

# WORKFORCE: THE POWER OF PEOPLE ON AUSTRALIAN DAIRY FARMS IN 2020



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# INTRODUCTION

The new Dairy Australia strategic plan has seven priorities that will guide investment to deliver improved profitability and a more sustainable dairy industry over the next five years.

The second of the strategic priorities is focussed on attracting and developing great people for dairy. The plan acknowledges that people are at the heart of the industry. The plan has, for this priority, identified four key strategic outcomes including:

- a. Greater awareness of Australian dairy as an attractive industry with rewarding career opportunities;
- b. Clear and supported capability development and career pathways;
- c. Access to capable and skilled farm employees and service providers; and
- d. Support farm businesses and their service providers to get the basics right.

To develop an understanding of the baseline situation of the dairy industry is at for the commencement of the new strategic plan, a Dairy Workforce Survey was commissioned. This survey will look to address the performance indicators laid out for this priority in the new Strategic Plan, but also build on the evidence base established in the 2017 *Power of People on Australian Dairy Farms* research.

The *Workforce: The Power of People on Australian Dairy Farms in 2020* survey collected feedback from n = 400 dairy farmers nationally. The information was collected over the period 12th – 27th November 2020 – thank you to the dairy farm businesses who participated.

## Context of the operating environment

It is important to note that the 2020 survey was undertaken at a somewhat unusual time, with a confluence of different factors creating an unusual operating environment for farmers.

With increased rainfall forecast for many regions, the impact of the preceding 2019/2020 drought has been offset in some, but certainly not all, regions. There is an ongoing optimistic and positive outlook for rainfall and for the positive flow on effects for fodder production and a dampening of input costs.

However, the social, operating and trading environments have been significantly impacted by the development of the COVID-19 global pandemic situation from March 2020 onwards. COVID-19 brought about restrictions of movement of people and products, nationally and internationally, creating challenges for farmers and creating uncertainty about business-as-usual practices. The outbreak, with subsequent different impacts across Australia (including moving in and out of tighter people movement and infection control restrictions), has impacted most commodity markets and is likely to continue to do so for some time.

The *Workforce: The Power of People on Australian Dairy Farms in 2020* survey was undertaken at a time where the impact of COVID-19 continues and with ongoing uncertainty about how business more generally might return to a more usual operating environment.

The impact of COVID-19 on workforce behaviours, intentions and attitudes is largely indeterminable due to the nature of this piece of research but should be considered when reviewing the results contained within this report.

## SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS AND INSIGHTS

The current average workforce size (including farmers and everyone who works on farm) is 5.1. Clearly the result varies across the different farm sizes with the larger farms requiring a larger workforce and similarly the smaller farm operations requiring fewer staff.

Of this workforce, on average 2.9 of the 5.1 workforce (or 57%) is employed as a full-time permanent employee.

The remaining are either casuals, part-time permanent staff or those on fixed term contracts.

### Recruitment

Almost one in two (47%) of farmers reported they had recruited staff over the last 12 months. This looks to have been a combination of full time and casual staff. Interestingly, about half of these new recruits were new to the dairy industry.

Use of Dairy Australia's Employment Starter Kit (ESKi) remains modest with just over one in three (34%) indicating they use or have used the ESKi to support their employment practices.

From the survey feedback, awareness and uptake of Dairy Passport is also modest. Fewer than one in five (23%) are aware of Dairy Passport and only a small proportion of farmers (4%) reported they are registered. Future efforts to promote the utility of the Dairy Passport are likely to be required if this resource is to achieve an improved level of traction among farmers.

At this point in time, most farmers (68%) are not reporting plans to make changes to their existing workforce.

### Upskilling

The feedback suggests farmers are reverting to on-the-job training to fill staff knowledge or skills gaps. This is being delivered from the farm owner, other staff or other farmers. Reliance on formal training or education is lower, suggesting farmers (at this point) may not be able to easily identify or connect to the training value proposition, or see obstacles around accessibility, immediacy or opportunity to use training for this purpose.

### Succession planning

From the survey feedback, fewer than one in five (18%) of farmers reported they had formalised an agreed succession/transition plan for their farm. A larger cohort of some 38% reported an intention to do so but had not triggered that process at the time of the survey.

With little movement on this measure over the past few years, a rethink of the processes and/or incentives to encourage more farms with more formalised succession or transition plans may be required.

### Farm safety

The challenge of encouraging farmers to formalise their Work, Health and Safety plans remains evident in 2020.

Just 56% of farmers reported they had a written plan, with just two in three (or 36% of all farmers) of farmers having updated their plan in the last 12 months.

Some 16% of farmers reported staff had acquired an injury requiring time off (at least one day). For these farmers, staff had on average taken an extended period away from work. The estimated time off staff have taken due to on-farm injuries crystallises the direct operational and economic impact that farm injuries have.

Uptake of safety practices varies from 75% (safety scans) to 50% (regular meetings to discuss safety). The results relating to the use of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for vehicles used on-farm suggests only a modest use of written plans. One in three (33%) of farmers directly reported they do not have SOPs for their farm vehicles.

## Attitudes and perceptions

Of interest is the widely held views about the farmers' own approach to and skills related to people management. In short, the survey feedback indicates a high level of reported perceived competency and strong approach to managing people.

The results suggest there remains a gap between the perceived competencies and the translation to adoption of on-farm behaviours. This will be a difficult bridge to reset and may require a more creative or disruptive intervention to allow farmers to more easily identify the need to rethink their own attitudes to on-farm practices and behaviours or allow for a different lens to be placed on the uptake and adoption of known and beneficial people and farm management practices.

There are some clear differences across farmer levy payers.

On exploring the results and feedback provided, some clear differences in behaviours and attitudes between farmers are evident, including:

- Differences across farm size. Perhaps not surprisingly, there are some clear differences evident with the larger farms requiring a larger workforce, have a larger contingent of full-time employees, are more likely to be active recruiters and have adopted some of the available resources and tools, and are more likely to have formalised their people management farm safety compliance practices.

That said, the differences are not always consistent with some larger farms showing behaviours similar to much smaller counterparts. Some caution should be exercised in over-stating this as a cause-and-effect determinant.

- Differences across farmer profiles. When comparing the profiles, some stark differences are apparent. Most notably are the three profiles (Facing Challenges, Questioning Involvement, and to a lesser extent Dairy Enthusiasts) where the results indicate some very different attitudes and behaviours.

The results suggest that achieving widespread behavioural and practice change (relevant to some of the measures in this survey) are unlikely to be achieved and that consideration should be given towards encouragement of the profile cohorts more likely to be predisposed to the benefit and value propositions of adopting identified practices and processes. The other cohorts may require a pivoting of the one size fits all success measures to create measures that are arguably more aligned to the specific needs of these profiles.

This is not to suggest these other profiles be removed from these efforts, but that a different approach and measure of success may need to be considered for these particular farmer profiles.



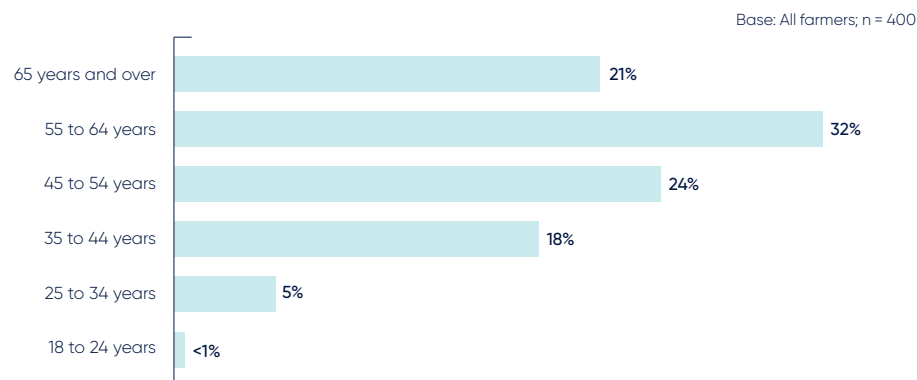
## FARMER PARTICIPANT PROFILES

The participants involved in the survey were reflective of the dairy farming population, with 53% over 55 years of age and <6% under 35 years of age and 92% of farm business structures being family owned. The majority were male (75%) and 84% were the farm owner.

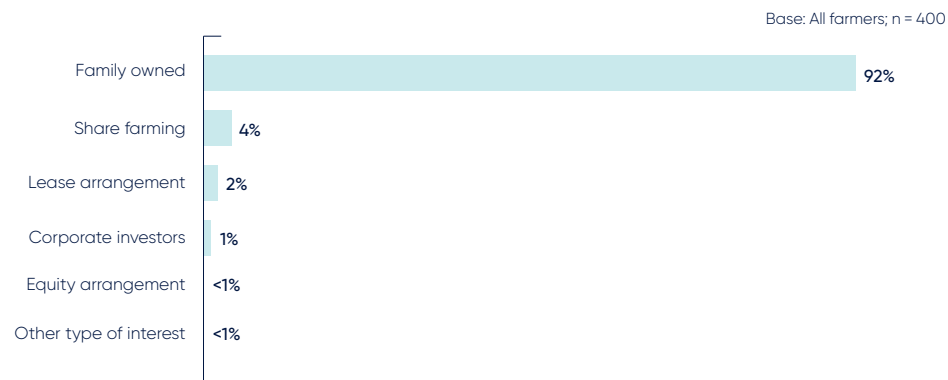
The farms were small to medium in size, with a herd of 300 cows or less, for the majority of participants (55%). Only 13% of respondents had a share farmer as a member of the farm business structure.

All key dairy regions in Australia were represented proportionally, with the greatest number of respondents located in the three Victorian regions.

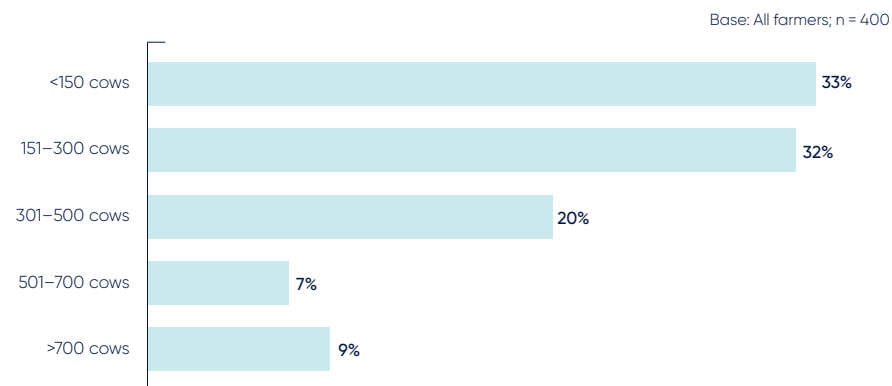
### Which of the following age groups do you belong to?



### How would you describe the ownership/management structure of your dairy enterprise?

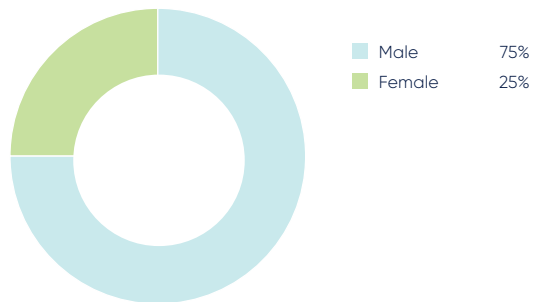


### Herd size of respondents (unweighted)





## Gender of respondent



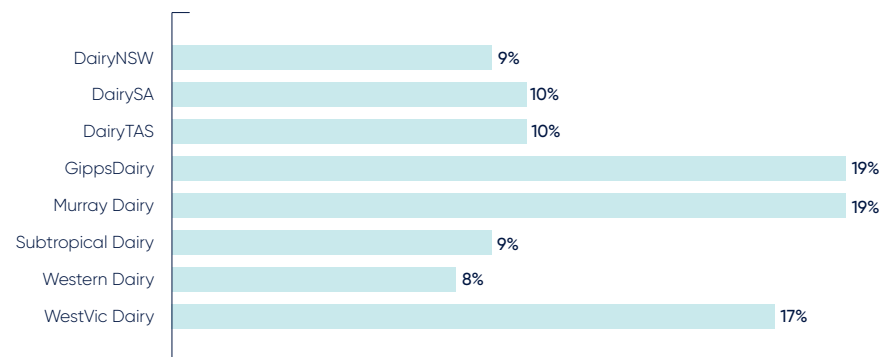
Base: All farmers; n = 400

## Are you the... (role of the respondent on-farm)?

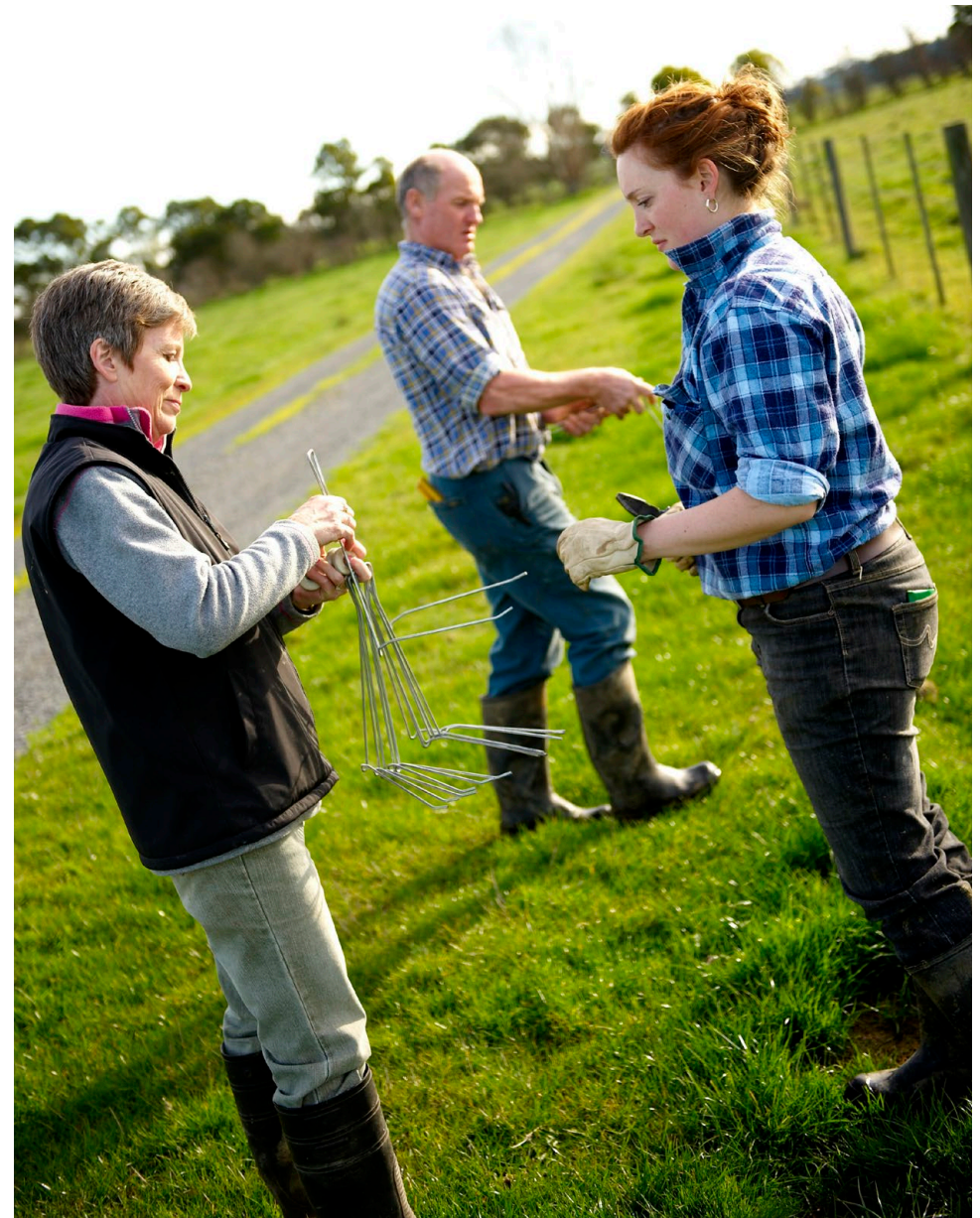


Base: All farmers; n = 400

## Dairy regions of respondents (unweighted)



Base: All farmers; n = 400

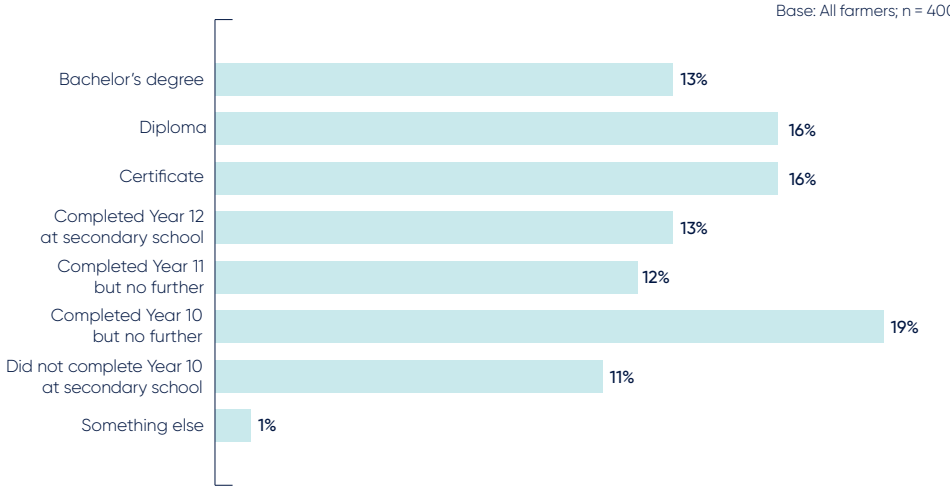






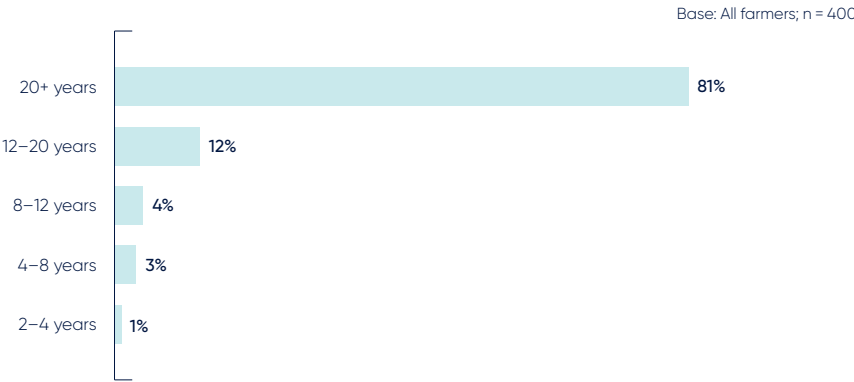
Education levels of participants were predominately high school, with 55% of participants completing Year 12 or lower years of schooling only. This level of education is not surprising considering the age of the participants and the expectations of school completion at the time when they were completing school, and the changing engagement with schools and further education that has occurred in the last three decades in Australia.

### What is the highest level of formal education you reached?

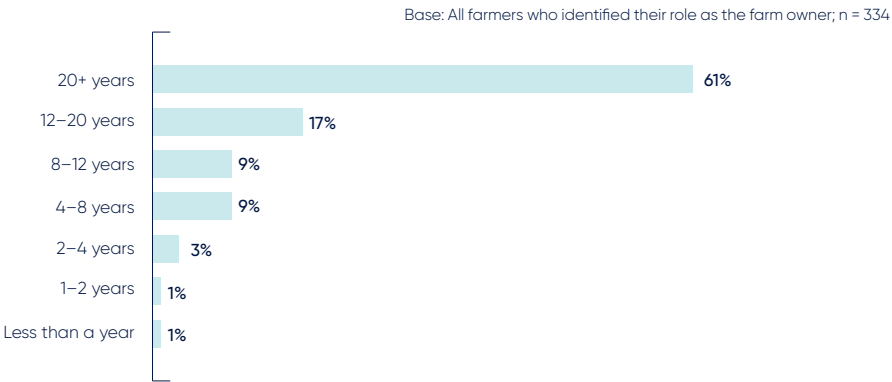


The participants were long term dairy farmers, with 81% of those completing the survey working in the dairy industry for more than 20 years and 61% having owned their current dairy farm for more than 20 years.

### How long have you worked in the dairy industry?



### How long have you owned this dairy farm business?



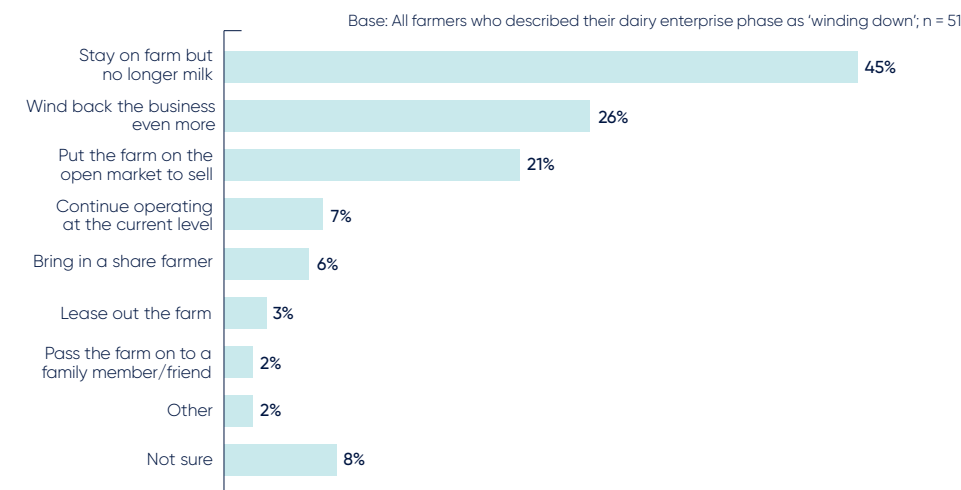
At the time of the survey, 28% of respondents were in an expansion phase of their business, 12% were steady with business activities and the intention of expanding, 44% were steady and feeling they were "where they wanted to be" and 13% were in a winding down phase.

#### How would you describe the phase your dairy enterprise is currently in?



Base: All farmers; n = 400

#### What are you planning to do over the next five years as you wind down the business? 13% of farmers indicated they are winding down. Of these dairy farmers...



## ATTITUDES TO WORKING IN DAIRY

Generally, dairy farmers agree that there are "lots of reasons why a career in the dairy industry is rewarding" (82%) although the pathways to develop career and capabilities are not necessarily clear to farmers for themselves (48%) or their employees (46%).

#### Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about working in the dairy industry?

				Some what agree	Strongly agree	NETT (agree- disagree)
There are lots of reasons why a career in the dairy industry is rewarding	9%	9%	82%	44%	38%	+74%
The dairy industry has clear pathways to develop my employees' career and capabilities	18%	18%	54%	38%	17%	+37%
The dairy industry has clear pathways to develop my career and capabilities	21%	21%	52%	34%	18%	+31%
The dairy industry offers an effective work/life balance	35%	35%	45%	33%	12%	+10%
Somewhat disagree + strongly disagree		Somewhat agree + strongly agree		Neither		

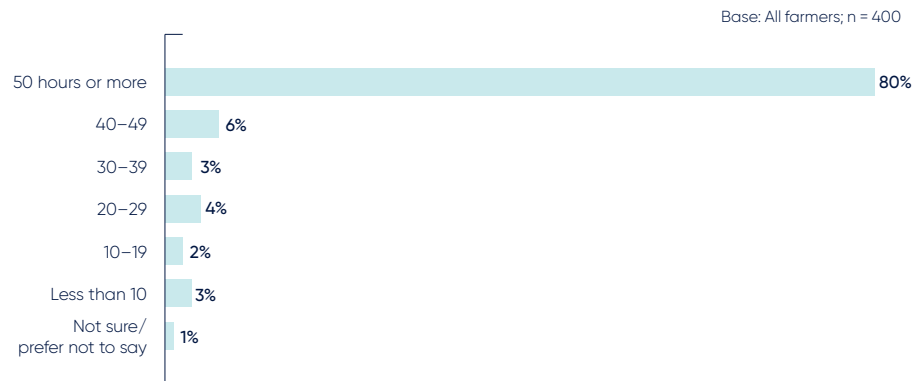
## WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Work-life balance remains a challenge for many farmers, with only 45% reporting the dairy industry provides them an effective balance.

This aligns with reported long work hours per week. Dairy farming remains an occupation with long work hours, with 80% of participants reporting they worked 50 hours or more a week.

As a dairy farmer, work is predominately full time, with approximately 90% of participants reporting that they worked >35 hours in a working week.

**On average over the last 12 months, how many hours would you work in a typical week?**





## WORKFORCE PROFILE

On average, there are 5.1 people employed by a dairy farm business (total number of people currently work on farm averaged across all respondents). This has increased from an average of 4.0 in 2017.

Only 2% of farms have only 1 person working on-farm. Thirty-four per cent have 2-3 people, 38% have between 5-10 people and 6% have 11 or more people working on-farm.

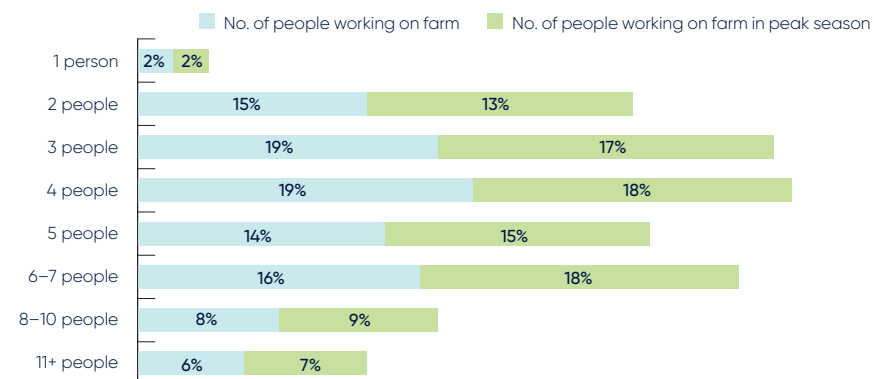
As expected, this varies based on farm business size with small farms employing on average 3.4 people, medium employing 4.4, large employing on average 5.7 and x-large employing 10.0 on average.

Of the 5.1 people employed on-farm, 2.9 are full-time permanent, 0.9 are part-time permanent, 1.1 are casual and 0.2 are fixed term contract. This distribution is proportionally observed across all farm business sizes.

	Herd size			
	Small	Medium	Large	X-XX Large
Base (n=)	130	127	78	65
Total # of people	3.4	4.4	5.7	10.0
# full-time permanent	1.9	2.6	3.0	6.0
# part-time permanent	0.7	0.7	1.1	1.7
# casual	0.6	1.0	1.3	2.2
# fixed-term contract	<0.1	<0.1	0.3	0.8

During peak season the number of people working on-farm has a small increase to an average of 5.5 people on-farm. The increase is again proportional across all farm business sizes – with 3.6 people on small farms, 5.1 on medium sized farms, 6.0 on large farms, and 10.8 people working on average on x-large farms.

### During your peak season/s, how many people work on your farm?



Base: All farmers; n = 400

### 5.5 people during peak season/s

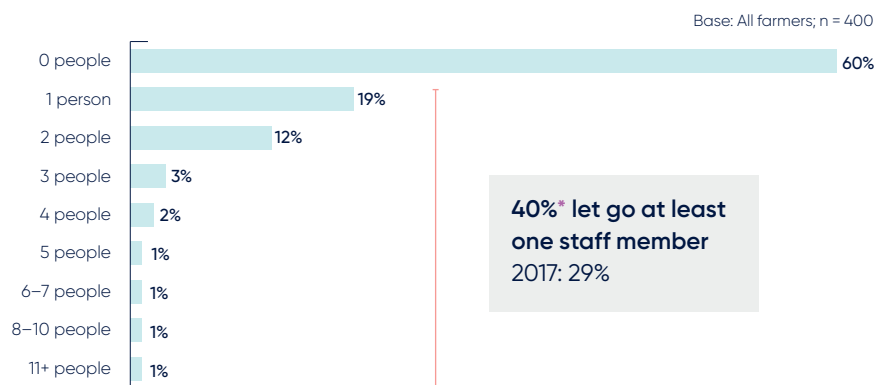
(total number of people during peak, averaged across all responses)

Percentage of respondents reporting the number of people working on farm current and peak

## WORKFORCE MOBILITY

In the 12 months prior to the survey, 40% of respondents had let go of at least one employee and 47% of respondents had recruited a new employee. These numbers have increased significantly since 2017, up from 29% letting a person go and 38% recruiting, respectively.

**In the last 12 months, how many of your staff left either because they have been let go, completed their contract or staff have resigned?**



\*2020 result is significantly different to the 2017 result (Z-test for two proportions).

### 2.4 people let go

(total number of people let go, averaged across all responses of those who let go at least one staff member)

Across the 400 farm businesses that responded to the survey, over 1000 people had been let go and over 1120 people had been recruited (with 120 more people being employed than let go), suggesting the total number of people employed by dairy farm businesses has grown over the last 12 months.

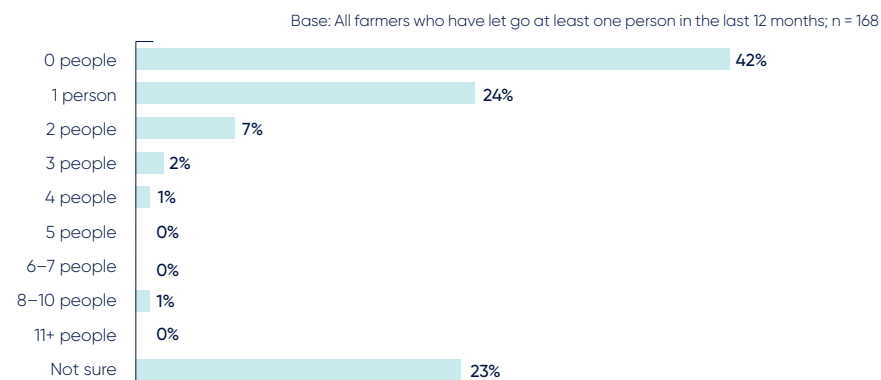
A significant greater percentage respondents from larger herd sizes had let go of at least one staff member in the prior 12 months (79% compared to small herd size businesses being only 18%).

This is not unsurprising and likely due to the larger herd sized businesses employing a greater number of people.

	Herd size			
	Small	Medium	Large	X-XX Large
Base (n=)	130	127	78	65
Let go at least one staff member	18%	38%	54%	79%

Of farm businesses who let go an employee, farmer respondents estimated that of the 2.4 people let go, 30% of people went to another job in dairy, with 54% of people retired or were employed in another industry, and the others unknown of their next steps in career/job.

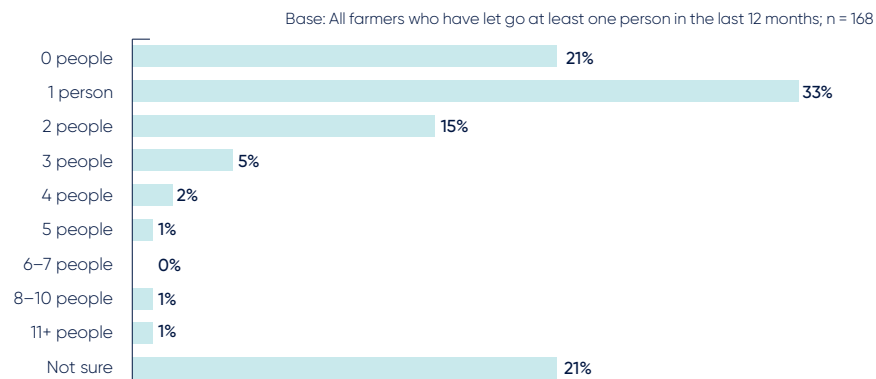
**Of the staff that have resigned, been let go or finished their contract, how many went to another dairy job?**



### 0.7 people went to another dairy job

(total number of people let go, averaged across all valid responses)

Of the staff that have resigned, been let go or finished their contract, how many retired or went to work in another industry?



**1.3 people retired/went to a different industry**  
(total number of people let go, averaged across all valid responses)

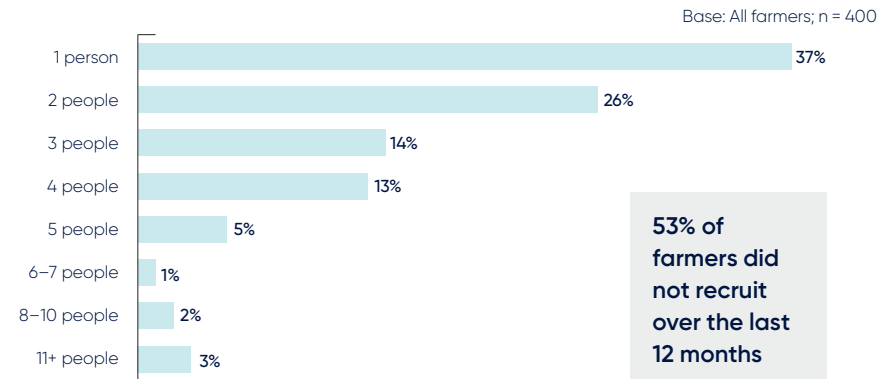
## Recruitment in the last 12 months

Of the 47% of farm businesses who have recruited in the last 12 months, each business has recruited an average 2.8 people to fill vacant roles on farm. Most farm businesses are recruiting a small number, with 77% of respondents reporting three or fewer people being recruited. The number of people recruited to a business was associated with business size, where larger herd sizes recruited a higher average number of people over the 12-month time period.

The split of casual to full time permanent recruits is approximately 50:50 and very few positions are fixed term contracts.

full-time permanent	1.1	part-time permanent	0.4
casual	1.3	fixed-term contract	0.1

How many staff have you recruited over the last 12 months? Of the 47%\* that did recruit...



\*(2017: 38% recruited)

\*2020 result is significantly different to the 2017 result (Z-test for two proportions).

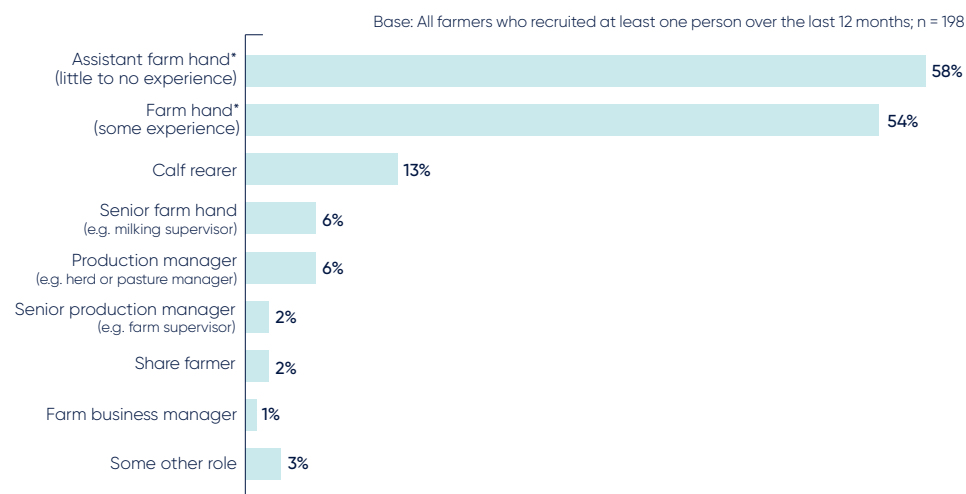
**2.8 people recruited over the last 12 months**  
(total number of people recruited, averaged across all valid responses)

	Herd size			Phase of business			
	Small	Medium	Large	X-XX Large	Expanding	Steady	Wind down
Base (n=)	130	127	78	65	166	176	51
% did not recruit	75%	52%	35%	26%	42%	60%	67%
Total # recruited	2.0	2.1	2.8	4.6	2.9	2.5	3.5
# full-time permanent	0.5	0.6	0.7	2.7	1.2	1.2	0.4
# part-time permanent	0.5	0.3	0.4	0.2	0.4	0.4	0.2
# casual	0.9	1.1	1.6	1.6	1.2	1.0	2.8
# fixed-term contract	<0.1	0.1	<0.1	0.1	0.1	<0.1	0.0
# new to dairy	1.0	1.1	1.6	2.8	1.5	1.4	2.1



The fundamental roles were predominately the positions that farm businesses recruited to over the last 12 months. 58% of farm businesses who recruited in the 12 months recruited at least one Assistant Farmhand. 54% recruited at least one farm hand. Only 6% recruited senior farm hands and only 1% recruited a farm business manager.

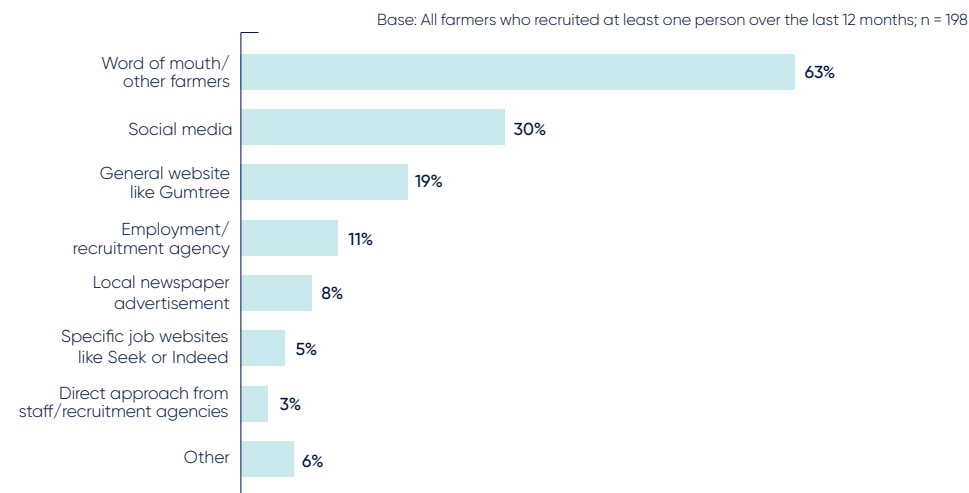
**Thinking of the people you recruited over the last 12 months, which of the following roles did you recruit for? Please select all the roles you recruited for over the last 12 months.**



\*e.g. milker and attending to livestock, haymaking, fencing.

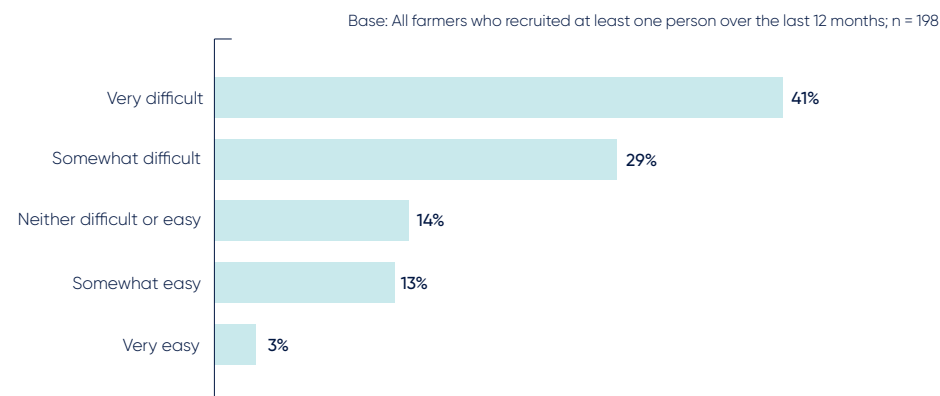
The predominate mechanisms used to find applicants and new recruits was word of mouth with 63% of respondents relying on this as a way to recruit employees. Social media (30% of respondents) and informal websites such as Gumtree (19% of respondents) were the next two most frequently used channels to recruit new employees. Only 3% of respondents had directly approached a recruitment agency.

**Over the last 12 months, what places did you use to recruit new staff?**



69% of respondents who had recruited to their business in the last 12 months reported finding it somewhat or very difficult to fill the position. Details on why farm businesses found recruitment difficult were not explored and could be related to the number of quality applicants, the time burden of advertising, interviewing and contracting a staff member and/or the time burden of onboarding and coaching a new employee.

**In general, when you recruit new staff, how easy or difficult do you find it to fill the positions?**



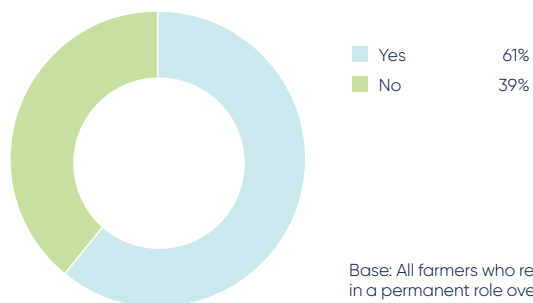
The time taken to recruit may also be a reason respondents report recruitment to be difficult. Thirty-one per cent of respondents reported it took longer than a month to recruit and fill a vacant position on-farm. While less than 30 days is considered a short period of time in a broad range of industries, in day, where cows are milked daily, there is a significant burden to cover the work tasks of a vacant position over a 30 day or longer time period.

### How long did it take you fill this position?



The majority of successful applicants had previously worked in the dairy industry, but 39% of respondents reported that their most recent new employee was new to dairy.

### Had the successful applicant ever worked in the dairy industry before?

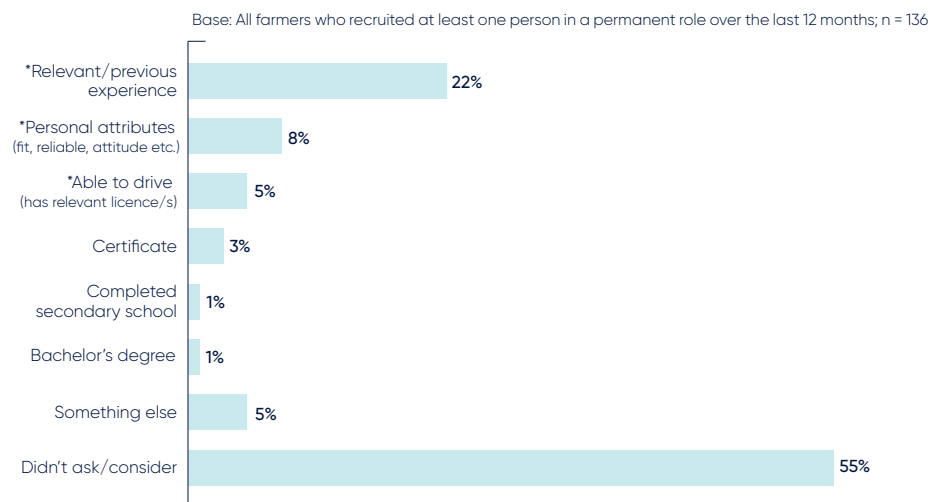


Base: All farmers who recruited at least one person in a permanent role over the last 12 months; n = 136



Relevant previous experience was the primary “qualifications” that farm businesses were looking for in recruiting to the vacant position. Only 4% reported looking for someone with a TAFE Certificate or Bachelor degree qualifications. In fact, 55% reported that they didn’t ask for qualifications or consider them as a component of the selection process.

#### When you recruited for this position, what (if any) types of qualifications were you looking for?

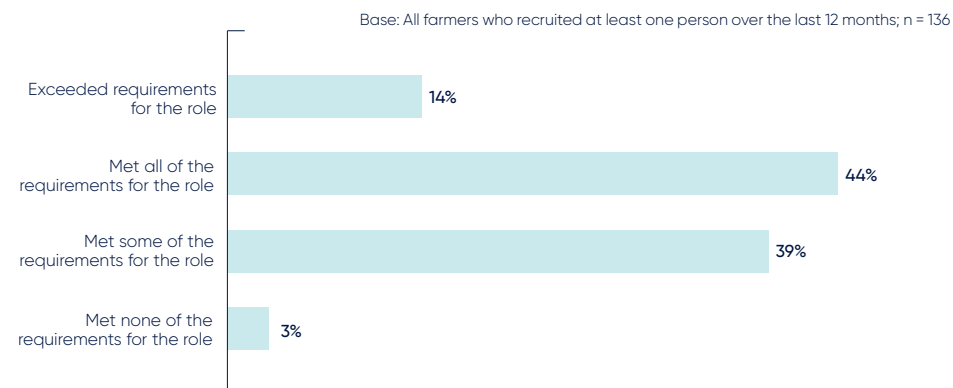


*\*Results coded back from "Other (please specify)" option.*

Of the successful applications, 58% of respondents reported that the person they most recently employed met or exceeded expectations. Only 3% of respondents reported that the person met none of the requirements of the role.



#### To what extent did the person you employed meet your requirements to fulfil the role?

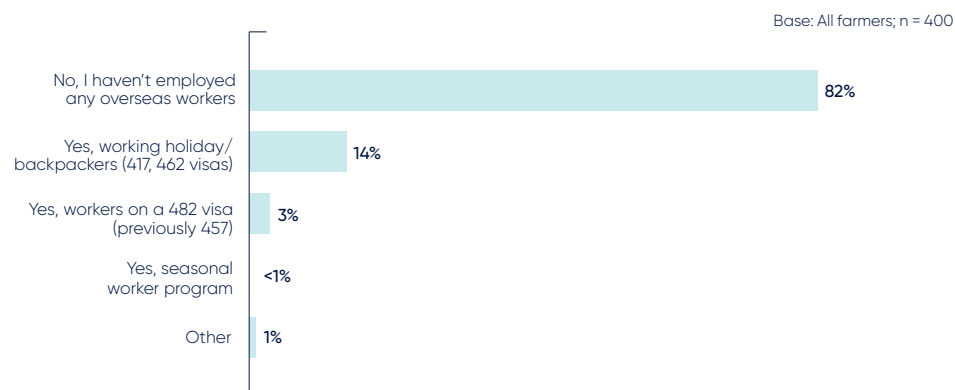




## OVERSEAS WORKFORCE

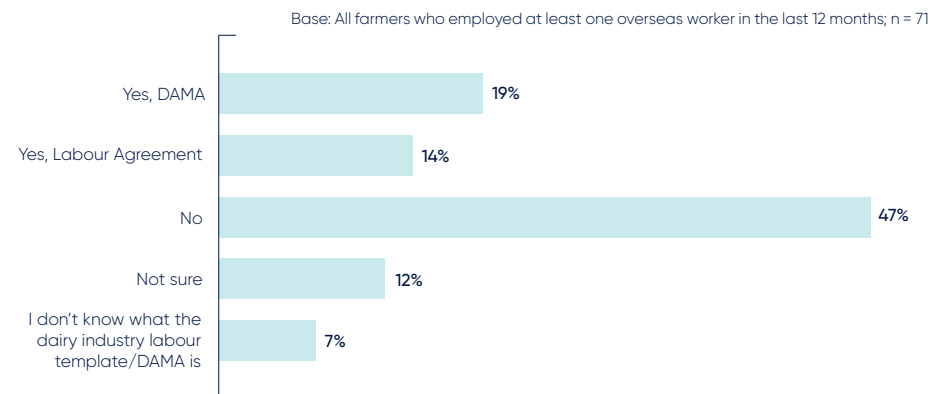
Overseas employees were not a prominent feature of farm businesses' workforce, with 82% of all respondents saying they had not employed any overseas workers in the last 12 months. 14% of respondents had employed a working holiday/backpacker and 3% employed a person on a temporary skills shortage visa (visa subclass 482).

**In the last 12 months, have you employed any overseas workers on your farm?**



Of the farmers who had employed an overseas worker (71 respondents), 47% had not used the dairy industry labour template agreement or a designated area migration agreement (DAMA), and 12% were unsure whether they had used the labour template or DAMA.

**Did you use the dairy industry labour template agreement or a designated area migration agreement (DAMA)?**



Despite the limited uptake of overseas employees on dairy farmers, respondents did report that overseas workforce had a role for their farm business. 29% felt overseas workforce filled an immediate or short term gap in workforce need. 16% considered overseas workforce for short to medium term access to skills the business needed and 12% considered overseas workforce as an essential mechanism to access the skills needed for long-term business success.

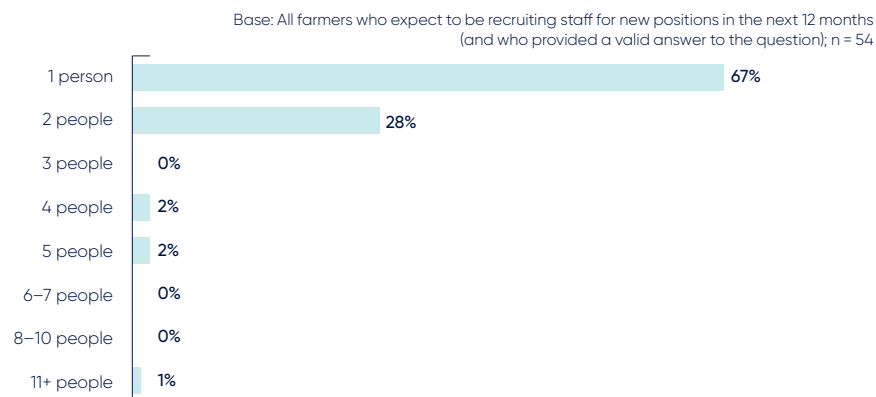
Only 36% of respondents did not consider overseas employees for their business.

## Recruitment plans in the next 12 months

Looking ahead to the next 12 months from November 2020, 29% of respondents expect to be recruiting to fill a vacant role. This has increased from 16% since 2017. 16% anticipate they will be recruiting to fill existing roles as people leave their farm business, 16% anticipate recruiting to new positions on farm, and 3% anticipate "laying off" staff and needing to recruit to fill the vacant position.

On average, those who reported to expect to recruit, would be looking to recruit 1.6 people to the farm business over the 12 months.

### How many new positions are you likely to recruit for?



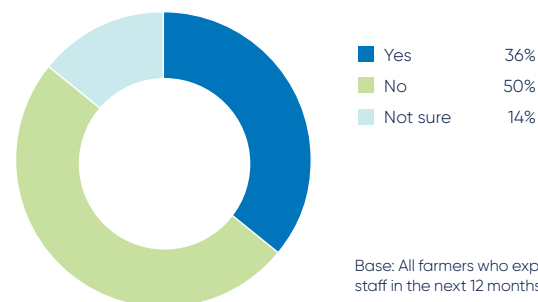
### 1.6 people in new positions

(total number of people in new positions, averaged across all responses)

The role of overseas employees filling vacant positions was limited, with 50% of respondents saying they did not anticipate recruiting people overseas and a further 15% reported being unsure whether they would. These results may be a reflection of the uncertainty that COVID-19 has brought considering international borders were closed at the time of the survey and no clear timelines for when they would open had been communicated by the Australian Government.



### As part of your recruiting for new staff, do you anticipate recruiting any overseas workers?

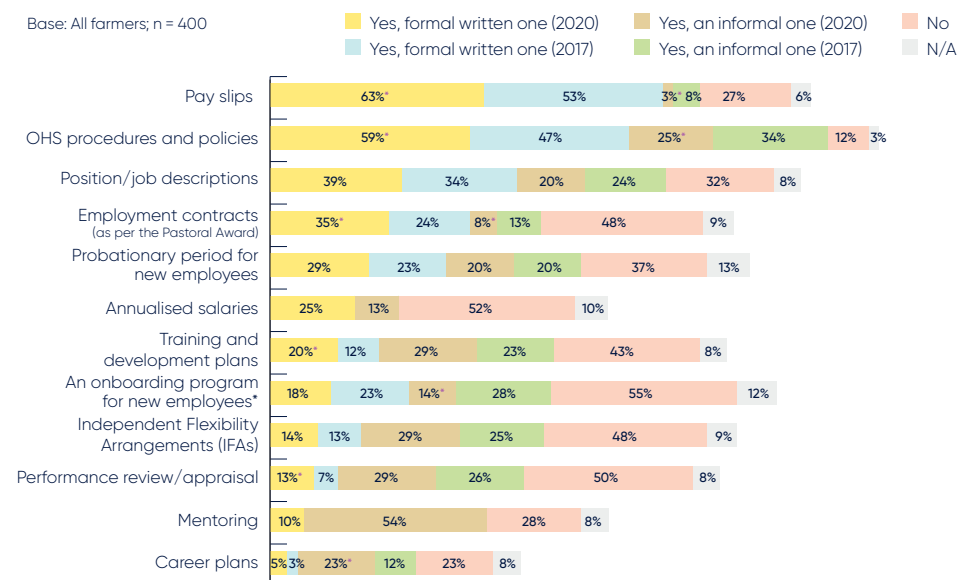


# EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

Employment practices for industrial relations compliant human resource management were variable and indicated room for improvement for the industry. Substantial numbers of farm business do not have formal performance review/appraisal processes, mentoring, training and development plans or onboarding programs for employees.

## Do you have the following in place for your employees and your family on the farm?

Base: All farmers; n = 400



\*Process/structure to bring people into your business.

\*2020 result is significantly different to the 2017 result (Z-test for two proportions).

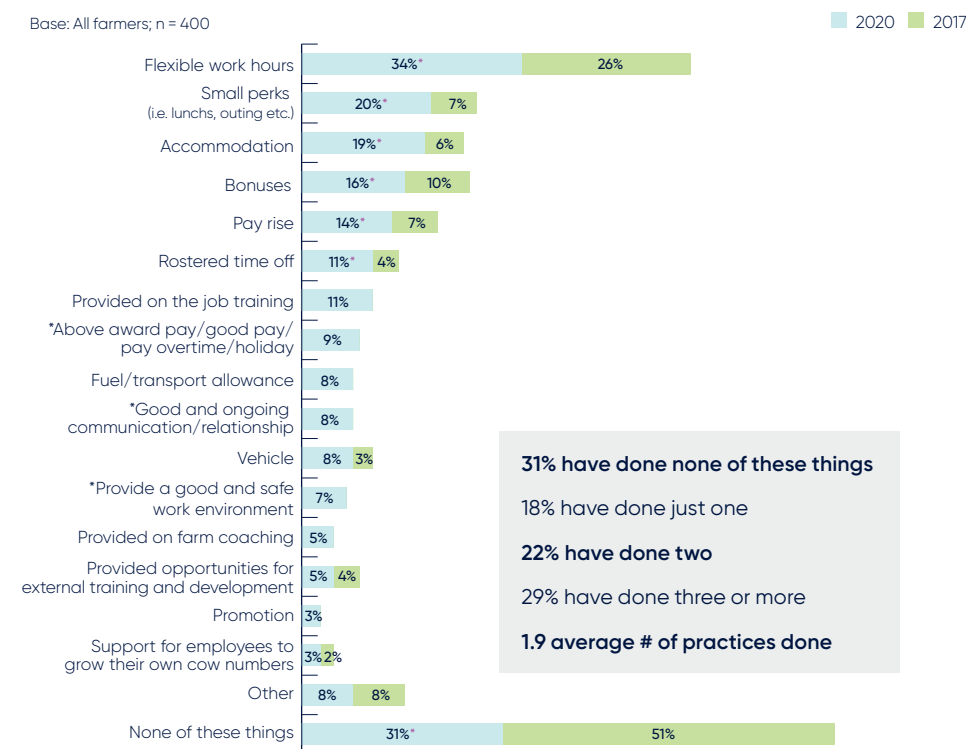
## Retention strategies

For the industry to position itself as an "employer of choice" farm businesses are using a variety of strategies to both attract people as well as retain employees. The three most frequently reported are flexible work hours, small perks such as lunches and social outings, and accommodation.

While the percentage of respondents reporting to use approaches for attraction and retention has significantly increased since 2017, the number of farm businesses remain less than one third for all approaches. 31% of farm businesses have done none, 18% have done one approach, 22% have done two and 29% have done three or more approaches.

## What have you done or put in place to help keep or retain your employees? Please tell us all the initiatives or benefits that you use.

Base: All farmers; n = 400



31% have done none of these things

18% have done just one

22% have done two

29% have done three or more

1.9 average # of practices done

\*Results coded back from "Other (please specify)" option.

\*2020 result is significantly different to the 2017 result (Z-test for two proportions).

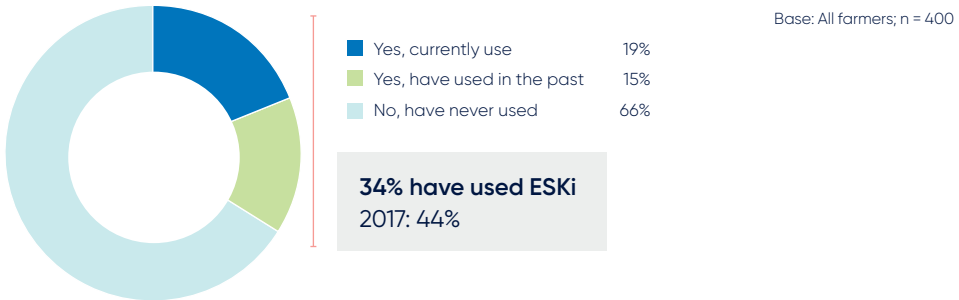
Use of Dairy Australia resources in employment practices

Dairy Australia offered the Employer Starter Kit (ESKi) as the key resource to support employment practices on-farm in 2020.

19% of respondents are currently using ESKi to support their farm business with human resource management. A further 15% have used the kit in the past, giving a total of 34% accessing ESKi. This percentage has significantly declined from 44% in 2017.

Although, business size influences uptake of ESKi, with 63% of the extra-large herd farm businesses having used ESKi compared to only 18% of the smaller herd farm businesses. This result is to be expected with extra-large herd businesses having greater employee numbers (detailed in workforce profile on page 11) and potentially more complex human resource management requirements.

Do you use or have you ever used Dairy Australia's Employment Starter Kit (ESKi) to support your employment practices?



	Herd size			
	Small	Medium	Large	X-XX Large
Base (n=)	130	127	78	65
Have used ESKi	18%	29%	50%	63%

Of those businesses that are using ESKi, 81% report that the kit improved recruitment and employment practices, which is a significant increase from 51% reporting the same in 2017. The preferred mode of access is through The People in Dairy website ([thepeopleindairy.org.au](http://thepeopleindairy.org.au))

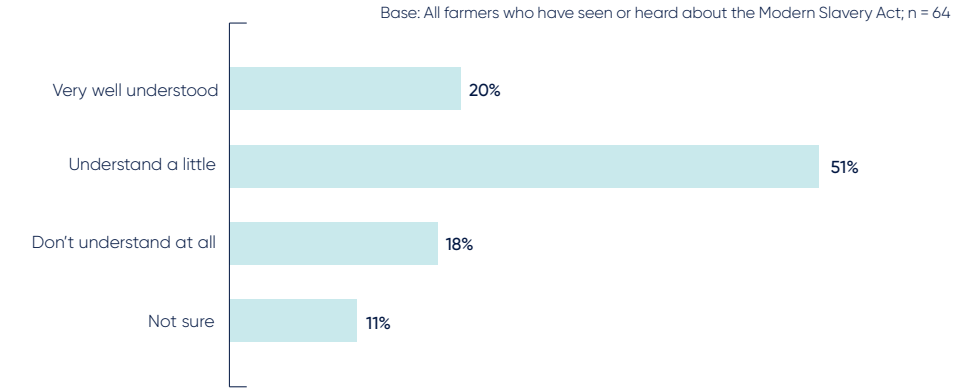
DAIRY FARMS UNDERSTANDING THE MODERN SLAVERY ACT

The dairy industry is committed to sustainable practices, and in 2018, when the Australian Government introduced the Modern Slavery Act, the dairy processors began reporting potential risks they see in their supply chains. The following results have been collected to support the industry to reflect on its understanding of the Act. Through knowledge of the Act and a commitment to employment practices that protect human rights, the dairy industry is taking a positive step to a sustainable workforce.

Only 16% of dairy farm businesses (a total of 64) that responded to this survey knew of the Modern Slavery Act prior to the survey. 71% of these respondents felt they understood the Act to some level and 79% reported they understood the definition of modern slavery and the different forms or circumstances it can be considered in.

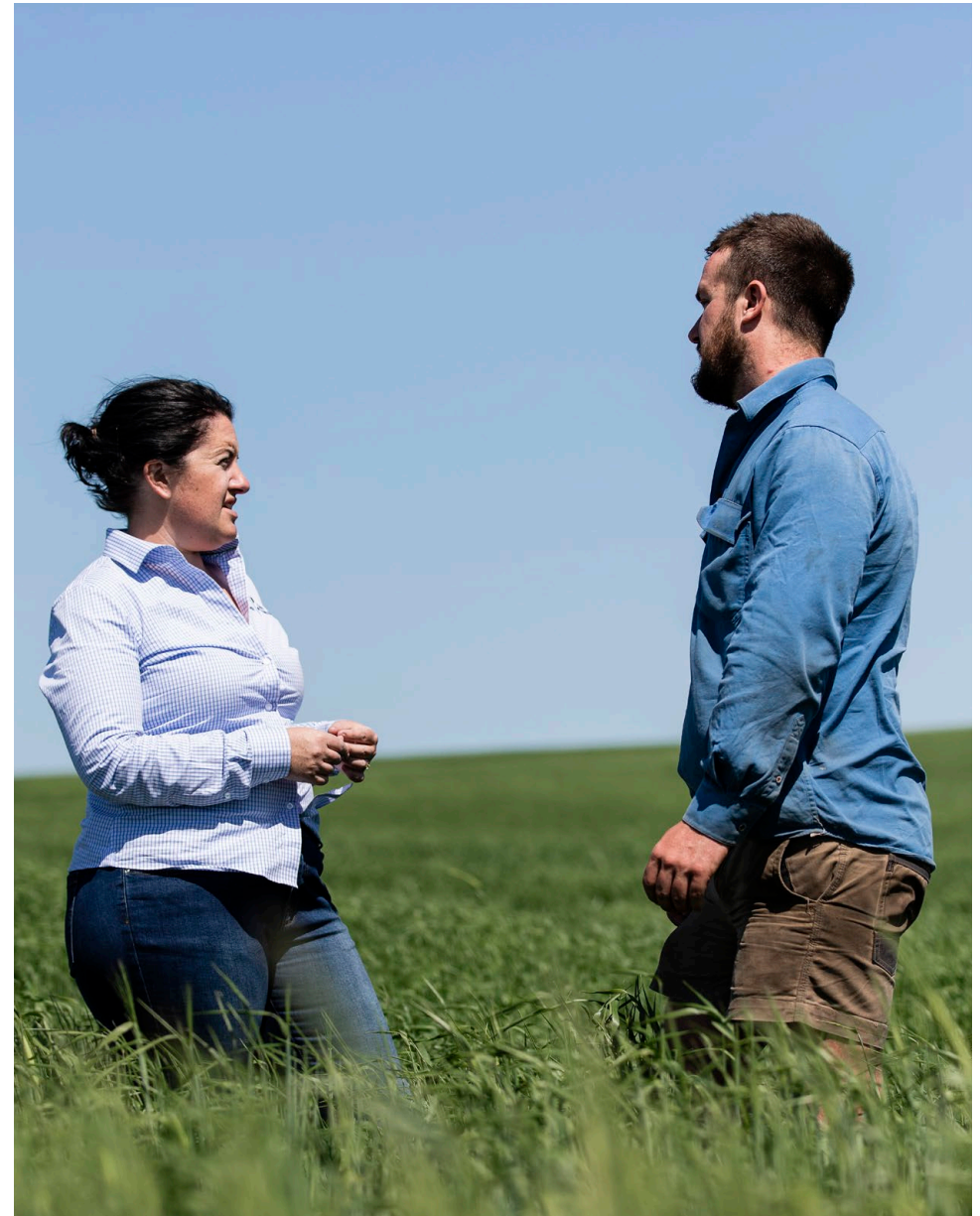
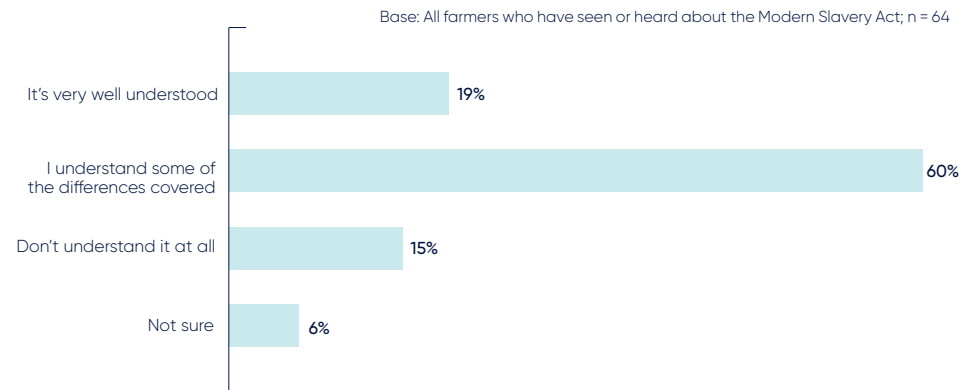
Of those who have heard of the Act, these results are encouraging. However, a large proportion of dairy farm businesses appear to be unaware of the Act. There is opportunity for the dairy industry to increase awareness of employment practices that would be in breach of the Act and support farm businesses in sustainable practices.

How well do you understand what the implications of the Act are for the dairy processors you supply? That is, do you understand what they are required to report and the penalties that apply if they are in breach of the Modern Slavery Act?





How well do you understand what the term "Modern Slavery" includes in today's working and operating environment? Do you understand the different forms or circumstances it can be considered in?

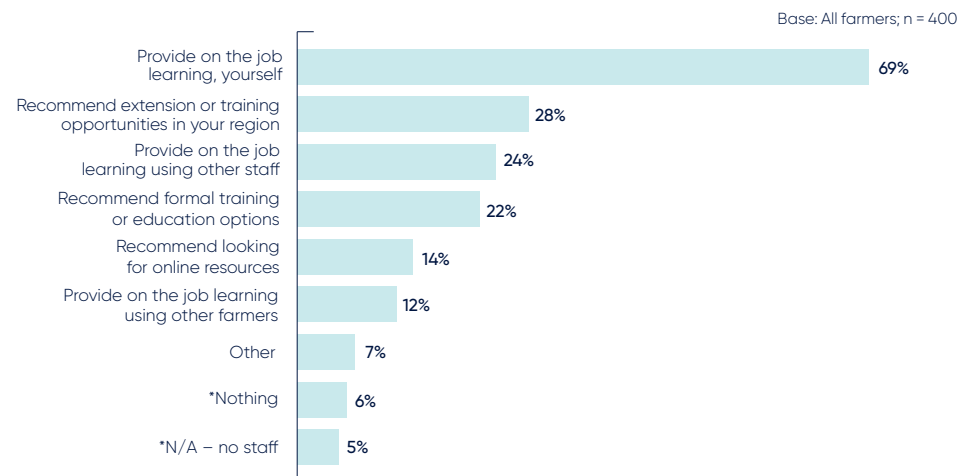


## EMPLOYEE CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT

Where respondents had observed a capability development need in staff, the main approach to supporting the person to develop the skills and knowledge needed was through providing "on-the-job" training (69% of respondents). Thirty-seven per cent recommended formal or informal training through the education sector or extension programs. Online resources for employees was reportedly used by 14% of respondents.

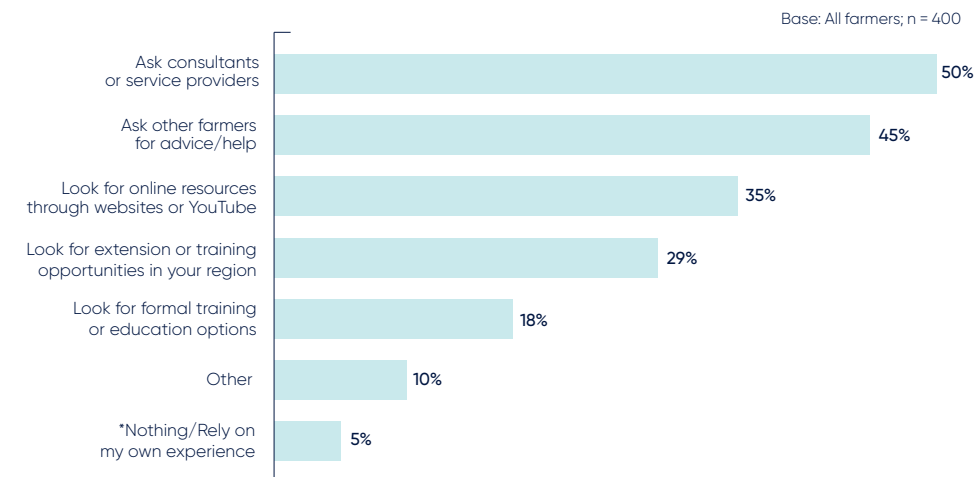
This contrasts with skills and knowledge development of the respondent, where 35% of respondents reported using online resources such as websites and YouTube for training and information. 69% looked to external advice from service providers and other farmers. Extension or education for training was a source of skills development for 33% of respondents.

**If you identify any gaps in your staff's skills or knowledge, what do you usually do to overcome these gaps?**



*\*Results coded back from "Other (please specify)" option.*

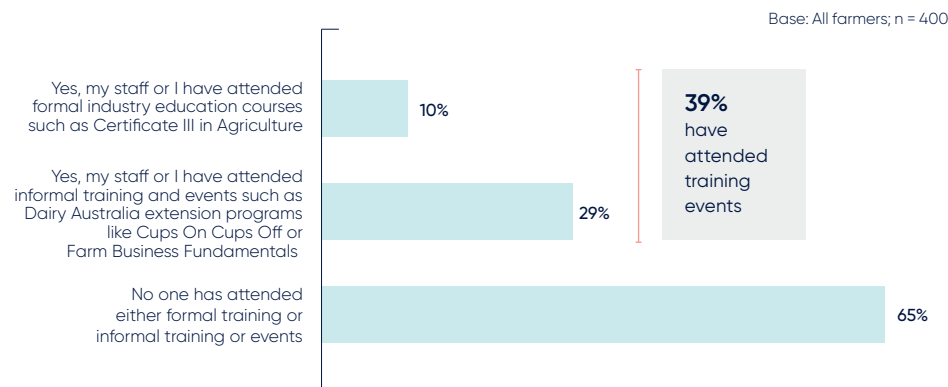
**If you identify any gaps in your own skills or knowledge, what do you usually do to overcome these gaps?**



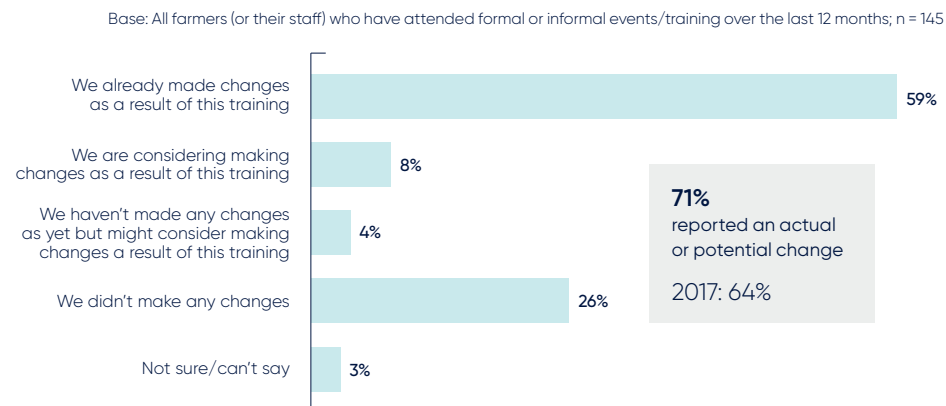
*\*Results coded back from "Other (please specify)" option.*

In terms of attending learning events over the last 12 months, only 35% of respondents reported that they or their employees had attended training. Of the 145 respondents who had attended a training event, 71% reported that attending the training led to an actual or potential change to the way the farm business was run. This has increased from 64% of respondents who attended training in 2017 reporting a change in the way their run their farm business.

## Have you or any of your staff attended any education, training and events over the last 12 months?

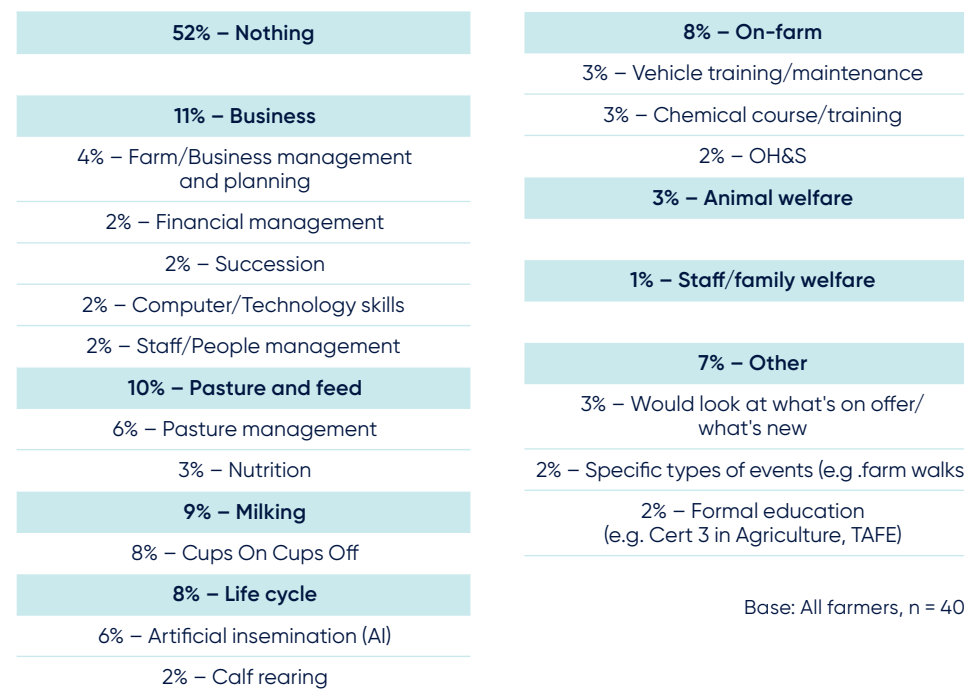


## Thinking of the most recent education/training/events you attended, did you make any changes to the way you run the business?



Plans for employee and own capability development over the next 12 months was limited, with 52% of respondents reporting they had nothing planned. The main area of training respondents were planning on competing were in farm business performance (financial management, business planning, succession planning, computer and technology skills and staff people management).

## Based on your farm business goals, what education, training and events would you like to access for you or your staff in the next 12 months?



Base: All farmers, n = 400

## SAFETY ON-FARM

The number of respondents reporting that the farm business has a work health and safety (WHS) plan has significantly increased from 38% in 2017 to 56% in 2020. Of those who have a WHS plan (232 respondents) 64% have updated their plan in the prior 12 months.

The percentage of all respondents who both had a written WHS plan and had updated that plan in the last 12 months was 36% (which has significantly increased from only 20% in 2017).

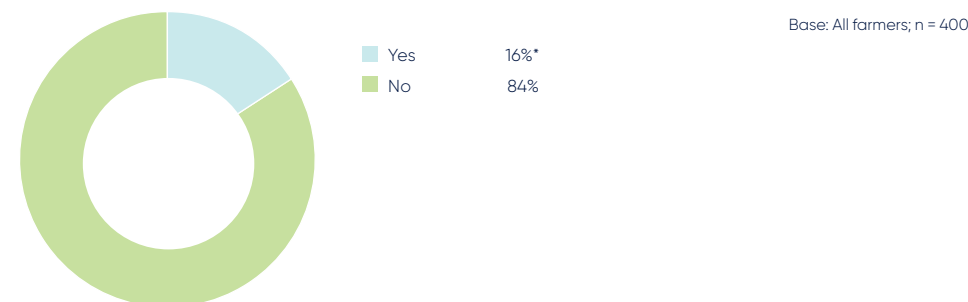
The larger herd size businesses had a greater proportion of respondents who had a written WHS plan and had updated that plan in the last 12 months. This is likely to reflect the fact that the larger herd size businesses have a greater number of employees on-farm and a perception of need around more rigorous WHS processes on-farm. This was not explored by the research though.

### Results across segments

	Herd size			
	Small	Medium	Large	X-XX Large
Base (n=)	130	127	78	65
Have a written WH&S plan	55%	50%	59%	72%
Base (n=)	72	67	47	46
Updated their WH&S plan	64%	64%	57%	69%

16% of farm businesses had an injury on-farm that prevented the person from working the next day. This is a small increase from 12% in 2017, which cannot be explained by the data at this stage.

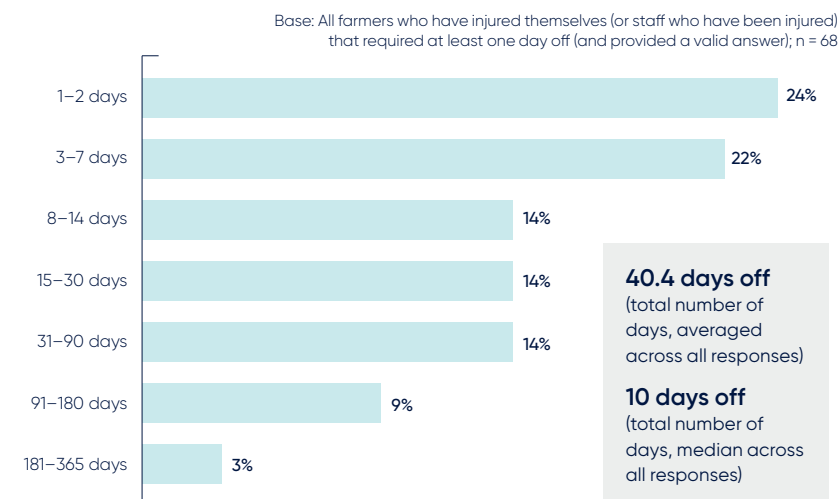
Over the last 12 months, have you or any of your staff had an injury on the farm that prevented them from working the next day?



\*2017: Yes = 12%

Across the 68 farm businesses that reported an injury to themselves or an employee, respondents reported an average of 40.4 days lost to on-farm injuries in the last 12 months. The median was 10 days. It is important to note that this was a question posed to farmers involved in the survey as a range of days lost and requires accurate recollection on behalf of the respondent. As such, this number should be considered an estimate.

Over the last 12 months, in total how many days have you and your staff had off due to on-farm injuries?





## Farm safety practices

When asked about implementing farm safety activities with employees, 85% of respondents reported at least one farm safety practice had been implemented with employees. This has not changed since the 2017 survey, where 86% of respondents reported at least one farm safety practice had been implemented with employees.

### Which of these practices do you undertake?

	<b>75%*</b> 2017: 55%	Involve your employees in conducting safety scans and identifying hazards?
	<b>67%*</b> 2017: 43%	Have an induction that is tailored to your farm, highlighting specific equipment and potential hazards to employees?
	<b>50%</b>	Hold regular meetings with staff to discuss farm safety?

Base: All farmers; n =400

\*2020 result is significantly different to the 2017 result (Z-test for two proportions).

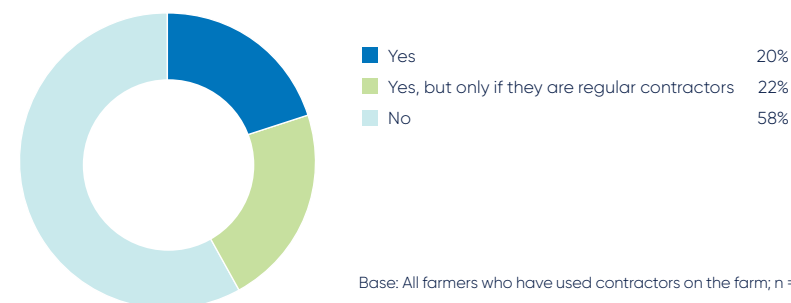
As farm size increased, there was a greater proportion of respondents who reported having a tailored farm induction for new employees (ranged from 55% of small herd size businesses to 88% of extra-large herd size businesses). There was also a greater proportion of respondents who reported holding regular meetings with staff on safety matters and involving employees in safety scans.

## Results across segments

	Herd size			
	Small	Medium	Large	X-XX Large
Base (n=)	130	127	78	65
Involve employees in safety scans	65%	75%	86%	84%
Have a tailored farm induction	55%	66%	77%	88%
Hold regular meeting with staff	45%	50%	46%	65%

83% of respondents had used a contractor on the farm in the last 12 months. Of these 324 respondents, only 20% completed a farm induction with all contractors, and a firm 22% completed a farm induction with regular contractors. A focus on farm safety and inductions for contractors could be improved.

### Do you conduct a site-specific induction for all contractors before they start work on your farm? Of the 83% of farms who used contractors...

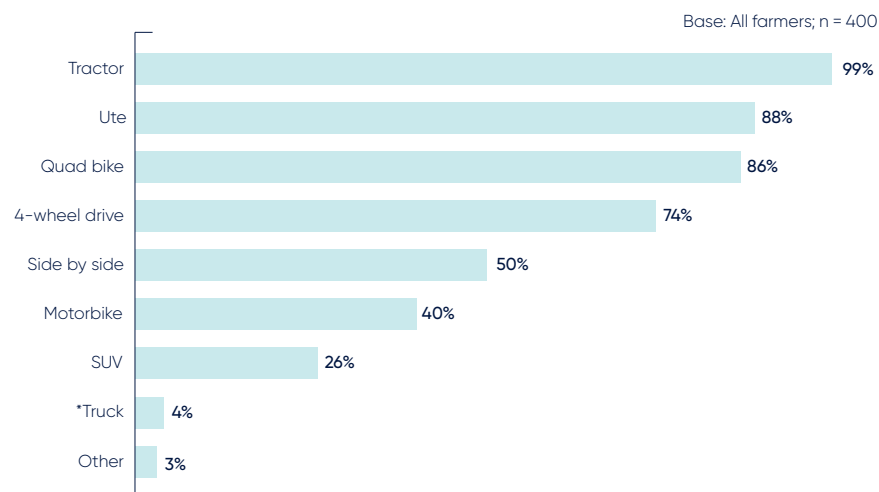


Base: All farmers who have used contractors on the farm; n = 324

## Safe vehicle use on-farm

Vehicle use on farm remains very high, with 99% of respondents reporting tractors, 88% of respondents reporting utes and 86% of respondents reporting quad bike use as the top three vehicles. 66% of respondents reported having a standard operating procedure (SOP) guiding use of vehicles, however only 13% had a written SOP for all vehicles used on-farm.

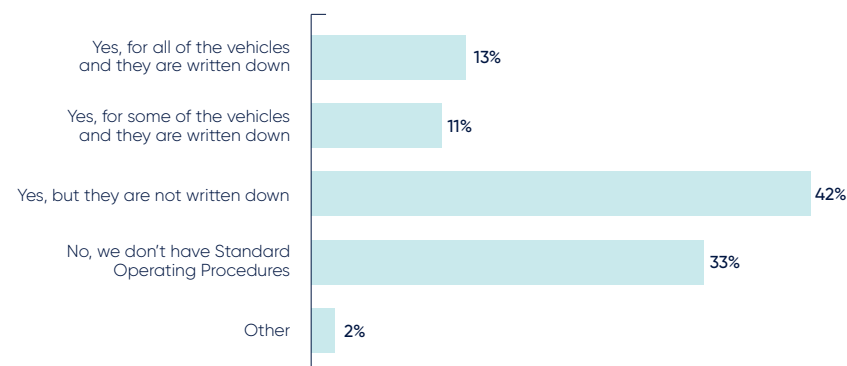
### Which of these types of vehicles do you or any of your staff use on your farm?



\*Results coded back from "Other (please specify)" option.

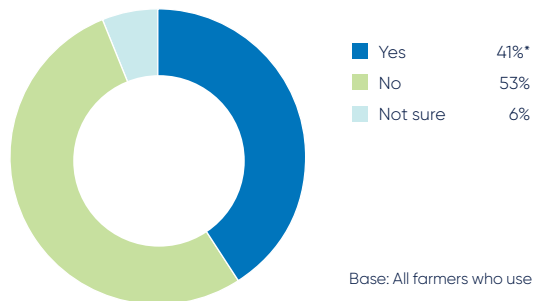
## For the vehicles you and your staff use on your farm, do you have Standard Operating Procedures for each of the vehicles used on farm?

Base: All farmers; n = 400



86% of respondents reported that they or their staff use quad bikes on-farm, with 90% using the bike on the day of the survey and 98% using one in the last month. Of the 342 respondents who reported using quads bikes on-farm, 53% reported helmet use was not regular. This has declined slightly since 2017. Uptake of crush protective devices has significantly improved since 2017 with 42% of respondents reporting all quad bikes on-farm being fitted with the device compared to only 19% in 2017.

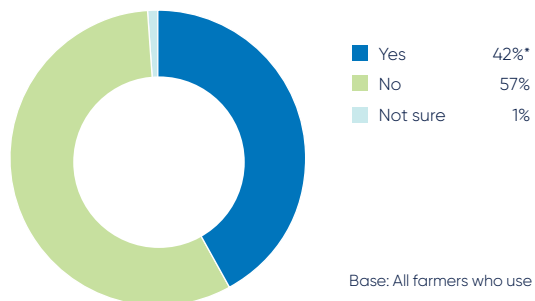
Does everyone on your farm wear a helmet when using the quad bikes?



Base: All farmers who use quad bike(s) on their farm; n = 342

\*2017: Yes = 38%

Are all quad bikes fitted with a crush protective device?  
For example, Quad bar or Life Guard?



Base: All farmers who use quad bike(s) on their farm; n = 342

\*2017: Yes = 19%

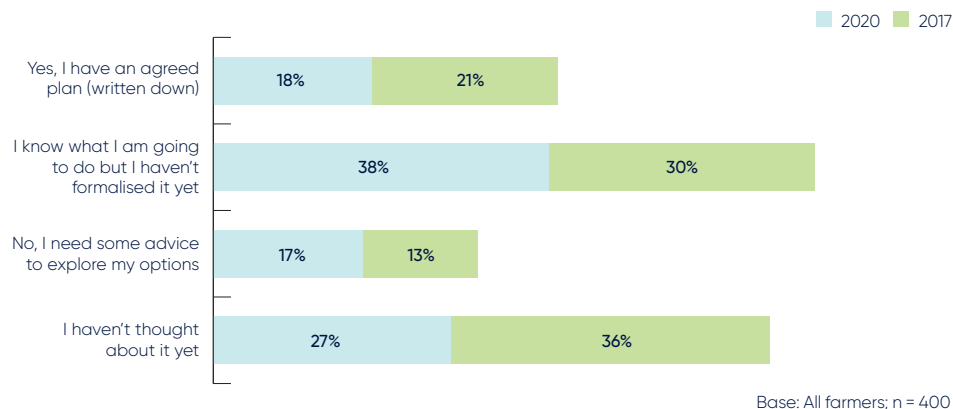


# SUCCESSION/TRANSITION PLANNING

Only 18% of farm businesses have a succession plan that is agreed to and written down. The larger farm businesses had a greater proportion of respondents with a succession plan. While the proportion of respondents with a written plan has declined since 2017, the proportion of people who “know what they are going to do but haven’t formalised it” or “no, need some advice” has increased and the proportion of people who have not thought about it has declined.

These results suggest that awareness around succession and transition planning has increased overall, but further energy is required by the industry to increase the number of farm business with formalised plans.

## Do you have an agreed plan in place for succession/transition of your farm?



## Results across segments

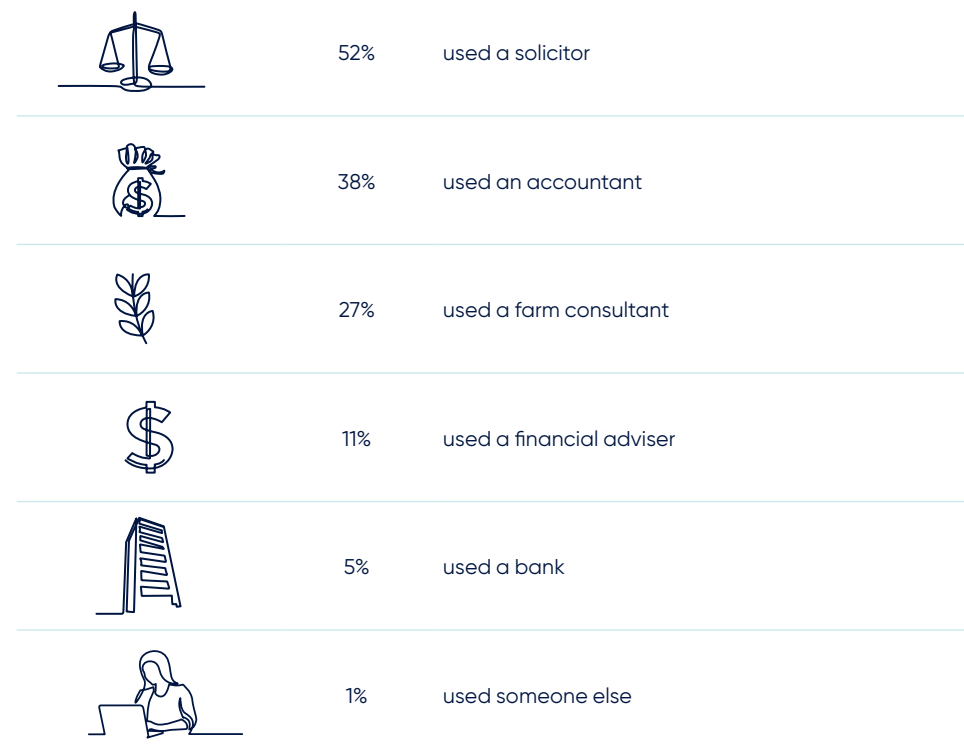
	Herd size			
	Small	Medium	Large	X-XX Large
Base (n=)	130	127	78	65
Written down plan	13%	19%	21%	23%

Of the 75 respondents who had a written plan, 94% had used a professional to assist with writing the plan, although a broad range of professionals were accessed, including solicitors, accountants, farm consultants, financial advisors, and their bank.

## Did you use a professional to assist with your plan and if so what type of professional help did you use?

Of the 18% who have an agreed plan (written down) 6% did not use a professional to assist with their plan.

Of the remaining 94%\* (2017: 74%)



Base: All farmers who have an agreed plan (written down); n = 75

\*2020 result is significantly different to the 2017 result (Z-test for two proportions).

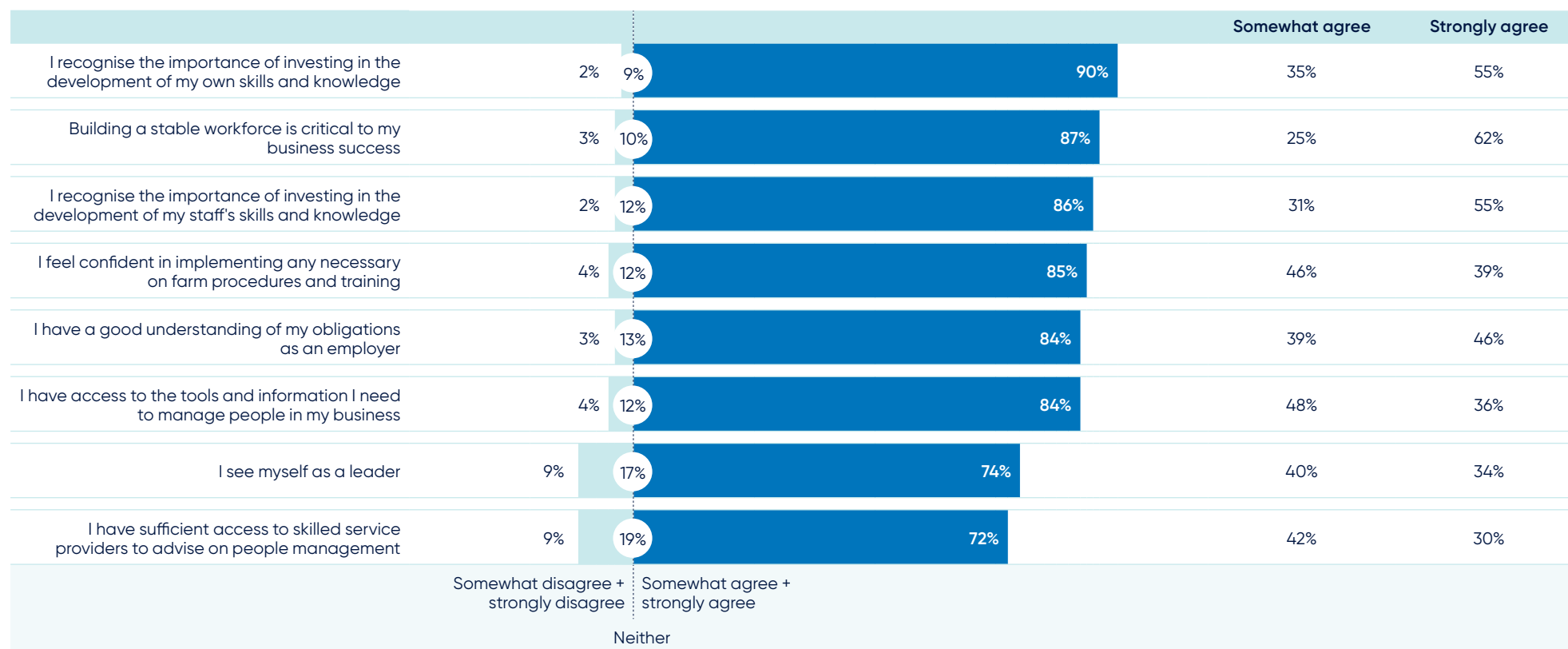


## A PEOPLE APPROACH ON-FARM

Overwhelmingly the majority of farm businesses feel positive about their approach to people management, in particular recognising the importance of investing in the development of their own skills and knowledge and building a stable workforce.

Farm businesses also recognise the importance of investing in the development of their employees skills and knowledge. There were two key areas where less than 80% of respondents agreed, being seeing themselves as leaders and access to service providers to advise on people management. These two areas are recommended to be a focus in the short term to address.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your approach to and skills related to people management?



# CONCLUSION

The dairy industry continues to make inroads with regards to attracting and retaining great people by implementing best practice people management approaches in dairy businesses. Whilst there is room for improvement in terms of recruitment and retention practices, farm safety practices have improved with more farm businesses having a written WHS plan.

Workforce planning and development – perceptions, approaches and practices surveyed in this report – will continue to be crucial for dairy farms to attract, retain and develop people and compete with other industries and sectors for these talented, capable people.

Australian dairy farms are well placed to continue to implement, review and improve people management practices through accessing Dairy Australia resources and applying these to their individual business needs to be Employers of Choice.

Visit [thepeopleindairy.org.au](https://thepeopleindairy.org.au) for more information.





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