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Hiring, training and keeping 30 PSY people

Jon Hoek, Production Strategy
Belstra Milling Inc., Demotte, Indiana

Starting in June of 2006 Belstra Milling achieved 30.1 PSY for 45 of 52 weeks through week 22 of 2007. This farm is managed by Lance Barton. Recently 30 PSY has been obtained at Hopkins Ridge Farms for 17 consecutive weeks in early 2008. This farm is managed by Troy Goodman. Since that time the farms has averaged 28.9 and 29.3 PSY respectively. Many factors are integrally involved in consistently achieving this benchmark of near 30 PSY. Technology, nutrition, genetics, facilities, attention to detail are critical components however, one cannot discount the human side of achieving this level of production. At Belstra Milling we don't have 20 PSY employees.

So how are Belstra Milling employees different? What drives these people to perform or strive for the 30 PSY level?

The foundation of Belstra culture was established by Albert "Bud" Belstra. Bud started the business in 1954 and set the tone for the next generations. His core values of faith, integrity, hard work, belief in people, optimism, and his willingness to invest in the business served Bud, his family and his community well. These values are part of Belstra Milling today.

Today, leadership at Belstra Milling provides the opportunities for employees to acquire the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to achieve 30 PSY. This is done by addressing the key components of people development; knowledge, motivation, resources, processes, and wellness.

People development starts when a potential employee is interviewed. Typically mass interviews of 5-10 employees are conducted at one time. Applicants are introduced to Belstra Milling history and current business activities. Expectations are defined. An orientation course produced by Pork Checkoff "Your Role as a Swine Caretaker" is shown to the group. This course covers the basics of what happens on a pig farm. Applicant's initial reaction to the description of daily activities on a pig farm are observed. Belstra management observes how applicants interact with a group of people they don't know. They look for curiosity, a desire to work, in addition to basics of available transportation, employment eligibility, drug test, etc.

For potential employees a second interview is conducted at a farm site. At this time Belstra management lays out expectations and opportunities for improvement. The

Belstra culture, family atmosphere, social aspects, and requirements to get along are presented.

Upon accepting a position, a new employee is placed with an accomplished and seasoned staff member or coach. Each coach teaches by example. During the first 30 days, expectations of new employees center on becoming oriented to the job and accustomed to people, task, and scheduling. New hires are provided time to learn and apply what they learn under supervision. They are placed in situations where they can conduct a procedure and if mistakes are made, corrective action can take place immediately before a mistake is overlooked and has negative impact on system. Following the initial 30 days, standard operating procedures are read and reviewed regularly.

Belstra Milling seeks to motivate their people through above average salary potential and job satisfaction. Management wants to tap creativity of each individual. Employees are not limited to standard operating procedures as rule of law. Innovation is encourage but managed. To start, new employees are directed to follow standard operating procedures to learn the systems plus build relationships with co workers and managers. As time passes each employee is allowed more freedom to improve processes, all the while communicating with their manager.

Opportunities for advancement are shared through examples of others within Belstra Milling. Managers are encouraged to share the success stories of others in the organization.

Employees are encouraged to think on their feet, to enhance communication skills and service their downstream customer. Bonus structure is based on area a person is in and the return they offer through performance above expected levels.

Building on the Bud Belstra legacy, Tim Belstra and Malcolm DeKryger provide the resources to achieve 30 PSY. Senior management is charged with the responsibility of fueling change on the farms. Some examples of change are the following. A 4,000 sow farm is in the finishing stage of renovation where a small percentage of sows housed in groups during gestation will be evaluated. An aggressive bump weaning and cross fostering programs was dropped in favor of rescue decks. A lengthy and persistent investigation indicated stray voltage as a cause of production

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losses in sow farms. Significant investment in electrical systems eliminated the problem. Disease elimination technology has been implemented with the help of system veterinarian Dr. Tom Gillespie.

Processes are developed, implemented and continuously evaluated. Standard operating procedures are provided in both English and Spanish. Managers establish clear expectations. Employees know what they are supposed to do and receive the support allowing them to learn what they are supposed to do. Shifting farrowing away from bump weaning and cross fostering to rescue decks was a new concept for employees to grasp. Prior to installing the system, employees learned why this was important to business performance, their farm and their position. Training on system use was provided to all farrowing department staff.

Managers strive to instill healthy respect for authority through good communication. Expectations are up front on how chain of command works. It is tested at times. Managers are responsible on drawing the line.

Belstra Milling employees are encouraged to learn and continue their education. Not only does management require employees to know how to do their job, but to understand why each task must be performed. For example employees attended a farrowing management course presented in Spanish. Three afternoon sessions were held from 3:00 pm to 5 p.m. Attending employees were on the clock. Employees are allowed to attend conferences and seminars. Managers in training will travel as a group to World Pork Expo. Quarterly managers meeting are held focused on analysis of production systems. Company activities, updates, and all farm activities are communicated to employees.

Belstra Milling strives to provide a work environment that imparts a sense of wellness and stability to employees. Turnover rates for new hires currently range from 10 to 15 percent. Management strives to get the right person in the right position for both employee and company. Respect for coworkers is nurtured. Lack of respect is not tolerated.

Belstra Milling has a reputation as employer of choice in the Demotte, Indiana area and at the surrounding farm sites. Employees are encouraged to be involved in community service and are allowed time to do so.

Average starting laborer pay in the DeMotte area is \$9 to \$11. Belstra Milling is providing comparable starting wage to stockpersons. Managers are at the top end of the generally accepted salary range for Swine Farm Managers.

Salary is not the only factor in job satisfaction at Belstra Milling. As in many pork operations slow upward mobility is a reality as managers tenure lengthens. The sense of wellness is provided through opportunities to invest in the company, health benefits, flexible work schedules to accommodate families, learning opportunities and individual support in personal matters.

A feeling of ownership is instilled in all employees. Employees know what they do is important and they have leeway to improve existing processes. Also most all of Belstra people have or plan to have families and live in the local community. Belstra Milling has a reputation as a company willing to help loyal employees in times of need. In times of personal crisis they are willing to assist financially and to act as a safety net.

Investment in employee training is providing a return to business performance through improved production. For example stillborns were consistently higher for one farm. The lead farrowing person does not speak English well. Upon completing of a course in farrowing management delivered in Spanish stillborns dropped from 8% down to 4.6%.

Nurturing a culture of employee support and development has impacted the steady improvement in production efficiencies at Belstra. Belstra Milling does not discount the human side of these levels of production which requires engaged, competent employees paying attention to detail.

