

# **DO EMPLOYER GROUPS HELP WITH DAIRY FARM EMPLOYMENT? WHY HASN'T THE IDEA CAUGHT- ON'?**

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## ***Abstract***

*Dairy employer groups began to appear about 2000 in response to employment difficulties as the dairy farm labour market encountered low unemployment. Edkins and Tipples (2002) reported to LEW 10 on the development of the Amuri Dairy Employers Group (ADEG). Since then other groups and enterprises have been established and flourished or failed. In this paper developments since 2002 are considered. Factors promoting their success are contrasted with causes of failure. In that time the labour force in dairy farming has changed radically (Tipples, Callister & Trafford, 2010). The paper considers how these changes have fitted with dairy employer groups and suggests ways in which the benefits experienced could be further developed and shared more widely.*

*Keywords: dairy farming, dairying, migrants, labour, recruitment, retention, group*

## **Introduction**

In early 2010, as part of a larger study of fatigue in dairy farming, a case study of the Amuri Dairy Employers Group (ADEG) was conducted for Lincoln University by AgResearch. This revisited the territory covered by Edkins (2003), and Edkins and Tipples at LEW 10 in 2002. It led to the review of the success and performance of dairy employer groups reported in this paper.

The attraction and retention of talented people continue to be key priorities of the New Zealand dairy industry (DairyNZ, 2009). These priorities need to be underpinned by developing a quality work environment, which should help to ensure continued improvements in dairy farming productivity. This in turn will help to retain the New Zealand industry's place as one of the world's lowest cost producers (DairyNZ, 2009) through continually improving on-farm productivity.

One farmer driven initiative to have been implemented was the Amuri Dairy Employers Group (ADEG). The ADEG was formed in 2000 and developed a code of practice and a system of accreditation that enabled employers in the area to demonstrate they were of high calibre (Edkins & Tipples, 2002). The existence of the ADEG helped dairy farmers make significant positive changes to how employers in the area were perceived (Edkins & Tipples, 2003).

The Amuri region is located in North Canterbury, 90 minutes northwest of Christchurch. It was traditionally a sheep and beef farming area until the Waiau Plains Irrigation scheme was commissioned (Edkins & Tipples, 2002). This precipitated the conversion of a few farms in the region to dairying. Now there are approximately 60 dairy farms in the region (2008/2009 New Zealand Dairy Statistics). Both Hannah (2009) and Edkins and Tipples (2002) document the reputation for poor employment relations that had developed in the region and the role that the ADEG has played in improving the reputation of the region as a place to live and work.

## Other experiences of dairy employer groups

Since the formation of the ADEG four strands of development of dairy employer groups are discernible. First, there have been papers, reports and one thesis about the Amuri Group. Not only is this the longest lived group but it has had its ups and downs. Secondly, there is the development of the Clydevale- Clinton Quality Employers Group in Otago. Thirdly, there was an abortive attempt to develop a further group, the Southland/Otago Dairy Employers Association, and fourthly, there was the North Island contribution, Quality Farm Employers of New Zealand (QFENZ) based at Cambridge, Waikato. In addition, there is the promotion of *The Beginners Guide to Dairy Employment Groups* by the Clutha Agricultural Development Board in association with Clydevale Clinton Quality Employers. In spite of the growing interest in 'being a good employer' that these groups have promoted the dairy industry continues to be plagued by employment problems.

Reasons for the concentration of dairy farm employer groups in the South Island merits consideration. Since 1991 dairy farm expansion, development and employment have undergone significant geographical and structural changes. These have largely involved the conversion of sheep/beef or cropping farms in the South Island to large scale, irrigated dairy farms. Unlike traditional North Island dairying, based largely on self employed or unpaid family labour, these large scale developments have depended on employed managers and other employees (Trafford, Tipples & Callister, 2010). For many of the locations where these developments have taken place, such as the Amuri, there has been no base of experienced dairy employees to call upon to staff these new enterprises. Hence, the acute problems encountered in the Amuri, which led to the formation of the ADEG in 2000.

Meanwhile, the New Zealand working population has been undergoing structural changes too. First, low levels of unemployment had been at record levels until about 2008. Secondly, the demographic structure of the population has been changing with a profound ageing of the population and a growth of youth cohorts only in the upper North Island. These changes have been associated with a growth in the working population from higher activity rates from older people going back to work or continuing to work longer and more women in the labour force (Wilson and Tipples, 2008). Neither of these are traditionally significant sources of dairy farm employees who have tended to

come from the younger male age classes. However, with little unemployment dairy farm employers have often had difficulty retaining their services and there have been ongoing problems of retention combined with increasing difficulties in recruitment. These effects have been felt most severely in the south (Trafford et al., 2010).

To foster the growing dairy industry in the South Island, an annual meeting of dairy farmers was initiated in 1999, the South Island Dairy Event (SIDE), which has provided an industry forum for considering employment concerns as well as more technical issues. Not only has it published practitioner papers, but it has acted as a forum for 'new' ideas. The Amuri Dairy Employers Group was presented just one year after its inception (McCraw Neil, 2001). That led eventually to the initiation of the Clydevale – Clinton Quality Employers Group, south of Dunedin (Sharplin, 2006; Sharpin and Deverson, 2008) and subsequently to the preparation of guidelines for the formation of dairy employers groups (Clutha ADB and Clydevale Clinton Quality Employers, 2008).

There was also an abortive attempt to form a Southland/Otago Good Dairy Employers Association in 2006-7 alongside Greener Horizons Workforce Ltd., a migrant consultant and farmer led initiative for staffing South Island dairy enterprises with migrant workers. However, it appears it may have been 'too early' because dairy farmers were not prepared to pay for the extensive range of services it provided (Dodunski, 2010).

The North Island strand of developments was through Quality Farm Employers of New Zealand (QFENZ). QFENZ was a wholly owned subsidiary of ATR Solutions Limited, and that a subsidiary of ATR Fegan, the People People dairy industry management consultants of Cambridge, Waikato. QFENZ was established as an organisation with members committed to providing a quality workplace for their staff, wherever located throughout New Zealand. It had developed its own employment standards and insisted on its members 'doing it right'. QFENZ members were required to undergo an annual assessment to ensure they continued to meet this standard. The first QFENZ standard had been developed on a whiteboard at a shed meeting in 1999 when dairy farmer participants had debated 'what good looked like'. For this benefit they paid annual fees (Wilson, 2007).

**Table 1: Comparison of dairy employer group initiatives**

<b>Dairy employer group</b>	<b>ADEG</b>	<b>CCQE</b>	<b>QFENZ</b>	<b>SOGDEA/ Greener Horizons</b>
<b>Year founded</b>	2000	2004	1999	2006-7
<b>Community basis</b>	Amuri	Clydevale/ Clinton	National	S.I. regional/ Southland, Otago, Canterbury
<b>Ownership</b>	Farmer initiated/owned	Farmer initiated/owned	Local professional consultants	Migrant professional consultant and local farmer
<b>Leadership</b>	Charismatic	Charismatic	Consultant	Consultant
<b>Code of employer practice</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Used QFENZ standard initially
<b>Vision</b>	To be high quality employers	To be employers of choice	To be employers of choice	To lead the way as employers so that dairying in the South Island is an occupation of choice which is both sustainable and fulfilling.
<b>Audit</b>  - Year 1 - In recess	IIPNZ/QFENZ/IIPNZ  Dec 2001  2008/9	Private auditor, lapsed  2005  Lost improvement focus after 2008	ATR Fegan	QFENZ, but felt to be too hard for dairy farmers
<b>Funding</b>	Farmers and sponsors  DairyNZ 2010-13	Farmers  DairyNZ 2007/8 'Beginner's Guide'	Fegans and farmers fees  Dairy InSight for Employment Health Assessment 2004	Employer and employee customers, and farmer owner
<b>Conclusion</b>	Revived	Inactive	Ended Sept 2008 - uneconomic	Mothballed, uneconomic
<b>Administration 2010</b>	Initially farmer's wife member, now to be North Canterbury Enterprise helping	Clutha Agricultural Development Board helping	Defunct	Defunct
<b>Stage in group development (Sharpin/Deverson, 2008)</b>	5, Re-born	4, Old age	5, Dead	5, Dead

**Key**

- ADEG:** Amuri Dairy Employers Group  
**CCQE:** Clydevale/Clinton Quality Employers  
**QFENZ:** Quality Farm Employers of New Zealand  
**SOGDEA:** Southland/Otago Dairy Employers Association

## Auditing Employment Standards

When the Amuri Group was set up in 2000 finding an appropriate auditor to validate their good employer status was problematic. Eventually Investors in People New Zealand (IIPNZ)<sup>1</sup> was found to have adequate experts, confidentiality and independence. After initial experiences in the Amuri, changes of personnel within IIPNZ and discussions with John Fegan and Shaun Wilson of ATRFegan/QFENZ, IIPNZ withdrew from the dairy sector in favour of QFENZ. QFENZ initial auditing was a mixture of good and bad experiences. There were criticisms of their performance in the Amuri, particularly related to their failure to maintain strict confidentiality of employees' views. Although available when Clydevale/Clinton Quality Employers private auditor was losing interest, they were not taken on by that group. On the other hand, Dairy Holdings found that their employment audited standards correlated well with business performance across their 57 farms. When QFENZ ceased to trade in September 2008 because they could not make it pay, Dairy Holdings were left without an auditor of employment standards. So they then went back to IIPNZ, who had continued to develop their non-farming business.

IIPNZ agreed to relook at a modified standard to apply to the dairy sector, with the help of Sarah Watson, an IIPNZ accredited human resources consultant, with a previous dairy farming background. Comparing the two organisations' auditing procedures, it appears that QFENZ had a more 'Tick the box' mentality, while IIPNZ focused on 'outcomes'. After some 40 assessments of Dairy Holdings farms, Sarah Watson reports half passed at the first assessment, with the remainder getting an action plan for improvement or development. Coaching of those required to improve is needed to encourage further business change. Often a lot changed just before reassessment in year two. Reassessment of those not meeting the standard certainly helps initiate such change. Going back to an IIPNZ approach has reinforced the need for all dairy employers to continue to seek continuous improvement in their standards of employment relations (Watson, 2010). Being 'Employers of choice' in a dairy farming world in which there is now much more help for any dairy farmer to improve their employment standards is now much easier, whether that help is provided by DairyNZ or the Agriculture ITO or private consultants. The industry seems to have been undergoing a change in its employment values compared to previous generations, but the 'old' culture has not yet disappeared.

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<sup>1</sup> IIPNZ is a franchisee of the parent British organisation, Investors in People, which is concerned to improve workplace performance through improving workplaces and the staff working there.

## Methods

In the main research project we were particularly interested in the organisational and employment practices on farms that helped employers manage their own, and their employees, workloads. The ADEG was used as a case study. Eight individuals, who were current or past members of the ADEG, were interviewed to determine some of the virtuous practices used by employers to create a productive and positive working environment for themselves and their employees. Six of the eight interviewees were male. Six farms were represented. Amongst the interviewees there was a mix of owners and managers. We used a semi-structured interviewing process to explore the types of on-farm practices in place and to obtain information about how each person managed their farm and their employees. For completeness, it would have been desirable to interview employees as well as employers to compare perspectives on workloads. However, it was difficult to obtain access to employees (AgResearch, 2010a).

## Results

There were a number of practices identified from the interviews that contributed to an employer providing a quality work environment. These reflected the desire of most of the interviewees to be considered 'employers of choice'. The two overarching practices that enabled someone to demonstrate they were a good employer were:

- Having structures and processes for employing and managing staff; and
- Being willing to learn and change these structures and processes as required.

Interviewee #4 commented that "unless you are an incredible people person then it's hard to manage things without good systems." Interviewees noted that good employers were able to choose their staff, rather than having to make do by taking whoever was available. Good employers also had low staff turnover. This was a source of pride for many interviewees.

There were a range of outcomes based on these two practices including employers working alongside employees, and helping employees integrate into the community. There were a range of methods used to achieve these practices, including the way in which rostering was set up on each farm, and the types of career paths offered to employees. Interviewees noted that each of these systems was evaluated and changes would be made as appropriate.

## Recruiting employees

Interviewees commented on the need to have good processes for recruiting employees. Most commented on the need for an employee to be a 'people person'

and a team player. Interviewee #3 commented they still got this wrong occasionally even with all the effort they put into recruitment. He felt you could teach people to milk, but you could not teach them to work in a team if they were not a people person. Structures and processes were important to ensure that the most appropriate employee was chosen. Sometimes these processes needed to be changed.

### **Employers working alongside employees**

Some of the employers interviewed indicated they believed it was important to work alongside their employees, being able to train and guide as needed, while doing day-to-day tasks. Interviewee #3 indicated that he saw himself as the casual farm worker or manager for the two farms he managed. If there was an emergency or an illness then he could fill in for his employee. This also helped with the roster as he could fill any gaps when employees were on annual leave. He saw this as an essential part of being able to provide employees with leave and as a means of dealing with emergencies.

Another employer, interviewee #6, also believed working alongside his employees was critical to his business. In his case, it was the means of providing training and helping employees along with their career in the industry. By working alongside his employees he was able to identify what motivated each one. He was then able to ensure that he could provide that motivation and ensure they had the necessary training and experience they required.

### **Helping employees integrate into the community**

All of the employers interviewed indicated that helping employees integrate into the community was an important part of their employment practices. One employer (interviewee # 3) indicated that the rostering process they had in place enabled their employees to be able to join the local rugby club, as they were free when rugby training was on, as well as being free for games at weekends. He believed this helped his employees get to know people in the community and meant they were more likely to settle into the job and remain in the position for some length of time. He recalled one employee who had not been inclined to get involved in any local sport and so had isolated himself from the community. This employee ended up leaving the job. Interviewee #2 felt that the time required to organise staff rosters in this way was beneficial, primarily for encouraging processes of integration into the community.

### **Rosters**

Rosters were a key tool that enabled employers to manage employees on their farms. Employers interviewed had a range of methods and approaches to rostering. These ranged from each employee having a

specific job and responsibility, with a monthly roster, to a system where each employee was given responsibility for a part of the farm for a period of time, before being moved on to another part of the farm. This latter system ensured that all employees gained an overview of the whole business. Interviewee #6 explained this system, saying that he employed mature, motivated people with a good work history, who had not been in the industry but were looking at a career change. He offers a pathway for people, from being new to the industry to where they are being offered a farm managers job. This involves ensuring that they learn all parts of dairy farming, hence the need to share and rotate all the responsibilities on-farm.

### **Career paths**

Every employer interviewed agreed that providing a clear career path to employees was important, and that they and the wider dairy industry benefited from this. As with the rostering systems, the processes used to provide employees with a career path differed from employer to employer. For example, one farmer believed that sharemilking was no longer a viable route into the dairy industry now. Instead, he encouraged good managers to enter into equity partnerships and to become dairy owners via that route. This interviewee outlined an example of a farm manager he had employed, who had left to get more experience elsewhere. This individual was now going to be coming back into the business as an equity partner in one of the farms.

### **The Amuri Dairy Employers Group (ADEG)**

All employers interviewed from the Amuri District agreed that the ADEG was critical in helping improve the region's reputation as somewhere desirable to work. This held true whether or not the employer had remained in the group or had left the group. Employers talked from experience about the difficulties of obtaining employees prior to the ADEG being formed. Employers who had moved into the region from elsewhere were able to outline just how bad the reputation of the area had been. It was clear the ADEG had made a significant difference to standards of employment in the region.

### **Current status of ADEG**

The ADEG has been in unofficial recess for the last two years. A small team of employers, keen to see the group evolve to help employers with current issues such as managing migrant workers, has been seeking help to get the group going again. This team has created a partnership with DairyNZ and Enterprise North Canterbury to gauge whether there is enough interest from employers in the region to do this. They held a public meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2010, and got enough initial support to begin the process of restarting the group. DairyNZ has now agreed to fund administrative support for three years to reignite its

good employer practices and help it maintain its status as a group of employers of choice (Serra, 2010)

### **Hours of work and accommodation**

The code of practice developed by the ADEG back in 2000 had specifically focussed on the hours of work, particularly for younger workers (under 18 years old), and specified the standard of accommodation required for employees. One employer noted that the demographics of employees had changed since the group had formed. He estimated the average age of an employee in the district was now 28, meaning that employees were much older than when the ADEG started. This had alleviated some of the concerns about hours worked as these were no longer as relevant as they had been.

### **Impacts of the ADEG on the community**

A number of employers noted that the presence of the ADEG resulted in other groups within the community forming to help address issues such as helping migrants with non-English speaking backgrounds integrate into the community. Some interviewees mentioned that the ADEG had also provided social activities for employees to meet each other by organising bus trips, for example. In this way, the ADEG had filled a social gap in the community.

### **Issues/concerns with the ADEG**

Several interviewees raised some concerns with the way in which the ADEG group was managed. In particular one ex-group member (interview #3) was concerned about the way in which members of the group were audited for compliance with the code of practice. He felt that it had not been as independent as it could have been. For instance, feedback from employees was given directly to their employers, meaning that employees did not feel that they had the freedom to say what they really felt. A current member of the group felt that the feedback obtained from the audit process had not been used to help improve the group. He felt there were still some employers in the district who believed that it was 'dangerous' for employees to have too much information.

Another concern expressed by a current ADEG member was that engagement with the younger employers in the district, who are not currently part of the group, is poor. They would like to see these younger employers contributing to, and being part of the group. One ex-member of the group interviewed indicated one reason for this may be that younger employers do not perceive a need to stay in the group once they have achieved the goals they had set for themselves. Interviewee #7 felt that he did not have to stay in the group once he had learnt all that he needed. He commented that he was "coping well on his own" and so did not need to maintain his membership (and pay the corresponding fees).

Other issues identified with the ADEG were succession for the team managing the group, having effective administration processes and dealing with the mix of personalities in a district. Interviewee #6 thought that having DairyNZ involved in restarting the group was an important means of dealing with some of these issues. Interviewee #8 indicated that funding applications were developed in order to ensure that the group could develop a sustainable management team.

### **Other issues raised by employers**

#### **Impact of migrant workers**

The impact of migrant workers on the Amuri region has been considerable. A recent survey revealed that the majority of respondents employed individuals from overseas (Hannah, 2009). Interviewees #1 and #2 indicated that migrant workers tended to be employed on farms that had "struggled to keep staff". However, unlike their New Zealand counterparts, these employees tended to remain with that employer because of their work ethic, even if they were not particularly good employers. Interviewee #1 commented that this meant that these dairy farms became fully staffed. This in turn helped ensure that the farm was more efficiently managed, meaning that some of the employment issues were often resolved. Interviewee #6 commented that the availability of migrant labour was a good thing for the district. He said, "farmers value them". Interviewee #4 commented that in his experience some of the New Zealand employees can be quite resistant to employment systems whereas migrant employees embrace those systems.

However, there are several challenges associated with high numbers of migrant workers. One issue was language. Interviewee #5 commented that the language issue could be tricky at times. Interviewee #6 had employed some migrant labour but had found that there were major cultural differences that proved impossible to overcome. He felt that their motivation for working in the dairy industry was very different to his and he struggled to work out how to motivate them and provide appropriate opportunities for them. Other issues raised included the impact on the community such as having non-English speaking children at the local primary school, and providing the appropriate means for partners of migrant workers to integrate into the community. Interviewee #2 indicated that an immigrant committee had been set up to try and deal with some of these issues, for example by providing information on schools and doctors to help immigrants find their feet in the community.

#### **The level of community engagement**

One of the key issues for both employees and employers was connections into the community in which they were living and working. Three interviewees (#1, #2 and #6) commented that this was

relatively easy to do when one has primary school-aged children. This was a means of instantly connecting with others in the community and being able to develop a network of friends and contacts. However, this was harder to maintain as children got older. Often secondary school-aged children were sent to boarding school, which means that there was less of a connection with other parents in the district. Preliminary results from a study of dairy 'farmer wellness' in the Waikato suggested that social isolation was a developing problem after the farmer's children had left school (AgResearch, 2010b). The other main point of connection mentioned was sports clubs (e.g. rugby). A community that is well connected will be able to provide support to people in times of crisis, so this could be an important aspect to dealing with work on dairy farms. Some interviewees felt that the ADEG had helped develop connections within the community as the group provided forums for employers to meet and network, as well as opportunities for employees to meet each other.

### **The culture of the district**

The culture of the district was commented on by several interviewees. Interviewee #6 felt that the district tended to be conservative. The wealth of the district had shifted into the dairy sector. However, the district norms, of sending children to boarding school for their secondary schooling and not making friends with employees, have become generally the accepted culture amongst dairy farmers. This was confirmed by other interviewees.

### **Generation 'I' (iPod, iPhone, 'I want...')**

Interviewees #1 and #2 commented on the differences they saw between their generation and the up and coming generation. They called them "generation I; as in iPod, iPhone and I want..." They talked about the dedication and hard work required to develop their farm, and felt that many young workers just wanted the rewards, but not the responsibilities. This made them hard to manage as employees. Interviewee #7 agreed, saying he "tended to go for more mature employees".

### **Discussion**

The results indicate that employers have established a range of practices that help them deal with recruitment and retention of staff, and with long work hours on dairy farms. These include having structure and processes in place for employing and managing staff, and being willing to adapt these structures and processes as required. Most took a realistic view of workers and their expectations. Some avoided employing younger staff because they felt they tended to have unrealistic expectations of the work; while others took advantage of the availability of migrant labour because they felt they were more open to following processes within defined structures. All addressed the need to demonstrate good work

practices, help their employees integrate into the community and provide career paths for their employees. Another key theme from the interviews was the recognition by interviewees that there was no silver bullet for addressing the long working hours and demands of working on a dairy farm. Development of structures and procedures to train staff takes time and effort. Some staff will succeed while others will not have the desire or ability to move up the career ladder.

A key result from the interviews was that employers had not changed their farming system significantly to deal with the issues arising from the long work hours and demands associated with dairy farming. Instead, it was clear that employers felt this was simply part of managing a dairy farm and that the structures and processes they had put in place to help manage employees was the best means of dealing with fatigue and productivity issues. This suggests that research exploring ways in which farming systems could be changed to deal with fatigue and productivity on dairy farms may need to reflect the desire to maintain current systems.

### **The ADEG**

The ADEG helped each employer develop specific work practices on their farm. Those employers that were no longer members of the group still felt as though they had learnt from being in the group and had gained insights into being a good employer from being able to take advantage of the training and networking opportunities offered by the group. Interviewees who had left the group felt that they had developed the skills they needed and did not see any further benefit to being a member of the group.

Some issues with the ADEG were identified, including the audit practices, auditing feedback to employers, and the sustainability of the group. This reflects Hannah's (2009) survey results. She commented that some respondents did not feel that there was impartiality in some of the processes developed by the group. The results of the research outlined in this report indicate there were also some concerns about how feedback to employers was used and whether this information was used to help develop new training opportunities within the group or refine processes developed by the group.

Overall, the employers interviewed felt that the ADEG had contributed to significantly improving the reputation of the region as being a desirable place to work. This reinforces the results from other research undertaken in the region (Hannah, 2009; Edkins and Tipples, 2002). Employers reported they no longer had problems recruiting and retaining staff. However, no employees were interviewed in this study, so it is not possible to determine if employees hold similar views to the employers' views reported here. This would be a fruitful avenue of enquiry for future research. However, it is necessary to bear in mind Edkins and Tipples' (2002) conclusion that employees in general did not attribute changes in their employment conditions to the ADEG.

## Conclusions

Why have dairy employer groups 'not caught on'? There are a number of reasons. First, in the ten years since the ADEG was formed, there have been substantial changes in the dairy farm labour market, particularly with the advent of migrant labour, which has tended to be more tolerant of adverse employment conditions. Thus dairy farmers may have perceived less need for such groups. Secondly, the range of employment services offered by DairyNZ and private commercial providers has increased vastly, also reducing the need. Thirdly, employment issues are much more talked about than previously, and there are suggestions that fundamental employment values in the industry are beginning to change. The formation of dairy employer groups had contributed to these changes. Nevertheless only one of the groups (ADEG) has managed to reinvent itself and continue into a second decade. Loss of initial charismatic leaders, problems with on-going administration and lack of a specific community focus have all contributed to the failure of other groups. Fourthly, farming and developing such groups is hard work on top of vary busy dairy farmers normal activities

Of the dairy employer groups discussed, the ADEG has just been revitalized by new leadership (Lee, 2010) and the injection of DairyNZ funds to help with group administration. However that is only for three years, during which time it is expected to become self-sufficient. In terms of group development (Table 1), it might be described as reborn (Clutha ADB and CCQE, 2008). The CCQE group has shrunk since losing its original charismatic leader. His successor has moved on and the succession is again an issue. The group is in 'old age' and inactive. Both groups have had strong community bases and may be revivable with a focus on what the Japanese call *kaizen*, or continuous

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- improvement, as employers, which is a message which needs to be passed to younger dairy farm employers, who 'think they know everything' about employment. QFENZ as a national body never had a strong community basis. Further, some were not confident of the confidentiality of its procedures and eventually it died. SOGDEA/Greener Horizons had more of a regional focus, and faced a more specific need with the growth of employment in South Island dairy farming. Also, its migrant director would have been better able to empathise with a developing migrant workforce. Their website, which still operates, <[www.greenerhorizons.co.nz](http://www.greenerhorizons.co.nz)> seriously attempts to establish migrant and local prospective employees with realistic expectations as advocated by the principal author for some years (see Tipples, 1996 and 2005). To do this it used full descriptions of each subject, illustrated with photographs and extensive video clips, and it does not ignore 'difficult' and 'distasteful' features of dairy farming jobs. However, farmers have not been prepared to pay for its services.

## Further research

The first need is to explore employee views of dairy employers groups as Edkins did in his original thesis (Edkins, 2003) to contrast with those of employers. The initial success of the ADEG and CCQE were built on community development and improved networking. What can encourage dairy farmers to be less self and financially centred and more interested in their communities? Is dairy farming, in its present individualistic state, too transient and temporary to make any relationships long lasting rather than transactional? This is surely what dairy farming communities need to maintain farmer wellness and wellbeing. Farmer wellness and wellbeing are now of serious concern to dairy farming communities and are shortly to be investigated in a long term project funded by DairyNZ.



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