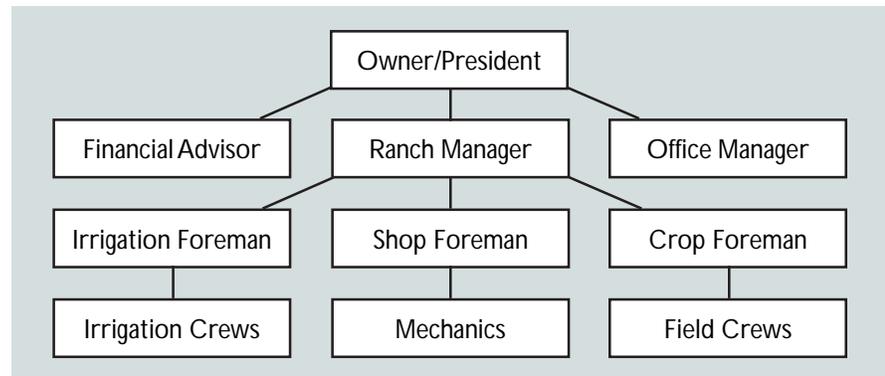


Figure 2.1. An example organizational chart.




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***A business is as good as its employees, and the quality of the employees speaks volumes about the management.***

## Agricultural Jobs

A job is a collection of tasks performed and responsibilities carried by a single person. Determination of a job's normal duties, like the rest of organizational structure, is a matter of managerial choice, and it naturally affects attractiveness of and performance in the job. Agricultural work and the lifestyle around it offer features that many people simply love but that also are accompanied by hardships.

Because of seasonal variation in the volume and nature of tasks to produce most agricultural commodities, half or more of the jobs in western agriculture are filled on a short-term basis. Most operational level work in labor-intensive commodities is divided into narrow jobs with repetitive tasks. Some workers enjoy a series of temporary jobs or a pattern of alternating employment and unemployment. Probably most, however, would prefer a more steady earning opportunity, and they swallow the instability of employment along with the inevitable physical stresses of field work, until better options appear.

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 one hand, and demands and discomforts on the other. Although most farm jobs involve some routine tasks and unpleasant conditions (heat, dust, etc.), deliberate effort can create an environment where people see they are likely to be respected, safeguarded, even well-treated and appreciated. Employees leave agricultural operations both during and between production years. Especially in mid-season, turnover imposes administrative and supervisory costs, and it requires coworkers to adjust, so workforce stability is generally desirable. Turnover is both expensive and often a symptom of other problems.

*What is it about agriculture that makes labor shortages worse than in other industries when the market is tight? A significant reason is a lack of job quality, both real and perceived.*

*How does ag stack up with other industries in terms of pay, hours, time off, and physical safety and comfort? How does ag stack up with respect to boredom, drudgery, civility, and equal opportunity? You can answer these for yourselves, but I think we have a lot of problems in these areas, and I think many others think so, too. If this is true, is it any wonder that, given a choice, prospective employees are going to shun ag employment and choose another line of work when they can?*

*The realities are compounded by perceptions, some based in the past but nevertheless influential. How are farm jobs seen by the job-seeking public? Generally, as offering low pay, long hours, little time off, physical discomfort and danger, boredom, drudgery, and incivility. Why? Partly because that description remains true in too many cases, even though today's farm management is more enlightened than in the past. And partly because it was even more true at times in the past when unemployment was higher and workers would put up with low job quality because they really needed the work.*

*So farm employment suffers from a poor image, and this negative image paints all operations with the same brush. Individual growers must understand this and take steps to differentiate themselves from the common perception by creating a contrasting image. Many producers have accomplished this and thus have improved their ability to hire and keep good employees. Their experiences can serve as examples to the rest of us in dealing with this problem of perceived poor job quality. It goes without saying, of course, that for a particular operation, it's difficult to create a positive perception of job quality if real job quality is lacking.*

— Dennis Cooper, Extension Specialist,  
University of Wisconsin – River Falls



Though opportunities to apply principles of rich job design are constrained by prevailing technology, managers can design farm jobs with broader and deeper content. Jobs that embody variety, a sense of control, and opportunity for growth, for example, tend to hold the interest and motivate people who are capable of performing them. Indeed, some people believe that managers have a responsibility to design jobs that provide a high level of job satisfaction. A job can, and many believe it should, be more than a source of economic livelihood. After all, work is central to most people's lives and self-concepts, so the quality of work life affects them as members of a family and greater community.

***“The boundaries of many jobs simply are not elastic enough to make room for workers’ hearts and spirits.”***

**John P. Schuster**



### **Six Attributes of Jobs that Tap Motivation**

Often jobs can be made more satisfying by structuring the work to allow employees greater scope, give them a sense of continuity and completeness, and encourage them to stretch their minds and sharpen their skills in accomplishing the tasks up to the expected standard. Attributes of such jobs usually include:

- Doing a whole job from beginning to end
- Regular contact with other employees, suppliers, and customers
- Duties or tasks that use a variety of skills
- Freedom to act independently, with choices about how to do the work
- Feedback from results, with standards built in against which success can be measured soon
- Opportunity for growth

## **Applying Ergonomic Principles**

Even if manual, routine tasks are not intellectually fulfilling, most do not have to hurt as much as they do. Aches, pains, strains, and sprains—especially in the back, shoulders, hands, and arms—are probably the most common health problem for people who work in agriculture. These “work-related musculo-skeletal disorders” (WMSD) are unfortunate byproducts of the repetitive reaching, gripping, carrying, bending, squatting, kneeling, and twisting involved in field and ranch jobs. They not only feel bad and reduce the earning opportunity for workers but also raise absenteeism, operational problems, and insurance premiums.

A simple low- or no-cost change in task procedure, tool, or immediate environment can often reduce risks of WMSDs by improving ergonomics, the “fit” between the job and a person’s body and abilities. Ergonomic studies have yielded guidelines for the design and redesign of agricultural jobs. In general, a physical task is risky if it has to be performed repetitively over a long period, with great force, or in a position that feels awkward.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has published a booklet describing more than a dozen sets of minor tool and procedural adjustments to alleviate ergonomic problems in nursery, grape, salad green, blueberry, and other types of production. The entirety of *Simple Solutions: Ergonomics for Farm Workers* (NIOSH, 2001), and a summary list of specific ergonomic tips adapted from it, are available through [AgHelpWanted.org](http://AgHelpWanted.org).