

# KEEP UP THE INCENTIVES TO RETAIN QUALITY STAFF

**Farm Business** learns from Safety Revolution's Oliver Dale how a proactive approach to staff management will be needed to win the Employer of the Year Award

## EMPLOYER OF THE YEAR

There has never been a better time to take a proactive approach to managing and developing members of staff or your team and we hope that this new *Farm Business* Food and Farming Awards category will provide an opportunity to highlight best practice in the management of staff on farms and estates across the country.

Competition for the most experienced and best qualified staff, capable of operating increasingly complex equipment to a high standard, is fierce. Demand outstrips supply and, as a result, the recruitment market is experiencing a significant rise in direct employment costs. Employers are recognising the threat of losing talented individuals and are borrowing practices from other professions – they are being better supported and managed to enhance skill sets and ensure loyalty.

## RISING RECRUITMENT COSTS

This has had positive results with the number of individuals willing to jump ship falling significantly. The converse of this, however, is that the cost of replacing staff is rising faster than in any other land-based sector of the industry.

The indirect costs of replacing an integral member of staff are often underestimated – the costs of advertising are readily apparent, but what about the cost of management time; the cost teaching and training the new member of staff? Not to mention the opportunity costs arising from the distraction. These costs are difficult to quantify, but are significant in both financial and operational terms.

Safety Revolution managing director Oliver Dale says the situation is forcing employers to revise and often improve the offer they make to prospective employees.

"The feedback we are receiving from both clients and candidates suggests that increasingly a good job within a farm or estate context is not just about rates of pay or location. The current generation has different expectations. It's more about 'what can a job do for me?' and less about 'what can I do for the employer?'. They are increasingly mobile, meaning managers have to be creative in the incentives offered. That's where our experience is invaluable," says Mr Dale.

Perhaps surprisingly, the value in



Oliver Dale

offering accommodation with a job is diminishing while there is greater appreciation for those willing to invest in on-the-job training. The younger generation has grown up with a strong regard for the importance of qualifications and so look to an employer to help build their career.

"The motivated staff employers seek are often highly ambitious and have decided which employer will best equip them with the necessary skills to move up the career ladder," says Mr Dale.

"The challenge for employers – we would suggest – is therefore to make their business and the roles that they offer the most exciting, challenging and rewarding available and to use a structured human resources strategy to deliver a workforce capable of meeting the businesses plans in the medium to long term," he adds.

"For some this requires a new approach to management that might seem daunting, but in practical terms this means looking at the relationship with the employee from the first stages of recruitment, through induction, appraisal and talent management.

"Working with the team to build individual skills and to recognise where the team as a whole needs to develop skills sets should be at the heart of the business plan and managed as an integrated, joined up, process."

Clearly, all these more progressive steps need to be underpinned by adherence to the basic and statutory requirements of UK employment law, includ-

ing observing the minimum requirements of the Agricultural Wages Order, implementation of compliant contracts of employment, maintenance of a handbook of company policies and procedures and regular and consistent use of those documents to manage staff in a positive and supportive way.

## REWARD STAFF

"As sponsor of the Employer of the Year Award, we will be looking for entrants that demonstrate good management practices that develop and reward staff," says Mr Dale.

"As personnel management professionals, we're keen to reward those businesses with a positive and vibrant approach to employee management. One that fosters an inclusive and open culture where staff are clearly involved in both the running of the farm or estate as well as having an input in the direction and development of the business and, wherever practicable, involved in the decision making processes that either directly or indirectly impacts upon them," says Mr Dale.

• *Safety Revolution is the sponsor of the Employer of the Year Award for the 2010 Farm Business Food and Farming Industry Awards.*



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