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Recruiting and Hiring Farm Employees

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Developing a farm labor management plan is an essential decision making tool for a farm manager in planning to hire farm labor. This type of plan helps the farm manager to identify the areas where additional labor may be required and what duties the employee will be required to perform. If you've decided to hire farm labor, this factsheet will help you hire the best person for the job.

The following is a summary of the advantages and disadvantages of hiring help. Do the advantages to your operation outweigh the disadvantages? Are you willing to spend the time necessary to develop a climate which is satisfactory for all concerned?

Advantages

- More work is accomplished.
- Greater farm production is possible.
- Vital operations can be completed in a more timely fashion.
- More time can be spent properly maintaining machinery and facilities.
- More time for the employer to "manage" the business.
- Farm family's hours of work may be reduced.
- Less stress and pressure.
- Easier to cope with health problems and accidents.
- Greater room to develop specialized skills within the farm operation.

Disadvantages

- Personnel management skills are needed.
- Hired employees are not familiar with the farm operation initially.
- Required skills of the employee may be lacking, particularly machinery operation and maintenance skills.
- Management time is required to supervise the employee(s) and organize work schedules.
- More paperwork to do.
- Farm may be vulnerable to hired help leaving at a critical time.
- Living arrangements for hired employees, if needed, must be adequate. Employees may not care for the property the way you would.
- Family living relationships may be adversely affected if hired help lives with the family or in the same yard.

Step One: Preparing the Job Description

You can make your recruiting and hiring process trouble free if you spend the time initially to develop a job description for the employee you will be hiring. A written job description is a personnel management tool used to aid in management organization, recruitment, selection and performance appraisal. You need to establish a clear idea of the duties the person is required to do. What qualifications are essential? Are you willing to train the potential employee in specialized areas? How much are you willing to pay the employee? The job description is primarily used by

managers to help communicate to their employees what their job entails.

The job description is designed to get down to specifics. What are the duties to be performed, the working conditions, the management expectations, and the wages and benefits? What are the job requirements in terms of education, experience, special skills and physical ability?

The job description can be the basis for a formal help wanted advertisement, as well as a word-of-mouth search. Thinking through the various aspects of the job ahead of time can lend much more substance to the recruitment process

The following is an example of a job description written for the position of herd manager on a dairy farm.

Job Description

Job Title: Dairy Herd Manager

Summary Description: Responsible for overall management of the dairy herd including milking, herd health, breeding, and supervision of employees. Plan feeding program in cooperation with farm owner.

Salary Range: Minimum \$350.00/week. Maximum \$400.00/week

Work Hours: 5:00a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Average Hours/Week: 60 hours

Days Off Per Week: 1.5

Other Benefits: House in very good condition. Health insurance, two weeks paid vacation after one year.

Duties:

Overall dairy herd management including milking herd health, breeding, and raising of replacements. Plan and implement feeding program in consultation with farm owner. Supervise other dairy employees responsible for milking and feeding.

Minor Functions: Assist with field work and/or machinery maintenance as time permits.

Supervised by: Farm owner

Supervise: Three or four other employees who milk and otherwise care for dairy herd.

Report to: Farm owner

Assist with other jobs: Field work - as time permits during peak periods of planting and harvesting.

Qualifications

Formal Education: At least two-year degree from Agricultural College with major in animal science or a related field.

Experience: At least three years experience managing a dairy herd.

Skill Requirements: Able to work with modern milking equipment and automated feeding system. Keep herd health and breeding records up-to-date. Ability to train milking staff. Good interpersonal skills.

Reprinted from: Human Resource Management on the Farm: A Management Letter Series (see references)

Step Two: Recruiting Farm Employees

Planning the recruitment effort is important to ensure the right activities are undertaken to attract qualified candidates. Review the following points...

1. Assess the job market

The key to assessing the job market is to answer the following questions:

- How available are people with the skills for the job?
- What has past experience shown in terms of recruitment costs?
- Are the costs of attracting people justified?
- How competitive is the job's salary with the market rate?
- Who am I competing with to attract qualified employees?
- How can I best match my labor needs with the resources available?

2. Consider the options

Listed below is a range of options for identifying and attracting candidates to your farm business. Check the types of options that have been used in the past. Are there ways to use these various options more in the future?

| | Have used in the past | Will use in the future |
|---|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Media advertising | | |
| newspapers | _____ | _____ |
| radio | _____ | _____ |
| Agricultural Employment Services | | |
| — listed under Government of Canada | _____ | _____ |
| Agriculture Colleges | _____ | _____ |
| Commodity organizations and magazines | _____ | _____ |
| Notices in local agribusiness, bulletin boards, Alberta Agriculture off ice | _____ | _____ |
| Word of mouth | _____ | _____ |

3. Finalize the Search Plan

Having considered all of the above options decide which option or combination of options will be best for the recruitment that has to be undertaken. The plan might include the following:

- tasks to be done
- who is responsible
- timing of events
- where potential candidates exist now
- how they are going to be attracted to the job
- the expected costs of the recruitment

Step Three: Advertising for Potential Employees

A frequently used recruitment method is the want ad placed in newspapers or agricultural magazines. This approach has several advantages. It's quick, relatively inexpensive, and provides a way to reach a potentially large audience. But newspapers may also have some drawbacks. Many farmers complain these ads bring them many applicants but none they want to hire. Perhaps the answer to this problem is how the ads are written. All too often we pick up the newspaper and read an ad like the following:

Wanted: Worker for dairy farm. Call 555-1111

If the goal of the ad is to attract good applicants, perhaps the following ad would meet that objective better:

Farm Employee - 100-cow dairy farm. Responsibilities include milking, feeding and some machinery operation during peak crop periods. Competitive wages, health insurance, one week paid vacation,

and one day off each week. Write Box 343, Home-town, Alta.

Posting job advertisements on bulletin boards can be a very successful advertising method. If you have prepared a job description, writing a job announcement is very easy. Take the key responsibilities from the description and write the announcement including the following information:

- Title of job
- Description of responsibilities
- Description of skills required
- Description of working conditions, if appropriate
- Key components of the wage/benefit package, if appropriate
- How to apply

The only limitation in recruiting is your imagination and courage. Exploit every opportunity you can think of when you are looking for good help. Continue to advertise until you have appropriately qualified applicants. Make sure you have enough candidates to permit you to make a real choice. Don't just take someone because the person is available.

Step Four: Application for Employment

After you have heard from interested applicants you should have them fill out an application form. Although a form doesn't provide sufficient information to use as the sole basis for hiring someone, it is useful as a screening device. It provides an excellent way to get acquainted before interviewing. For an example of an application for employment form, see the Appendix.

Screening is often one of the hardest tasks in the hiring process. It's a true test of your job description and application design. Sort through the completed applications. Assess each one keeping in mind those most desirable characteristics.

Step Five: Interviewing the Potential Candidates

From the application form you will be able to select the more promising applicants for a detailed personal interview. To give the applicant and his family a clearer picture of the job, the interview should be conducted on the farm.

Interviewing is an art, and by no means an easy one. Make the person you are interviewing feel comfortable. You are not testing so much on what the person does NOT know, but rather endeavouring to find out their strong points. Be positive and frank with the person and they will more than likely be the same with you. The applicant must be given a clear idea of what to expect from the job both in the immediate future and in the long run, and also what will be expected of them.

Certain points on the application form will need to be clarified:

- 1 Reasons and justification for leaving former employees.
2. If applicant has had previous farming experience you will want to know precisely how much and what kind.
3. You should have a check list detailing the things you want to know about your employee.
4. The attitude of the applicant's family towards living and working on a farm is a particularly important point. Since farm employment tends to be a "family affair" both the husband and wife should be present at all interviews to better acquaint all concerned with what the living and working conditions will be like.
5. The necessity of discovering the applicant's personal goals and aspirations and why they want to work on a farm is especially important when hiring a full-time employee.

If specific behaviors are important to the smooth functioning of your operation, design questions in a way to help you predict these behaviors in the future. Open-ended questions (ones which require more than a yes or no answer) allow you to get more information. For example:

Behavior: Technical Skills

Questions designed to predict behaviors:

1. Describe your experience with developing pesticide spray schedules.
2. What farm equipment have you operated?
3. Describe your knowledge of animal nutrition programs.

Before you make a final decision as to which applicant is the most suitable it is advisable to conduct more than one interview with the more promising candidates. In at least the first of these interviews the employee's immediate supervisor (if someone other than yourself) and your spouse should be present so

they can participate in the hiring decision. This may avoid future conflicts that could develop if the chosen employee does not meet with their supervisor's or spouse's approval.

Remember, mistakes made in hiring are expensive, but also take a serious toll in human misery. Many people whose jobs are terminated should never have been hired in the first place. Being turned down for employment is not nearly as damaging to the ego as being fired. With more long-range planning and patience, most farmers who offer competitive wages and good working conditions can avoid making hasty decisions which so often result in hiring less than desired.

Step Six: Checking References

Before you hire someone you should also check with the references provided by the applicant insight into the person's background and experience. Remember, however, to evaluate the person giving the reference as well as the person applying for the job. It stands to reason people will be named as references only if the applicant is reasonably sure they will supply a satisfactory comment. How much stock you can put in the information you receive from the person will be determined by their position and relationship with the applicant.

The following questions may give you an idea of the type of question to ask:

1. What was the individual's quality of work?
2. Was it necessary to provide very close supervision?

Step Seven: Hiring a Farm Employee

If after thorough investigation you have found an applicant who impresses you as being the right person, you're in a position to make a job offer. Whether the person accepts will depend on how good a selling job you have done on the merits of working for you and on whether the two of you can draw up an employment agreement that is mutually satisfactory. Remember it's important to negotiate between yourselves if there are any points of disagreement. In any relationship, be it husband-wife or employer-employee, compromises must be made to ensure better, longer-lasting results.

All points in the employment agreement must be spelled out clearly in a manner both you and your

employee understand. To minimize the risk of misunderstanding, a well written and specific employment agreement, preferably signed by both parties, is likely to be the type to ensure the most discussion between you and an employee. Both employer and employee must have a copy of this agreement.

Just because something is in writing does not necessarily ensure proper communication. However, it's a step in the right direction. Many future disagreements can be avoided or at least dealt with more easily if the issues are presented in writing at the time of hiring. An initial employment agreement will also provide a bench mark when discussing changes for future agreements. A detailed list of items to be included in an employment agreement follows:

Name and Address of Employer/Employee

- Detailed Job Description
- Salary and Wages
- Pay Periods
- Bonus Incentive
- Regular Working Days
- Statement on Overtime
- Regular Vacation
- Sick Leave
- Housing
- Telephone, Utilities, Meat, etc.
- Date
- Health Insurance
- Employee Accident Insurance
- Life Insurance, Retirement Plan
- Transportation or Car allowance
- Statement about Pay Deductions
- Time off for Short-courses, Training
- Statement on Probationary Period
- Provision for Contract Up-dating
- Termination Statement
- Employer, Employee, Witness Signatures

Labor-management agreements must be followed up to be successful. At the time of hiring, provision for updating and modifying the employment agreement must also be made. In addition, the basis for terminating the agreement must be stipulated in the event either party finds the situation unsatisfactory.

Summary

Because communication is such an important element in building a long-term satisfactory working relationship, both employer and employee are only asking for trouble if they "hire on the spot" or allow themselves to be hired on the spot.

To increase your chances of finding the right person it's necessary that you:

- channel your advertising efforts into all possible areas
- require application forms to be filled in
- conduct detailed personal interviews with both husband and wife on your farm
- check references
- negotiate a specific, all-inclusive employment agreement, with provision for updating and termination.

Prepared by: Family Resource Management Specialists, Home Economics Branch, Alberta Agriculture

References:

- Labour Management in Agriculture*, Alberta Agriculture, Farm Business Management Branch 1981
- A Guide for Effective Recruitment and Selection*. Alberta Career Development and Employment 1989
- Labour Management for Farm Employers*. Employment and Immigration Canada & Manitoba Agriculture
- The Keys to Good Farm Labour Relations*, Employment and Immigration Canada & Manitoba Agriculture 1985
- Making "Farm Help" a Good Investment*. Robert H. Simmerman, Alberta Agriculture
- Human Resource Management on the Farm: A Management Letter Series*, Department of Agricultural Economics and Cornell Cooperative Extension, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 14853

APPLICATION FOR EMPLOYMENT FORM

Date _____

1. Name _____

2. Address _____

3. Phone Number a) Home _____ b) Work _____

4. Are you over the age of 16? Yes _____ No _____

5. Position Applying For _____

6. Length of Employment Desired _____

Temporary, Permanent, Summer

7. When are you available for work? _____

8. Are you experienced in any of the following:

a) Beef Cattle _____

b) Dairy Cattle _____

c) Hogs _____

d) P o u l t r y _____

e) S h e e p _____

f) Tractor _____ Models _____

g) Tillage Equipment _____ Models _____

h) Haying Equipment _____ Models _____

i) Swather _____ Self-propelled/Pull-type _____

j) Combine _____ Models _____

k) Other _____

9. Have you any special training? (eg. welding) _____

10. Have you a driver's license? Yes _____ No _____ Class 1 2 3 4 5

11. EDUCATION BACKGROUND:

| Institutions attended | Years and/or Grades Completed | Diploma or Certificate |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|

| | | |
|-------|-------|-------|
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |

12. REFERENCES: Please provide two personal references whom we may contact:

| N a m e | Address | Occupation |
|---------|---------|------------|
|---------|---------|------------|

| | | |
|-------|-------|-------|
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |

13. Any additional comments:

