. ☐ Induction completed and core safety requirements met ☐ Core farm routines introduced and practised ☐ Close supervision provided ☐ SOPs explained and demonstrated ☐ Initial DCG capability discussion completed ☐ DCG Matrix completed ☐ Dairy Learn Online Training - Complete Introduction to Australian Dairy ☐ Dairy Learn Online Training - Complete Rearing Health Calves Fundamentals ☐ Dairy Learn Online Training - Complete Milking and Mastitis Management Fundamentals → These courses support foundation knowledge and reinforce safe and consistent work practices.			
Month 1 – Capability & Training Review			
• What tasks is the employee confident with? • What tasks require more support? • What capability gaps have been identified (using DCG)?			
Discussion and training priorities identified:			
Action	Date	Employee Initial	Supervisor Initial
☐ Coaching provided by supervisor/buddy ☐ Additional training scheduled ☐ Responsibilities gradually increased			
Details:			

The First 3 Months – Onboarding Plan (continued)

Month 2 – Skill Development & Increasing Responsibility			
Task / Activity	Date	Employee Initial	Supervisor Initial
Focus: Building confidence, consistency and independence. ☐ Ongoing coaching and feedback ☐ Employee completing routine tasks with reduced supervision ☐ Continued use of SOPs and safe work practices ☐ DCG capability review updated			
Month 2 – Capability & Training Review			
• What tasks require supervision? • What tasks still require coaching?			
Discussion and training priorities identified:			
Action	Date	Employee Initial	Supervisor Initial
☐ Additional training provided ☐ Training and Development plan updated ☐ New skills introduced			
Details:			
Month 3 – Independence & Role Confirmation			
Task / Activity	Date	Employee Initial	Supervisor Initial
Focus: Confirm capability, embed employee into team and review long-term fit. ☐ Employee operating confidently within role ☐ Work quality and safety standards consistently achieved ☐ Capability reviewed against role expectations and position description using DCG ☐ Development goals discussed			

The First 3 Months – Onboarding Plan (continued)

Month 3 – Capability & Training Review			
• What strengths have been demonstrated • What areas require continued development			
Discussion and training priorities identified:			
Action	Date	Employee Initial	Supervisor Initial
☐ Ongoing training plan confirmed ☐ Future development goals discussed ☐ Transition to normal Capability Check-in cycle			
Details:			
End of Month 3 – Onboarding completion and Training and Development plan			
Task / Activity	Date	Employee Initial	Supervisor Initial
☐ Onboarding completed ☐ Training and Development plan finalised ☐ Next review date scheduled			
Supervisor comments:			
Employee Comments:			

Feedback and Development

Feedback is one of the most important parts of developing capable and confident employees on farm. Waiting until formal Capability Check-in (performance reviews) to discuss performance can mean problems go unnoticed for too long, or good work goes unrecognised.

Providing regular feedback during everyday work helps employees understand what they are doing well, where they can improve and what is expected of them in their role.

The Importance of Regular Feedback

On a dairy farm, learning often happens while doing the job. Short conversations during daily tasks are often the most effective way to support learning and build skills.

Regular feedback helps to:

- correct mistakes early before they become habits
- reinforce safe work practices
- build employee confidence and capability
- recognise good performance
- improve communication between team members
- support continuous learning and development



Feedback does not need to be formal or complicated. Often the most valuable feedback happens through quick conversations while working together, such as explaining why something is done a certain way, suggesting a better approach or acknowledging when a job has been done well.

Creating a culture where feedback is normal and constructive helps employees feel supported and improves overall farm performance.





Tips for Providing Effective Feedback

- Provide feedback **close to when the task occurs**
- Be **clear and specific** about what was done well or what needs improvement
- Focus on the **task or behaviour**, not the person
- Encourage employees to ask questions and share ideas
- Balance feedback by recognising **both good performance and areas for improvement**

Regular feedback should be seen as part of everyday farm communication, not something that only happens during formal Capability Check-ins. More information on how to provide feedback is available on the People in Dairy website.



Learning on Farm (70-20-10 Model)



People in agriculture generally prefer to be "hands on". This is why learning through the 70-20-10 model works well in agriculture

- 70% – Doing the job (hands-on tasks)
- 20% – Coaching and mentoring from supervisors or experienced staff
- 10% – Formal training such as Dairy Learn courses or extension programs

The DCG helps guide what capability can be developed through the 70-20-10 learning model

Using the DCG Capability Matrix

The Dairy Capability Guide provides a framework for understanding the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to perform different roles on a dairy farm.

It groups capabilities across key areas such as dairy farming practice, farm business performance, people management, communication and leadership.

The Capability Matrix

The Capability Matrix is a practical tool which sits alongside the DCG that helps farm businesses assess an employee's capability and identify areas for development.

Capabilities include a combination of:

- **Knowledge** – understanding how and why tasks are done
- **Skills** – the ability to carry out tasks effectively
- **Abilities** – applying knowledge and skills to achieve outcomes on farm

Using the matrix helps employers and employees clearly understand:

- what capability level is expected for the role
- what the employee can currently do
- where further training or development may be needed

This supports clearer expectations, structured training and better workforce planning on farm.

When to use the Capability Matrix	The timing of the Capability Matrix assessment depends on the employee's experience.
Brand New Employees	The Capability Matrix can be used at commencement; however, for employees who are new to the dairy industry, it is recommended that it be completed after the first three months of onboarding.
Experienced Employees	The Capability Matrix is recommended for use at commencement and should be reviewed regularly to assess competency, support skill development, and identify opportunities for further training and improvement.

Capability Levels

The Dairy Capability Guide outlines five capability levels that reflect increasing responsibility and skill.

Level	Description
Follow	Complete tasks under supervision
Apply	Complete tasks independently
Ensure & Advise	Supervise tasks and support others
Initiate & Influence	Lead areas of work and influence farm practices
Set Strategy	Set direction and strategy for the business

Most farm operations roles sit within the *Follow*, *Apply* or *Ensure & Advise* levels.

Using the Matrix to Support Development

Once the Capability Matrix assessment is completed, it should be used to guide employee development.

This involves:

- discussing capability levels with the employee
- identifying skills that need improvement
- creating a Training and Development plan
- reviewing progress during performance discussions

Development may include on-farm coaching, Dairy Learn courses or external training.

Regular capability discussions help employees build skills, improve confidence and contribute more effectively to the farm business.

Example Capability Discussion

Supervisor questions:

- What tasks do you feel confident doing on your own?
- What tasks would you like more practice with?
- What parts of the job are still unclear?
- What skills would you like to develop over the next few months?
-

These conversations can be supported using the Capability Matrix.



DCG Capability Matrix

Capability Matrix Assessment		Employee Name:		Date:	
Capability Area/Specific Capability	Rating	Priority	Gap	Development priority/Comments	
Dairy Cattle - Milking, Health & Nutrition					
Milking					
Reproduction inc genetics and genomics					
Husbandry & livestock handling across the lifespan					
Nutrition and health across the lifespan					
Dairy Cattle - Feed Based Management					
Pasture based nutrition					
Fodder cropping & conservations					
External commodities					
Soils, Water Management & Irrigation					
Properties of soils					
Soil moisture for optimal growth					
Irrigation systems					
Plant nutrition programs					
Vehicles, Machinery & Farm Maintenance					
Ride on vehicles					
Feed storage and machinery					
Fodder, crop and harvest machinery					
Milking plant maintenance					
Agrichemicals					
Fencing - electric and conventional					
Property improvement, construction & repair					
Business Performance					
Financial mangement					
Business planning & strategic objectives					
Farm infrastructure reqs					
Farm system management					
Transition/succession planning					
Sustainability & Environment					
Farming practice meets industry environmental standards & legislation					
Climate adaptation for resilient farm business decision making					
Energy mgt and conservation					
Carbon & greenhouse gas emissions					
Water quality and conservation					
Biodiversity conversation					
Waste management					
People Management					
IR legislation & employemnt compliance					
OH&S					
Processes and protocols					
Workforce and succession planning					
Performance mgt & people development					

DCG Capability Matrix (continued)

Digital Technology				
Computer operation				
Mobile device operations				
Internet usage				
Farming technology				
Data collection				
Data access & storage				
Data analysis & interpretation				
Professionalism				
Time management				
Ethical behaviours				
Commimment to safe work practices				
Team work				
Negotiation & conflict resolution				
Identity areas where capability is lacking				
Locating and engaging with resources for learning				
Communicate Effectively				
Literacy				
Written Comms				
Verbal Comms				
Body Language & non-verbal comm				
Digital Comms				
Leadership				
Take responsibility & lead by example				
Build resilience and manage uncertainty				
Actively collaborate				
Open-minded empowerment				
Advocate and communicate with influence				
Holistic & strategic thinking				
Embrace & lead change				
Enquiring mind for innovative new directions				
Problem solvig for practical solutions				
Implementing solutions in an appropriately collaborative manner				
Stratigically aligned solutions				
Instructions				
This matrix can be used to identify strengths, capability gaps, and opportunities for further training and development for yourself or your staff. Using the key below, select the rating that best reflects the current level of capability across each of the nine areas. When considering the various capabilities and where you feel you sit, you need to take into consideration whether you consistently demonrate the capability or are still developing this capability.				
Example: If you are at a Senior Farm Hand level, the general expectation is that across the capabilities, you would be operating at Esnure and Advice level rating on a consistent basis. Therefore, when you go through the various capabilities if you are not consistently demonstrating a capability, then you might mark that as Apply level.				
KEY: Capabiltiy Ratings				
Follow	Basic capability to complete tasks under supervision.			
Apply	Consistently completes tasks independently.			
Ensure and advise	Supervisory roles, new direction provided when problems arise.			
Initiate and influence	Applies authority for an area of work, work is complex, leads change.			
Set strategy	Decisions critical to the business are made, sets business objectives, leads strategy.			
KEY: Priority				
Low	24 - 36 months			
Medium	12 - 18 months			
High	6 - 12 months			

Common Mistakes When Inducting New Employees (and How to Avoid Them)

Starting a new job on a dairy farm can be overwhelming. Many problems that occur later in employment can be traced back to gaps in the induction and onboarding process.

Taking the time to properly introduce a new employee to the farm, the team and the way work is done will help build confidence, improve safety and reduce mistakes.

Below are some common mistakes and simple ways to avoid them.

1. Expecting employees to "just pick it up"

New employees may not understand farm routines, terminology or systems straight away. Explain and demonstrate tasks clearly and check understanding.

2. Providing too much information at once

Trying to explain everything on the first day can overwhelm new staff. Spread training over the first few weeks and focus on the most important tasks first.

3. Leaving new employees unsupervised too early

Without supervision, mistakes and safety risks can increase. Ensure new employees work alongside an experienced team member for as long as required during Induction and Onboarding.

4. Assuming previous experience means no training is needed

Even experienced dairy workers need to learn the systems used on your farm. Use the Dairy Capability Guide to identify capability levels and training needs.

5. Not explaining why tasks are done a certain way

Employees are more engaged when they understand the reason behind procedures. Explain the purpose of tasks, such as why milking hygiene is important for milk quality.

6. Not checking in regularly

Without regular communication, small issues can grow into bigger problems. Have short check-ins during the first few weeks to ask how the employee is settling in.

7. Not recognising good work

Positive feedback helps build confidence and motivation. Acknowledge when tasks are done well and encourage continued improvement.

8. Not identifying training needs early

If capability gaps are not addressed early, employees can become frustrated. Use the Capability Matrix and position description to identify training priorities and develop a plan.

9. Treating onboarding as a one-day activity

Effective onboarding happens over time. Follow the three-month onboarding plan to gradually build skills and independence.

10. Not setting clear expectations

Employees need to understand what success looks like in their role. Use the Dairy Capability Guide to explain expected capability levels and responsibilities.



Final Reminder

A strong induction and onboarding process helps employees become safe, confident and productive more quickly. Investing time in the first three months builds capability, improves retention and contributes to a stronger, more successful farm business.

Dairy Australia Resources

People in Dairy: [The People in Dairy | Great workplaces. Great jobs. Great people.](#)

Contract Templates: [Contracts and Agreements](#) | [The People in Dairy](#)

Position Descriptions: [The position description](#) | [The People in Dairy](#)

The Dairy Capability Guide: [The Dairy Capability Guide](#) | [The People in Dairy](#)

Induction Checklist, Capability Matrix, Onboarding and Coaching Guides:
[Induction and Onboarding | The People in Dairy](#)

Notes:

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