TRAINING DAIRY FARM WORKERS
Bernie Erven, Professor
Department of Agricultural, Environmental and Development Economics
Ohio State University

Introduction
What do you like to do that you don't do well? Easy question for most people! Nothing! Now imagine having your first job on a dairy farm and not knowing how to do what you have been hired to do. Most people gain more satisfaction from doing a job well than stumbling along on their own trying to learn. New employees need and want training. The importance of training programs has increased dramatically. Margins for acceptable error have decreased. Equipment has become more complicated. Farm work is complex. People with all the necessary skills and experience for success cannot be hired. Many new employees were not raised on a farm. New employees who have worked for another dairy farmer are likely to bring habits that need to be changed. Training is essential!

Getting Ready to Train
Dairy farmers should separate getting ready to train from doing the actual training. Trainers are often so experienced in what they are teaching that taking time to prepare for training seems like a waste of time. "I don't have time to prepare" or "I know this job so well I don't need to think about how to teach it" are usually foolish attitudes. Muddled instructions increase the time spent on training.

Confusion causes frustration for both trainer and employee.

Two important questions guide preparation for training. First, what is the objective of the training? Define specifically what the workers are to know or be able to do at the conclusion of the training. Does the new milker need to know how to do preventive maintenance on the milking equipment? Does the tractor driver need to know how do determine when a field is too wet to work? An acceptable level of performance and timetable for the training should also be established. What is excellent work? Is anything less than excellent acceptable? What is the difference between good enough and excellent? Who will notice or care about how well a job is done?

Second, what are the principal steps in the task and in what sequence should they be done? Analyzing each task can be helpful. Develop tips to make the job easier to do, to do more quickly and to do with less frustration. Keep in mind that a new worker needs help that builds on what he or she now can or cannot do.

Having determined the objectives of the training and the principal steps in the job, the trainer is ready to prepare equipment, materials, learning aids and the work place for the actual training. Stopping training to look for equipment or supplies leaves the learner suspicious that the trainer is careless or incompetent or both.

The actual training of a new employee can be aided by a five-step teaching method:

1. **PREPARE the learner.** Learners are prepared when they are at ease, understand why they need to learn the task, are interested in learning, have the confidence that they can learn and the trainer can teach. The most important part of learner preparation is creating a need to know or desire to learn. Each of the following is helpful in preparing the learner: show enthusiasm for the task, relate the task to what the learner already knows and help the learner
envision being an expert in the task. It also helps to add fun and prestige to the task and to associate the task with respected co-workers.

2. **TELL** the learner about each step or part of the task.

3. **SHOW** the learner how to do each step. In demonstrating the task, explain each step emphasizing the key points and more difficult steps. Remember the little and seemingly simple parts of the task. Get the learner involved by asking questions about what is being shown.

4. Have the learner **DO** each step of the task while being observed by the trainer. Ask the learner to explain each step as it is performed. If steps or parts of the task are omitted, reexplain the steps and have the learner repeat them. Then have the learner do the steps without the trainer observing.

5. **REVIEW** each step or part of the task with the learner, offering encouragement, constructive criticism and additional pointers on how to do the job. Be frank and honest in the appraisal. Encourage the learner toward self-appraisal.

These five steps work! They help create an ideal learning situation based on the following guidelines and assumptions:

- All employees can learn.
- Trainers should make learning an active process.
- Learners need and want guidance and direction.
- Learning should be step-by-step.
- Learners need time to practice.
- Learning should be varied to avoid boredom.
- Learners gain satisfaction from their learning.
- Trainers should encourage and reinforce learner progress.
- Learning does not occur at a steady rate, i.e., plateaus follow spurts of progress.
- Getting Started

Improved training offers dairy farm managers a way to increase employee job satisfaction and progress. Deciding what can be accomplished through better training is a good starting point. Creating a positive environment for learning helps both the trainer and the employees. Preparing before jumping in avoids confusion and frustration. Using a five-step method, **Prepare-Tell-Show-Do-Review**, steers both trainers and employees toward greater success.