
Farm Employee Management: Get the Right Start in Hiring Employees

Probably the most important category of resources in any business operation is human resources. That definitely includes farm and agribusiness operations. Labor costs are often one of the highest cost categories - particularly in dairy, swine, and beef feedlot operations - so it is vital to hire right and then train and retain those good employees. Here are a few notes on how to improve the hiring process.

First, review the needs of the farm and hiring practices used in the past. Reviewing the needs of an operation may require an analysis of costs and cash flow to help determine what labor costs are within the budget. Analyze whether full-time or part-time employees are needed and perhaps more specifically when the labor needs are greatest, such as weekends, evenings, or early mornings. There may even be specific times of the year. For example, in dairy operations there may be peak periods of freshening when the labor requirement is somewhat increased.

Before posting a help wanted announcement, give careful thought to assembling a written position description. Don't just use a canned job description for farm workers. Make a list of all the different duties expected of this new employee. Then review the list and determine whether expectations are reasonable or whether some of those duties should be prioritized.

Be sure to include any physical requirements of the position, such as lifting, standing, reaching, and stretching. Also list whether there is any knowledge, training, or previous work experience expected from the new employee. Finally, describe the working conditions such as days and hours to be worked or flexibility required.

With any farm employment, it is always important to determine whether the position requires a regular driver's license or commercial driver's license (CDL).

There is information on the [Iowa Department of Transportation website](http://iowadot.gov/mvd/cdl/), iowadot.gov/mvd/cdl/ Commercial-drivers-licenses, that can help an employer determine whether a CDL is needed for the position.

While it is not necessary to include a pay range in a job announcement or position description, a proposed pay range should be determined prior to starting the recruitment process. The pay range should be in line with what you can afford, but it also needs to align with the expectations of the position. Consider possible incentive or bonus payments and benefits that may be offered with the position.

When you are ready to start recruiting a pool of possible applicants, be creative. Some farm employers come from an era of looking at "help wanted" ads in local newspapers or shoppers. However, many jobseekers these days never look in printed media. Depending on your needs, contact area schools that may have students seeking farm employment. Iowa Workforce Development is another source for listing your employment opportunities. A source to post employment opportunities is the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach [Market Maker site](http://ia.foodmarketmaker.com/), ia.foodmarketmaker.com/. Many local radio stations have on-air or online job boards or help wanted sites. A simple help wanted flyer with contact information posted on community bulletin boards is another strategy. Finally, remember that word of mouth is one of the best ways to seek good employees. Ask current good employees if they know anyone who may be interested in a farm labor position.

Determine what information is needed from potential job applicants. Obtain or prepare a job application form for this purpose. Be sure that the form used does not seek information that is inappropriate or even illegal to request from job applicants. Be sure to request references from job applicants.

Prepare carefully for job interviews. Make a list of information to share with applicants, such as the position description. Remember that many applicants will be unfamiliar with how a farm operates and the kind of hours and duties that are required. Describe the hours and working conditions and outline the training that will be provided to the new employee. Share information about the pay structure and benefits that come with the job.

Make a list of the questions to be presented to each applicant. Again, seek legal guidance regarding inappropriate areas of inquiry. For some interview guidance, see AgDM File C1-71, [The Job Interview, and What Questions Can I Ask?](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/wholefarm/pdf/c1-71.pdf), www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/wholefarm/pdf/c1-71.pdf.

Check references. References may be former employers, teachers, volunteer work coordinators, or even neighbors or community members. While persons acting as employment references may need to be careful regarding statements made about another, a potential employer can always ask a former employer to confirm employment dates and positions held. It is reasonable to ask the simple question, "Would you hire this person?" Ask the reference about the applicant's former job duties.

When you have interviewed possible applicants, carefully evaluate the candidates and make a selection. Determine the details of the job offer. While an initial offer may be by phone, it is a good idea to follow an oral offer with a written offer of employment. This written offer can confirm the details such as pay, benefits, hours, duties, and flexibility required in the position.

If the offer is accepted by the selected applicant, be sure to contact the other applicants to inform them of the decision. If there are individuals who may be considered for future employment, let them know that the application will be kept on file for that purpose.

Once your employment offer has been accepted, there are a number of forms and procedures that must be completed to be in compliance with state and federal law. Those procedures are the topic of other articles in the farm employee management series.

Farm Employee Management Series

The complete [Farm Employee Management Series](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/wdhumanresources.html) can be found on the Ag Decision Maker website at www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/wdhumanresources.html.

- C1-70 Get the Right Start in Hiring Employees
- C1-71 The Job Interview, and What Questions Can I Ask?
- C1-72 Do We Need an Employee Handbook?
- C1-73 Assembly of Farm Job Descriptions
- C1-74 Put Job Descriptions to Work on Your Farm
- C1-75 Evaluation and Selection of Job Candidates
- C1-76 Getting the New Employee Off to a Good Start on Day One
- C1-77 Employment Eligibility Verification—The Basics of Form I-9 Compliance
- C1-78 New Employee Orientation
- C1-79 Farm Safety and Hiring Youth on the Farm
- C1-80 Applicant Background Checks
- C1-81 Terminating Employees in Iowa
- C1-82 Health, Stress, and Well-Being
- C1-83 Avoid Employment Pitfalls
- C1-84 Five Steps to Formulate Workforce Contingency Plans
- C1-85 Protect Farm Workers from Heat-Related Stress and Illness