

Organizational Planning

Human resource management begins with an overall business plan. Company characteristics, such as business purpose, form of ownership, commodities produced, and acreage or scale of operation, have an influence on organization structure, the feel of the work environment, and the approach to labor management.

To paraphrase management theorist Peter Drucker, every organization needs to operate from a “theory of itself as a business,” with knowledge (or at least good working assumptions) about three fundamental dimensions: its environment, its mission, and its core competencies. Such working knowledge is the basis for setting realistic business goals and planning strategies to achieve them.

Taking Stock

Many agricultural managers start to diagnose problems only after feeling a symptom of pain in their organization – or in their family. Taking stock regularly, however, contributes most to identification and reduction of labor-related risks. This process is key to planning in any organization.

Mission Statement

A statement of business mission is the bedrock for all other planning and operating decisions. It explicitly tells about the identity and purpose of an organization. Managers who know where they want the business to go are more likely to get there.

Goals as Targets for Success

Goals reflect personal values and beliefs, apparent opportunities, resource limitations, and relative priorities, especially when choices among them have to be made. They not only help

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Trent Teegerstrom—University of Arizona, Jeffrey E. Tranel—Colorado State University, and John P. Hewlett—University of Wyoming.

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establish a sense of direction but also serve as benchmarks for measuring levels of performance and accomplishment, for individuals, as well as businesses. People are more likely to achieve their goals when they know what they are trying to accomplish, by when, and how.

Organizational Structure

All business operations have a “structure” of roles, relationships among them, and rules that facilitate the division and coordination of work. Any organizational structure can benefit from review and adjustment from time to time, preferably before a crisis demands it.

Agricultural Jobs

A job is a collection of tasks performed and responsibilities carried out by a single person. Determination of a job’s normal duties is a matter of managerial choice, and it naturally affects attractiveness of and performance in the job. Agricultural jobs can have seasonal variation in the volume and nature of tasks, and/or be filled on a short-term basis. To attract and retain good employees, a working environment has to be a place where prospective staff might want to work, or at least where they feel a fair balance between pay and intrinsic rewards, on the other hand, and demands and discomforts on the other.

Assessing Needs for Labor and the Current Workforce

How much labor of what type is needed and when? How much is needed during various seasons? A labor estimate worksheet that lays out tasks by month throughout the year can be used to organize data in the process of answering such questions. Taking careful stock of business labor requirements, the current workforce, and your own skills should yield a good sense, if not a precise assessment, of the match between organizational needs and current staffing.

Assessing Managerial Capacity

Self-analysis isn’t easy, but it is incumbent on every manager and is part of an employer’s assessment of management resources in the farm business. Instruments are available to assist in examining one’s own abilities and dispositions relevant to managerial work. Farm Business Points: Working together can bond families and gratify each member like few other experiences, but successfully mixing business and family dynamics is difficult. There are common qualities of successful family businesses. Putting some structure into the employment relationship, as in family businesses, can help avoid misunderstandings and other problems on farms of any size.



Operating Within Legal Bounds

Management of human resources on farms and ranches is no longer only about dealing with workers – if it ever was. Relationships among people who provide and procure labor to make the system run – farm business owners and operators, employees, and contractors – are subject to a large set of public rules that apply to all but are well comprehended by only a few. The creation of new obligations specific to agriculture has placed it among the most heavily regulated of industries.



Coverage Varies

The rules and regulation of agricultural labor vary from state to state on many issues, and are administered by a plethora of federal and state agencies with various levels of enforcement capability and orientations to the industry. The prime federal law designed to protect migrant and seasonal farm workers is the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act (MSAWPA). Unlawful Discrimination: Several federal and state laws prohibit employment discrimination based on personal characteristics unrelated to job performance. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) oversees and coordinates enforcement.

Health and Safety

Agricultural workers are covered in varying degrees by worker's compensation laws in 40 U.S. states or territories, 14 of which treat them the same as all other

employees and 26 of which limit coverage in ways not applicable in other industries. The 13 jurisdictions with no statutory prescription allow for voluntary coverage of agricultural workers. Compliance Information: State and federal agencies offer pamphlets and forms in addition to those cited above to help orient new employers and assist all employers to meet their legal responsibilities. Virtually all materials are now accessible through websites.

Engaging Labor Though Contractors

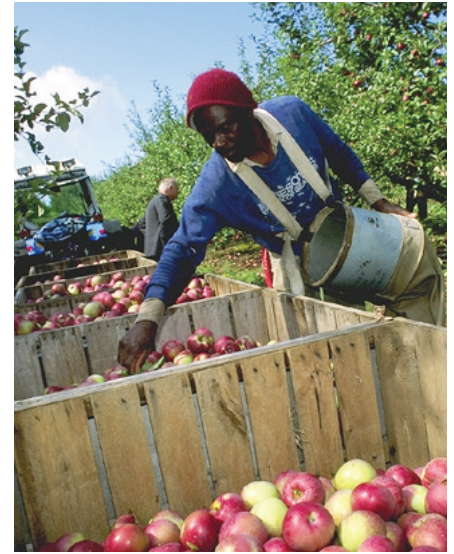
Given the regulatory and technical challenges of managing labor and the risks of incurring fines or other penalties for infractions, many growers contract with an external entity for services on their land. Engaging workers through farm labor contractors (FLCs or crew leaders) and custom operators has increased as farm operators have sought more organizational flexibility, time for other management functions, and relief from legal obligations and exposures to liability. Contractors can alleviate various difficulties, uncertainties, and costs associated with direct employment, especially the transaction costs of filling and laying off from short-term jobs during peak activity periods.

Legal Considerations in Contracting

The form in which labor is engaged to work on a farm has important practical consequences. Doubts have increased about whether farmers actually reduce their legal risks as employers by purchasing labor services from contractors. Although FLCs who operate properly and independently do reduce risks for both growers and workers, growers may leave themselves open to joint liability for negligent and unlawful acts committed by contractors with whom they do business.

Before Getting Started

The importance that growers' carefully select contractors they do business with and clarify and stick by the terms of any agreement, especially the payment schedule, cannot be overstated. While growers may be primarily concerned about the fees they will have to pay for various services, ignoring the legitimacy or business practices of contractors leaves them at risk of incurring additional costs. For both legal and operational purposes, growers and FLCs are wise to put their agreements in writing, to help avoid misunderstandings and to manifest the independence of the two entities.



Personnel Records

Accurate personnel records can inform day-to-day administration, as well as longer term planning decisions. Contents of a full file for each employee would document pre-employment and on-the-job events. Most laws that require creation of employee records also set minimum period of time to retain them on file.

Business owners and managers should give much thought about the relationship between the organizational plan and human resources. Additional resources, examples, and links to state and federal governmental web sites are available at AgHelpWanted.org.

Ag Help Wanted is a full-color, 250-page agricultural labor handbook that presents principles, practical examples, legal considerations, and offers additional references in six chapters: Roles and Responsibilities of an Agricultural Employer; Organizational Planning; Staffing the Farm Business; Supervising Agricultural Work; Managing Employee Performance, and Communication and Problem Solving. The text is designed for use in a variety of ways. It can serve as a reference to help cope with problems that arise, a source of ideas for improving management policies or practices, and a base for systematic study of human resource management in agriculture.

To learn more or to order see: AgHelpWanted.org.



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