

Farm Employee Management: Put Job Descriptions to Work on Your Farm

File C1-74

Do you become aggravated with employees who simply do not seem to know what they are supposed to be doing? Have you ever had high hopes for a new employee who just did not last on the job because he or she did not understand expectations?

Whether your farm has two employees or 25, the effective development and implementation of job descriptions might be a tool that could be put to good use on your farm. Job descriptions help workers know what is expected of them and serve as a fundamental basis for employee communication and development.

Job descriptions summarize the overall function of a position and detail the qualifications and duties expected of the employees. While developing job descriptions might seem like just one more thing to do on the farm, there are significant benefits to consider.

Recruitment: When you have taken the time to analyze the essential duties of a position, you are more likely to recruit appropriate applicants. For example, if you need an employee with experience in operating certain types of equipment, or experience in artificial insemination, or computer skills, you will identify these needs if you have job descriptions for the positions on your farm. This will help to attract applicants who have the skills you seek.

Hiring and Selection: A good job description is an essential aid in the interviewing and selection process. During the interview, you can go over the necessary qualifications and duties of the position with each applicant, asking about training and past experience. This serves to keep you on task as you interview, compare and evaluate job applicants. This process also serves to communicate with potential employees what will be required of them. The applicant receives guidance on what will be

expected and gives the applicant keys on questions that need to be asked. Because you have reviewed the requirements of the position with applicants, you are likely to make a better new employee selection.

Training and Employee Development: All new employees need job orientation and training. When you have reviewed the requirements of a position with a new employee, you have a good idea of the individual's past experience as well as the training needs for that new employee. Similarly, as experienced employees move into more advanced work, you can continue positive training and employee development experiences. This increases employee satisfaction and productivity.

Evaluation: All employees like to know what is expected of them and whether they are meeting expectations. Properly developed job descriptions are tools that can be used in the employee evaluation process. By reviewing the elements of the original job description – and combining these with performance criteria – both you and the worker can periodically determine whether expectations are being met and where improvement or additional training is needed. You will also evaluate whether the employee's actual duties have changed or evolved over time. This is also a good time to update position descriptions.

Communication: As indicated, the job description is a good tool for communication between employer and employee. However, it also aids communication among employees. When all employees understand their job duties, they have a better idea of where they fit into the overall operation, and how they relate to one another.

Organizational Development: Your farm is a growing, developing organization – whether you always think of it that way or not. Taking the time to analyze your labor needs and develop job descriptions

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is a huge step in helping your farm to be a more efficient, effective and profitable business. Your farm operation will run more smoothly when you and your employees understand their role on the farm. Just like players on a well-coached football team, employees who understand their role in the organization are more likely to work as a team.

Job descriptions are just one more of the tools that help a farm become a smoother operation. When staff people understand their jobs and relationships on the farm, it is easier to work toward excellence because everyone knows who is responsible for what tasks.

Now that you have been convinced to take the time to develop job descriptions, it would be helpful to know how to go about the analysis and assembly. That will be the topic of the next employee management article in this series. Another good reference is a publication from the University of Nebraska Extension on “How to Write a Dairy Job Description,” www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/pages/publicationD.jsp?publicationId=692.

Farm Employee Management Series Articles

C1-70 - Get the Right Start in Hiring Employees

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C1-73 - Assembly of Farm Job Descriptions

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C1-79 - Farm Safety and Hiring Youth on the Farm

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