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## Make SOPs Available to Employees

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Use of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) is critical to any quality system. These policy and procedure documents lay out the regularly recurring activities performed within a business. SOPs provide organization, clarity, and consistency to a task, and they play a large role in setting employees up for success in their work.

When a new employee begins work on a farm, they likely have many questions. *What do the leg band colors mean? How do I switch the bulk tanks? How much soap do I use to wash bottles?* Rather than tracking down a manager and asking these seemingly simple questions, a new employee may make assumptions or be hesitant in their work. Preparing these step-by-step instructions and posting them in known locations allows for a training system that develops self-sufficient and proactive employees.

To be fully utilized, SOPs must be two things. First, they need to be written in a way that is easily understood. They should be clear and to the point. SOPs also may need to be translated. It is a good idea for SOPs to include pictures of each step of the procedure followed by a short caption describing the work being done. Second, SOPs should be placed in an accessible location. For a group of procedures, such as health protocols, a binder of documents in the herd office may be appropriate. Documents that should be readily available such as milking procedure, wash station protocol, and pasteurizer instructions should be hung up on a wall in plain view. All SOP documents should be laminated.

The first step to develop a set of SOPs is identifying what procedures would benefit the most from these documents. Where is there protocol drift? Lack of consistency among employees? Positions that turn over most often is a likely place to start. Keeping in mind that SOPs describe the tasks identified in job descriptions, start with basic procedures. Take photos of each step. Limit each procedure document to a page or two and be clear but concise. Use consultants and veterinarians to help develop the SOPs. Once a set of SOPs has been created, let employees know they are there and that they should be followed. Only then can SOPs be used as a tool in evaluating employee performance.

Visit <http://agworkforce.cals.cornell.edu/human-resource-management/performance/> to access the SOP writing guide, example SOPs, and a SOP template.

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