



Northeast Agribusiness & Feed Alliance

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NEAFA: Tight Labor Market Highlights Value of Farm Employees

Hired labor is an essential component of many Vermont dairy farms, accounting for 12% of all farm expenses nationally, according to a new analysis by Farmer Mac. “The Northeast Agribusiness and Feed Alliance recognizes the respect dairy farmers show their employees,” said NEAFA President Andy Dugan. “Dairy farmers know their employees are a vital part of their business,” Dugan said.

In Vermont, worker scarcity and rising labor costs pressure farmers to adopt agricultural technology that substitutes for human employees. Chris Wagner of Green Dream Farm, a Large Farm Operation in Enosburg, Vermont said “We feel all our employees are an asset to our business and deserve a rate of pay commensurate with their abilities.” Wagner hires Hispanic labor as well as local people.

As reported in the spring issue of The Feed, the Farmer Mac newsletter that tracks markets and trending events in agriculture, “Emerging technologies like robotic milking parlors, drones, and self-driving tractors all have the potential to greatly reduce the need for labor in the long run.”

Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data shows the average wage paid to employees on Vermont dairy farms in 2016 ranged between \$31,000 and \$39,000 per year depending on employee demand. Many Vermont dairy farms employ Hispanics to milk and care for cows and calves and wages paid to this group of employees are included in the averages compiled by BLS.

During a May Hardwick VT Community Forum titled “Who will milk the cows? Dairy Farms, Farmworkers, and our Communities,” Jon Lussier, manager of Northeast Kingdom Sales, a dairy cattle auction service, stated that he works with many dairy farms employing Hispanic labor and that these employees are treated with respect.

Another panel member, John Roberts, a retired dairy farmer from Cornwall, Vermont, employed Hispanics for many years on his 200 cow farm. Roberts said his Hispanic employees were essential members of the farm team and he paid them competitive wages. Roberts said that in addition to wages, employees on Vermont dairy farms often receive housing, heat, electricity, Internet connection, meat and milk as part of their compensation package.

Dugan explained “Vermont farmers care for the people who care for their cows.”

The Northeast Agribusiness and Feed Alliance is a 300 member association committed to supporting a thriving northeast agricultural community through advocacy, education and collaboration. Members of the Alliance include feed, seed, fertilizer companies, financial service providers, transportation companies, veterinarians, nutritional services providers, and professional advisors.

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