

*Breaking Barriers for Beginning
Farmers and Ranchers*
(NIFA-USDA #2010-49400-21729)



Labor Management in Agriculture

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Seminar Series

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1200 West Houston Street, Sulphur Springs, Tx 75482

November 22, 2011

Labor Management In Agriculture: Cultivating Personnel Productivity

2nd Edition

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ANR Publication 3417

LABOR MANAGEMENT IN *Agriculture*



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1. MANAGING PEOPLE ON THE FARM



The three essential ingredients of effective labor administration are:

- (1) A concern for productivity and people
- (2) An understanding of human resource management
- (3) Purposeful action.

Labor management may suffer if any of these are absent.

A concern for productivity and people:

To effectively manage a labor force, an employer must be concerned about productivity and also about people. Focusing on productivity alone may lead to a reduction in worker output.

Understanding labor management:

A concern for both employee needs and worker productivity is fundamental to effective management.

Consider that:

- (1) Workers differ in both ability and motivation and
- (2) Farmers can manage much of that variation. There are numerous labor management tools that farmers can use to temper challenges or improve results.

Managers must avoid the tendency to rely on a limited number of tools.

In table 1, the center column lists labor management tools and practices.

The column to the right lists potential results or outcomes.

The middle column are filters or magnifiers affecting the results column.

In the absence of effective human resource management practices (the middle column), external influences may have a pronounced effect on productivity and other sought after results.

Human Resource Management



Table 1

INFLUENCES AND CONSTRAINTS	PRACTICES, DECISIONS AND TOOLS	RESULTS
Tradition Competitors Laws Labor market Technology Union contracts Individual differences and skills	Organizational structuring Job design Recruitment Selection Orientation Training and development Supervision Performance appraisals Compensation Benefits Safety and health Organizational development Discipline Research and evaluation	Productivity - quantity - quality Waste Breakdowns Satisfaction Motivation Absenteeism Turnover Strikes Grievances Litigation Injury and illness Workplace violence

Purposeful Action:

- It helps to have a plan with timetables, and to incorporate ways of evaluating progress toward goals.
- Two additional challenges may include lack of self-esteem or inability to focus. Action may not be effective because of faulty planning, evaluation, or correction measures.

2. PRACTICAL STEPS TO EMPLOYEE SELECTION



Interviews, reference checks, tests, applications, and résumés can all help identify differences among candidates.

Decided what you need:

Step 1: Determine whether a temporary employee is needed

- Sometimes a new employee is urgently needed. Hiring a temporary worker is a good alternative to employing a less suitable replacement under pressure.

Step 2: Complete a job analysis, description and specification

- Job specification consolidates the necessary employee qualifications identified in the job analysis schedule (information about the position) and lists them in terms of knowledge, abilities, skills, or licenses. Job description is used to give applicants a feeling for what the job will be like.

Step 3: Weight the job specification items

Step 4: Determine the recruitment Strategy

- The larger the applicant pool, the greater the chance of finding qualified applicants.

Design the selection process:

- A well-designed selection process will yield information about a candidate's skills and weaknesses, enabling the farm employer to make an informed choice.

Step 1: Determine which selection tools to use

- Applications, interviews, tests, reference checks, letters of recommendation, and physicals. Try to verify evidence of specific skills, knowledge, and abilities at more than one point in the selection process (Table 2).

Step 2: Prepare questions and situations for written and practical tests, the interview and reference checks

- Table 2 can serve as a checklist of attributes to be verified by selection tools.

Table 2

Skills, knowledge, and abilities may be measured using different tools at different stages of the selection process. An "X" indicates a principal method for measuring that skill, knowledge, or ability; an "O" indicates a secondary method.

Skills / Knowledge / Ability	Test	Interview	Application	Reference Check
Operating wheel and crawler tractors	X		O	
Adjusting / calibrating equipment	X			
Maintaining equipment	X	O	X	
Using implements (disk, plow)	X	O		
Controlling weeds, pests, diseases	X	O		
Directing efforts of others	O	X	X	O
Training employees	O	X		
People skills	X	X		X
Reading and processing information	X			

Step 3: Assign a sequence to hurdles

- Each hurdle eliminates some applicants from contention.

Step 4: Provide a realistic job preview

- In a realistic job preview farmers try to present the job the way it really is.

Exchange information with applicants

Step 1: Conduct a pre-interview (orientation day)

- Applicants have a chance to ask questions about the job and learn more about working conditions, is very effective.

Step 2: Review applicants' biodata (applications and résumés)

- Skills and abilities that applicants claim to possess do not always show up in their job performance.

Step 3: Conduct tests

- Consider that tests can measure knowledge, ability, skills, aptitude, attitudes, honesty, and personality.

Step 4: Conduct interviews

- The interview gives you a chance to probe when unsure about an applicant's answers, capabilities, or work philosophy.

Step 5: Check references

- Some supervisors may even exaggerate the virtues of difficult employees to get them off their hands and speak poorly of those they wish to keep.

Step 6: Conduct a final interview (if needed)

- A final interview with the top two or three candidates can help resolve the dilemma.

Bring new employee aboard

Step 1: Make offers and convey Rejections

- Offering the job to someone “because we’ve come this far” could mean hiring the wrong person for the job.

Step 2: Oversee the post-offer pre-placement physical ability testing

- A well-planned physical and physical ability exam require that the examining physician and physical therapist understand the job requirements.

Step 3: Conduct orientation

- Combined with a good orientation period, careful selection enables the employer and new personnel to start out on a positive path.

3. VALIDATING THE SELECTION PROCESS



- Validity is a measure of the effectiveness of a given approach. A selection process is valid if it helps you increase the chances of hiring the right person for the job.
- Ensuring face validity will enhance applicants' acceptance of the process. A thorough employee selection approach brings out the differences among applicants' abilities for specific jobs.
- For a selection process to be valid, it must also be reliable. That means the process must measure what it is designed to measure and do so consistently over time.

4. PROMOTIONS, TRANSFERS AND LAYOFFS



- A successful promotion policy should neither stifle present personnel nor eliminate management's option for outside recruitment. Some employers and workers feel the only evidence of career success is promotion. Fortunately, there are several other ways to provide workers more challenges. There are several other ways to provide workers more challenges. This can be done through transfers, job rotation, job enlargement and job enrichment.
- Arguments favoring merit-based promotions focus around worker qualifications and performance, while those based on seniority stress greater job security and protection from arbitrary treatment. Seniority tends to reward loyalty while merit promotes excellence. An effective blend may combine good points from each.

5. HELPING WORKERS ACQUIRE SKILLS

The training process consists of

- 1) Explaining and demonstrating correct task performance
- 2) Helping workers to perform under supervision
- 3) Allowing personnel to perform alone
- 4) Evaluating worker performance
- 5) Coaching employees based on evaluation results.
- 6) He can further cement his skill by coaching another

There is an important difference between telling workers how to do a task and successfully transferring skills, ability or knowledge. When training personnel you may want to:

- 1) Continually assess workers' level of understanding
- 2) Gear training to the participants
- 3) Present only a few concepts at a time
- 4) Where needed, divide tasks into simplified components
- 5) Involve all workers
- 6) Use visual aids (samples of defective fruit)
- 7) Encourage questions.

Mentors also model desirable behaviors that employees can imitate. An ideal coach or mentor is one who

- (1) Is not easily threatened by an employee who becomes successful
- (2) Has a high tolerance for the employee trying out different approaches
- (3) Encourages the employee to take initiative in terms of how much and at what rate to absorb new information.

6. APPRASIAL

- People need positive feedback and validation on a regular basis.
- Supervisors who tend to look for worker's positive behaviors and do so in a sincere, no manipulative way will have less difficulty giving constructive feedback or suggestions.
- An effective negotiated performance appraisal helps the employee take additional ownership for both continuing effective performance and improving weak areas. Consider that employees want to know what you think of their work.

A farm manager can ask the employee being appraised to bring three lists to the performance appraisal interview:

- 1) Areas where the employee performs well
- 2) Areas where the worker has shown recent improvement
- 3) Areas where the worker feels weak, or thinks his supervisor would like to see improvement.

7. INTERNAL WAGE STRUCTURE



You can arrive at appropriate wages for positions on your farm on the basis of two main management tools:

- (1) Job evaluations (based on compensable factors such as education, skill, experience, and responsibility)
 - (2) The going rate (or market value) of a job. In practice, results of job evaluations are often compromised or even overshadowed by market considerations.
- Those who pay at or below the market may have difficulty attracting workers, and may find themselves frequently training people who leave for higher paid positions.

- Workers expect their wages will:
 - (1) Cover their basic living expenses
 - (2) Keep up with inflation
 - (3) Leave some money for savings or recreation
 - (4) Increase over time.

- Farmers can set wages based on
 - (1) Job evaluations
 - (2) Market values

- In practice, results of job evaluations must often defer to market considerations.

8. INCENTIVE PAY

- Farmers' structured incentives are most likely to succeed if they have
 - 1) Accurately established standards
 - 2) Clearly linked superior performance with pay or a valued reward
 - 3) Carefully considered what type of performance the incentive stimulates. Effective incentives are designed so the more an employee earns, the more the farmer benefits.

Steps in establishing structures incentives

- 1) Analyze the challenge and determine if incentives are appropriate.
- 2) Link pay with performance.
- 3) Anticipate loopholes. The number one loophole for quantity production incentives is often quality.
- 4) Establish standards and determine pay.
- 5) Protect workers from negative consequences. Provide a fair wage, tell employees how much they are earning, hire fewer workers for longer periods, provide a safe environment.
- 6) Improve communications.
- 7) Periodically review the program.

9. SUPERVISORY POWER

Supervisory power stems from both organizational authority and personal influence. Supervisory responsibilities must be matched with corresponding power, such as the right to hire or discipline personnel.

The term supervisor has two connotations:

- 1) A specific level in the management hierarchy, usually somewhere between the farm manager and the foreman
- 2) Any person who has responsibility for directing and facilitating the performance of one or more persons

For supervisors to be effective, responsibility and power must be balanced. Workers value being treated with ‘respeto’ (respect) and good manners.

10. EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION



- Delegation and empowerment work best when done in small increments.
- Bound for great difficulty is the supervisor who knows exactly what he wants and tries using a “democratic front” to get workers to think his idea is theirs.
- Employees will lose their taste for involvement if no action results from the decision they help make. Shared decision making can lead to better decisions, increase communication with employees.

Whether delegating routine jobs or important decision-making assignments, supervisors also need to assure instructions are clear, communicate the limits of the shared decision-making power, and see that tasks are carried out in a timely fashion.

11. CONDUCTING EFFECTIVE MEETINGS



Examples of rules you may want to use include:

- (1) Only one person speaks at a time
- (2) Attempt to understand the needs behind positions
- (3) Try to understand both the positive and negative aspects of suggestions
- (4) Comments will be asked for, at times, beginning with the least and ending with the most senior person
- (5) Remind participants that this is the time to speak up
- (6) No private conversations during the meeting
- (7) People need to speak on the subject being discussed.

12. INTERACTING WITH EMPLOYEES



- Breaking through status barriers can take time and effort.
- As we interact with others of different cultures, there is no good substitute for receptiveness to interpersonal feedback, good observation skills, effective questions, and some horse sense.
- Being able to hold a conversation is a key workplace and interpersonal skill is based on the participant's ability to give and take.
- When helping employees, often the key is not so much in trying to solve their problems but in being a good listener.

13. CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SKILLS



- Wherever there are choices to be made, differences may provide challenges or opportunities.
- The advantage of mediation is maintaining responsibility for problem solving and conflict resolution at the level of those who own the challenge.
- When the supervisor acts in the role of an arbitrator, it is more important to make a fair judgment than to try to please all workers involved
- Selecting an outside mediator often makes sense.

14. DISCIPLINE

Misconduct can be classified according to specific behaviors, for instance:

1. Effort (working at a reduced speed, poor quality, tardiness, sleeping on the job, wasting time)
2. Co-worker relations (fighting on the job, lack of cooperation);
3. Supervisor-subordinate relations (favoritism, withholding of key information, mistreatment, abuse of power)
4. Handling of tools or company property
5. Harassment or workplace violence
6. Dishonesty
7. Not wearing safety equipment, horseplay, carrying weapons on the job, working under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Discipline is based on the principles of just cause.

Rules of fairness can be distilled into the following:

- 1. Develop fair rules and consequences.
- 2. Clearly communicate policies.
- 3. Conduct a fair investigation.
- 4. Balance consistency and flexibility.
- 5. Use corrective—not punitive—action.

Effective discipline can protect the agricultural enterprise, the supervisor who enforces the rules, and the subordinates subject to the regulations.

15. TERMINATION

Employee termination is often the last step in an unsuccessful attempt to help a worker meet work standards. There are both legal and management implications to employee termination.

Where the employer shares some of the fault for the employee's poor performance, a termination agreement can be a very powerful tool. An agreement may meet some of the needs of the employer and the terminated employee.

Thanking employees for the good they have done is in good taste always, as well as bringing up the employee's positive contributions and qualities.

16. EMPLOYEE TURNOVER

- Employee turnover can hurt the overall productivity of a farm and is often a symptom of other difficulties. Measures taken to prevent turnover are bound to improve other operating results as well.
- Turnover is costly in terms of time and effort required to recruit, select and train new.
- Knowing the reasons why workers leave can give farmers an edge in improving working relationships.
- A useful tool for understanding and managing turnover is the exit interview. You can check the reasons why workers leave the farm and ask for suggestions on how to improve the way you do business.

17. POLICIES AND HANDBOOKS

- Policies help guide decisions. Policies can be a fine tool in reducing perceptions of arbitrary treatment of employees.
- To obtain maximum value, policies need to be understood by both supervisors and workers. To be effective, policies need to be adjusted to meet the changing needs of the organization.
- Sick leave policies can be designed to protect workers from losing income when sick while also rewarding individuals who do not misuse the privilege.

18. CREATIVE NEGOTIATION



- Negotiation skills include being well prepared, showing patience, maintaining integrity, avoiding the presumption of evil, controlling our emotions, understanding the role of time pressures, breaking down bigger issues into smaller ones, avoiding threats and manipulative tactics, focusing first on the problem rather than on the solution, seeking interest-based decisions, and rejecting weak solutions.

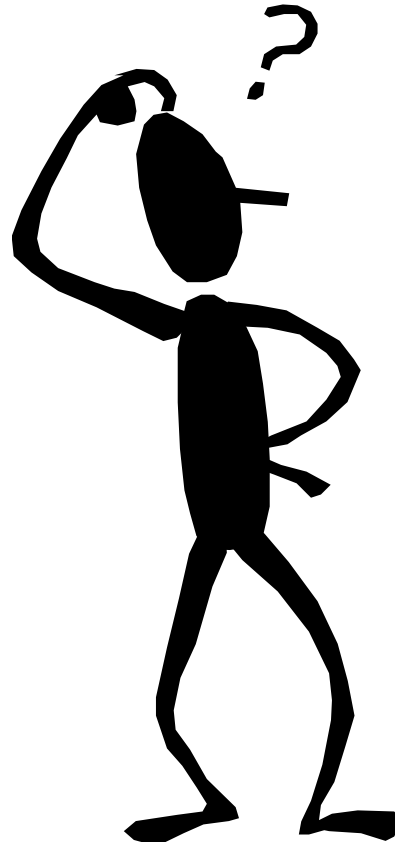
Be prepared

- Sometimes the most unexpected issues may come up. You may, for instance, have to face a worker who has come asking for a loan to bury a family member.

Search for clarity

- It helps to learn about other people's preferences and also make our own clear.

¿Questions?



Next Seminar



January 2012

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¡Thanks!