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CLIPPINGS

A Weekly Column from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

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For Immediate Release

Creating Win-Win Scenarios for Employers and Employees

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Sit down with any Northwest Iowa livestock producer - dairy, swine, beef or poultry - and the topic of labor is sure to surface in the conversation. Providing access to a legal and stable workforce for agriculture will be a driving issue for those at that table. Livestock producers are unique in that their labor is not seasonal, and they require knowledge and training to have successful employees.

Although immigrant employees are a crucial component to the economic viability of livestock farms, the employer-employee relationship is fraught with legal and economic vulnerabilities. Some immigrant farm workers lack legal authorization to work and live in the United States, which exposes both employers and employees to increased risk, threatening agricultural investments.

On the other side of the coin are operators who have not taken the time to learn the culture and community of the people who are employed. They run head-long into these cultural differences.

How valid are perspectives and solutions that don't recognize or jive with the issues identified by both employees and employers? Not very, since everyone needs to be valued and appreciated in a business that requires consistent management practices for people to ensure proper animal welfare. Having all parties sitting at the table and prioritizing their concerns and issues makes win-win scenarios possible for businesses and communities.

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Dairy and Family Life Specialists in Northwest Iowa are asking the players - employees and employers - to identify issues that they believe are most important in bringing employees and employers together for a mutually beneficial arrangement in their communities. The goal is to tie together the needs of each and build a framework for programs that will help stabilize the workforce and build community.

Surveys have been circulating the area with help from local churches and farm groups to ensure the questions would be easily understood. The kick-off event will be the Northwest Iowa Farm Labor Conference on Tuesday, April 17 at the ISU Extension and Outreach - Sioux County Office in Orange City.

The employer track will begin with registration at 9:00 a.m. and programming starting at 9:15. Speakers will discuss what community means to immigrants, consistent management practices for people, animal welfare and creating community for employees in Sioux County. In addition, all employers will be asked to complete the employer survey during the noon lunch.

The employee track will be presented in Spanish and will run from 6:00 to 8:00 pm. The evening will start with a light dinner and the program will start at 6:15 p.m. The over-riding theme for the evening will be how immigrants understand community and how employers can build consistent management practices for people that protect both employees and supports animal welfare. All employees will be asked to complete a survey. Proctors will be available to assist with the employee surveys, as needed.

Neither program has a registration fee, but pre-registration is required to ensure that enough meals are provided. Pre-registration can be made by calling the Sioux County office at 712-737-4230 or emailing fredhall@iastate.edu.

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