Dairy Herdsperson

Dairy farming

Job title	Dairy Herdsperson
Department	Dairy farming
Reports to	Herd Manager (Farm Manager on smaller farms)
Direct reports	None (may direct relief milkers on shift)
Location	*[To be confirmed by the employer]*
Contract type	*[Permanent / fixed-term / other]*
Salary and benefits	*[To be confirmed by the employer]*

Job purpose

Looks after the milking herd day to day: milking and parlour hygiene, cow health and welfare, heat detection and support for artificial insemination (AI), calving, feeding and bedding, and accurate records. Herdsperson is one of the most common job titles in UK dairy farm adverts.

Key responsibilities

Milking and parlour

- Milk the herd to the farm routine: pre-milking teat preparation, clean cluster attachment and post-milking teat disinfection
- Check the milk filters after every milking and report clots, blood or sediment
- Check the bulk tank is cooling to target and record the temperature
- Milk treated and fresh-calved cows separately so their milk stays out of the bulk tank, and milk high cell count cows last
- Wash down the parlour and collecting yard after each milking and run the plant wash to the set programme
- Show relief milkers the routine and check their work when asked

Herd health and welfare

- Walk the herd every day and spot sick, lame, injured or off-colour cows early
- Look for the early signs of mastitis at every milking and treat cases under the farm health plan
- Mobility score and body condition score the herd to the farm schedule
- Record every treatment, the dose and the withdrawal period, so treated milk never enters the bulk tank
- Mark and separate treated cows clearly so every milker knows them
- Handle cows calmly and quietly, and report any welfare concern straight away

Breeding and calving

- Watch for heats at milking and in the yards, and record every heat seen
- Present cows for AI on time, or serve them yourself where DIY AI is permitted and you hold the certificate
- Check calving cows regularly, help with difficult calvings and know when to call the vet

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- Make sure every newborn calf gets enough good-quality colostrum quickly, ideally within two hours of birth
- Watch fresh-calved cows closely for milk fever, retained cleansings and other problems

Feeding, housing and records

- Feed the herd to the ration set by the Herd Manager or nutritionist and push up feed through the day
- Keep cubicles and loose yards clean with fresh dry bedding
- Scrape yards and passages and handle slurry safely
- Enter treatments, heats, services, calvings and movements in the herd management software on the same day
- Keep the medicine store tidy and the medicine book up to date

Qualifications and experience

Essential

- Practical experience on a dairy farm
- Competent milker
- Can recognise a sick, lame or off-colour cow
- Comfortable with early starts, a weekend rota and working outdoors in all weathers
- Careful record keeping
- Works safely around cattle and machinery

Desirable

- Level 2 or 3 agriculture qualification or apprenticeship
- AI (artificial insemination) certificate where DIY AI is permitted
- Telehandler, ATV or tractor certificates as required where the job is based
- Foot-trimming training
- Veterinary medicines handling training
- Experience of robotic or rotary parlours
- Experience with herd management software

Skills and attributes

- Stockmanship and patience with animals
- Attention to detail
- Reliability: the cows must be milked on time, every day
- Teamwork
- Staying calm under pressure, for example at a difficult calving
- Practical, hands-on approach

Measures of success

- Milk quality results, such as somatic cell count and bacteria counts, within target
- Mastitis and lameness cases falling
- No antibiotic milk failures
- Calving and fertility targets met
- Records complete and up to date
- No accidents or injuries

Working conditions and safety

Early starts are normal; milking often begins before 5 am. Most farms work split shifts around the milkings, with a weekend and holiday rota. The work is in the parlour and outdoors in all weathers and involves handling large animals, slurry and chemicals; PPE is provided. Accommodation is sometimes offered.

- Follow health and safety rules and safe systems of work, and wear the correct PPE

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- Follow animal welfare, biosecurity and medicine-use procedures at all times
- Report hazards, accidents, near misses and concerns promptly

This job description outlines the main duties of the role. It is not a complete list, and the employer may update it as the business changes, in consultation with the jobholder.

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