

Agricultural Personnel Issues - Personnel Planning

Quick Notes...

Good employers have visions for their businesses.

Personnel planning starts with a self-assessment of the employer.

The current work force must be matched with the current and future needs of the business.

Compliance with regulations helps the employer provide a safe, satisfying, productive, and legal work environment.

Effective personnel management creates a work environment where workers can fulfill their needs while meeting the objectives of the business. This social, personal, creative, and financial environment doesn't happen by chance -- it requires planning. An employer can increase productivity, enhance employee job satisfaction, and reduce potential problems by taking personnel planning seriously and giving the process the time and effort it requires.

Personnel planning begins with the employer having a vision for the business and knowing the environment in which potential employees will work.

What Are The Goals Of The Business?

A good employer has a vision for the future (one year, five years, and ten years from now) of the business. Personnel needs can more accurately be determined if goals are specific and have a time frame. For example, "the cow herd will increase to 1000 cows within ten years."

There are several method for identifying family and business goals. One such procedure is a part of the "Business Management In Agriculture" series of workbooks and videotapes developed by Cooperative Extension and Farm Credit Services.

Self Assessment

It is important for the employer to complete an assessment of his/her personal characteristics. What experience and supervisory skills does the employer have? What are his/her attitudes toward employees?

Self analysis isn't easy, but it needs to be accurate. Managers of agricultural businesses who strive for close working relationships with their employees, often need to delegate important responsibilities and want employees to feel a commitment to the business. Having an employer and employee who are compatible is essential, but it is unlikely to happen by chance.

An employer can begin self assessment by asking a series of questions. It is important that a spouse, friend, and/or other person be available to review and discuss the self assessment.

- What are my strengths and weaknesses?
- Am I a good teacher?
- Do I have patience to work with people having little or no experience?
- Am I a good listener?
- Do I trust my employees?
- What biases do I have that could get in the way of developing a good relationship with my employee(s)?
- Am I a perfectionist?
- Do I tend to be a pessimist or an optimist?
- Do I delegate well?

Assess Labor Needs

How much labor is needed and when is it needed? A worksheet can be developed listing the enterprise, activities, hours of necessary labor during various seasons, and the number of people required to complete the activities. Those activities that are currently, or could be, completed with custom operators should be included.

Once the labor requirements are determined, the current labor component can be evaluated. The job of each person in the work force should be described with consideration given to the duties, necessary qualifications, and level of responsibility of each person. Any and all actively involved family members should be included in the assessment.

Assess The Working Environment

To attract good employees, the working environment needs to be attractive to the worker. Efforts need to be taken to create an environment where employees are appreciated and recognized.

Organizational structure must be considered, and it is especially important in a family operation. No two businesses are alike

because managers, employees, families and the work involved vary from one business to another. Keys to effective organizing include proper planning, clear relationships among the people, delegation of authority, clear limits to delegation, authority accompanied with responsibility and a structure that is not too complex nor too simple.

Employers must be able to offer several advantages in order to hire and keep good employees. Competitive wages, flexible work schedule, training opportunities, incentives, good work environment, good people to work with, safe equipment, and opportunities for growth and responsibility are a few features to incorporate into the business.

Matching Labor Needs With the Current Labor Supply

After the manager's skills, labor requirements, current labor supply, and work environment have been assessed, the current labor supply and needs must be matched. Possible findings could include:

1. A good match. The current employees have the skills and desire to do all the required jobs. Hence, employees should continue in their current roles.
2. There is the right number of good employees, but some changes in the jobs they do would be better. Hence, some time should be spent assessing employees and developing new job descriptions that would better match the business's needs and their talents.
3. There are too many employees or the wrong employee for the job. Hence, consideration should be given to retraining an employee or the business could be expanded to make use of valued employees. If neither option is possible, it may be necessary to dismiss an employee.

4. There aren't enough employees to do the work that needs to be done. Hence, an assessment should be completed of the job(s) needing to be done and the qualifications an employee would need to do the job. The key is to hire employees who fit the job description in the essential areas.

Complying With Regulations

Employers are required to comply with certain regulations concerning payroll, insurance, safety standards, record keeping, etc. Compliance with such regulations helps the employer provide a safe, satisfying, productive, and legal work environment.

All employers must have an "employer identification number" (EIN). It can be obtained by completing Form SS-4 or by calling the appropriate tele-TIN phone number. The tele-TIN number for Colorado is 801-620-7645.

Each employee must complete a "Form W-4" which serves as the employee's income tax withholding certificate. The employer maintains a record of these forms and withholds income taxes from workers according to the information provided on the form.

Each employee must complete a "Form I-9" to verify that he/she is eligible to work in the United States. Employers are required to have all employees complete their part of the Form I-9 when they start work: check documents establishing employees' identity and eligibility to work; properly complete the employer's part of the form; retain the Form for three years or a minimum of one year after the person leaves employment; and present the Form for inspection upon request. The phone number to the Division of Labor's Main Office in Colorado is (303) 572-2241.

It is important that employers have Worker's Compensation. It is a type of insurance covering injuries and diseases which are work related, and the full cost is paid by the employer. Specific requirements and regulations of Worker's Compensation vary by state. The phone number to Workmen's Compensation in Colorado is (303) 782-4000.

Having employees is a complex issue. Employers, and potential employers, should seek professional advice concerning the various forms that must be completed and regulations concerning labor laws. Furthermore, managers must give personnel management adequate time and energies in order to enjoy the benefits of having employees.

Sources: 1) B.C. Farm Employer's Handbook, British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture, fisheries and Food, 1991; 2) Farmer's Tax Guide, 1994.

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