



# Working through fuel and fertiliser pressure together

## Practical ways dairy farm employers can work with employees to ease pressure

With current fuel and fertiliser pressures, it puts strain on the whole farm. The best response is not to carry it alone. Involving employees early can help reduce stress, improve ideas, maintain a safe work environment and keep the farm focused on what matters most.

### Be upfront with your team

Let employees know:

- what's happening
- how it may affect the farm
- what the key priorities are
- what is still uncertain.

People cope better when they understand the situation. Clear communication reduces rumours and helps everyone focus on practical solutions.

### Ask employees where resource use can be reduced

Your team often sees things owners and managers do not. Ask:

- Are there unnecessary tractor or ute trips?
- Are some jobs being doubled up?
- Is time being lost through poor planning or breakdowns?
- Are there better ways to group jobs together?
- Are there paddocks or inputs giving low return?

Small improvements made every day can add up quickly

### Work smarter, not just harder

Avoid creating pressure and increasing safety risks by simply expecting people to do more. Instead ask:

- How can we save time?
- How can we reduce fuel use?
- How can we get better value from inputs?
- How can we plan jobs more efficiently?

The aim is to improve efficiency, not just increase effort.

## Practical ways to reduce pressure

Small changes to rosters, travel, facilities and daily work planning can help reduce pressure for both the farm and employees.

- Support car pooling where practical.
- Avoid split shifts where you can.
- If split shifts are necessary, provide somewhere for employees to rest, eat or stay between shifts if needed.
- Combine jobs and errands to cut down on extra trips.
- Plan daily work to reduce unnecessary vehicle use around the farm.
- Group tasks by location so staff are not doubling back across the farm.
- Keep tools, equipment and supplies close to where they are needed.
- Maintain vehicles and machinery so they're running efficiently.
- Ask employees what changes would save them the most time or fuel.
- Be flexible where possible if rising fuel costs are putting pressure on staff.

If work on the farm has to slow down, talk to your staff about considering annual leave.

### Focus on the jobs that matter most

During pressure periods, not every job is equally important. Work with employees to identify:

- **must-do jobs** – animal health, milking, feed, safety and compliance
- **can-wait jobs** – lower priority work that can be delayed
- **stop-for-now jobs** – tasks that are not adding enough value right now.

This helps the team stay safe, focused and helps prevent you becoming overwhelmed.

## Hold short regular check-ins

A quick weekly check-in can help keep everyone aligned. Cover:

- what has changed this week
- current priorities
- any supply or cost concerns
- ideas from staff
- any workload or safety risks.

Short, regular conversations are better than waiting until problems build up.

## Protect morale and trust

Pressure on the business can quickly turn into pressure on people. Employees are more likely to help when they feel:

- informed
- listened to
- respected
- part of the solution.

Blame and silence usually create more stress and increased safety risks. Clear, calm leadership builds trust.

## Keep an eye on workload and fatigue

Trying to save money can sometimes lead to overloading key people. Watch for:

- rushing
- frustration
- corners being cut
- longer hours without support
- safety risks increasing.

Saving money at the cost of burnout or mistakes usually backfires.

## Build flexibility in the team

Cross-training staff can help the farm respond when conditions are tight. It can:

- improve cover for leave or absences
- spread workload more evenly
- help staff step into priority tasks when needed.

It also gives employees a chance to build skills and confidence.

## Turn concern into problem-solving

Ask your team practical questions such as:

- What should we do if supply is delayed?
- Which jobs are most critical if costs rise further?
- Where can we make changes without hurting production, animal welfare or affecting safety?
- What ideas do staff have that we have not considered?

This helps people feel useful and keeps the conversation productive.

### Key message

You may not be able to control prices or supply, but you can control how you work with your team during tough times. Clear communication, shared problem-solving, continued safety awareness and sensible prioritisation can reduce pressure and help the farm stay focused, practical and resilient.

Simple conversation starter for employers

"We're under pressure from fuel and fertiliser costs, so I want us to look at this together. What are you seeing on farm that could help us save time, reduce waste or work more efficiently without creating more risk?"

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