



legendary, “that’s not in my job description,” however, does not have to be a problem to any employer making reasonable assignments to workers. In fact, the employee who does not have a written job description may be more likely to feel that a foreman’s directive is overstepping rightful bounds.

Wording within a description can advise employees that they are expected to adapt to new methods when introduced or to perform related tasks, even if not specified, that contribute to overall operations. Subheading the list of job functions as “*Examples of Duties*” (or of Major Functions) conveys a similar message.

An examination of the job, or a “job analysis,” is the logical precursor to writing a job description. Like other aspects of personnel management, a job analysis may be conducted through various methods that range in formality and complexity. Common to all the methods is the gathering of information about a job. Some managers may feel so close to all operations that they draw solely on their own knowledge (of an existing job) or vision (for a new position) when writing job descriptions. Most, however, rely on or supplement their initial understanding with information collected through systematic observation, interviews with employees, worker activity logs, or other forms of incumbent reports. Whether coming from the manager, job incumbent, immediate supervisor, coworker, an office staff member, a consultant, or others, collection of information to be summarized in the written description is essential.

Writing Job Descriptions

Many employers do not use written job descriptions because the task of developing them looms too large or uncertain. References that lower this barrier, however, are readily available. Though not a substitute for descriptions specific to positions in a given organization, generic references that describe similar jobs can serve as models and help in launching local job analyses with which to modify them.

Examples of agricultural job descriptions that are online at AgHelpWanted.org can be expanded and tailored to individual company circumstances. They are presented as starting points, working drafts for you to further develop and refine to fit your operation.

Following are tips for writing effective job descriptions:

- Make it simple, clean, and factual.
- Resist overstating or exaggerating job importance and requirements.
- Keep the duties/functions and qualifications in different sections.
- Begin each duty/function with an active verb.
- List functions in order of either significance or portion of work time spent.

- In identifying “essential functions,” consider these criteria:
 - Portion of time spent performing the function
 - Purpose for very existence of the job
 - Necessity for the incumbent of this job, rather than of any other, to perform the function
 - * Consequences of removing the function from this job
 - * Special expertise required to perform the function
- Develop the description in coordination with a current or recent incumbent.
- Review with the employee(s) after every revision.
 - Answer questions about it, and discuss the need for any changes.
 - Ask to indicate understanding by signing.
 - Provide a copy to employee.
 - Check each year or two for continued accuracy.



“Jobless” Organizations?

In a world where business arrangements and technologies change fast, the mix of tasks in a job also has to change. Sometimes change is so rapid that the organization seems to not really have definable jobs. So, the classical selection strategy of identifying the tasks that make up a job and then finding people who can perform those tasks does not always work well. Managers have to be prepared either to constantly update those job descriptions or to define jobs more generally in the first place, putting emphasis on operational results and the resourcefulness to learn whatever it takes to achieve them, instead of method-specific skills.

Agricultural operators holding this view are likely to find *worker*-oriented job definitions and selection procedures much more useful than *work*-oriented procedures. They would put emphasis on finding people with positive attitudes and on assessing basic competencies, knowledge, skills, and ability to learn and adapt, rather than abilities to perform specific tasks. Even if the task content and core responsibilities of a job evolve with changing circumstances, however, a core set of qualifications needed to perform the job may be rather stable. Focusing on a basic range of skills, aptitudes, and versatility also makes sense when the employment timeframe is mid- or long-term and the farm seeks someone with potential for movement through a family of jobs.

This is not to say that job analyses and descriptions are not useful when job content is dynamic, but that care is needed to give them suitable levels of breadth, depth, and flexibility.

Below is a sample job description for the position of Herd Manager on a dairy farm.

Sample Job Description

Job Title: Dairy Herd Manager

Summary: Responsible for overall daily, weekly, and seasonal management of the dairy herd, including milking, herd health, and breeding. Supervises employees and plans feeding program in cooperation with farm owner.

Duties and Responsibilities (essential): Oversee and participate in all aspects of herd management, including milking, monitoring health of cows, breeding, and raising replacements. Plan and implement feeding program in consultation with farm owner. Supervise three or four other dairy employees who milk, feed, and care for cattle.

Minor Functions: Assist with field work and/or machinery maintenance as time permits, especially during peak periods of planting and harvesting.

Direct Supervisor: Farm owner

Qualifications

Knowledge, Skills and Abilities: Knowledge of cow physiology, life cycle, and factors affecting health and milk production. Understanding of and ability to work with modern milking equipment and automated feeding system. Ability to organize and maintain herd health and breeding records. Ability to communicate well with and to train milking staff.

Experience: At least three years experience managing a dairy herd.

Education and Training: Associate's degree from an agricultural or technical school with a major in animal production or a closely related agricultural field. Bachelor's degree preferred.

Safety Qualification: First aid certificate and ambulance safety certification preferred.

Conditions

Salary Range: \$450 to \$600 per week, depending on qualifications

Work Hours: 5:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., with two one-hour breaks per full day

Days Off Per Week: 1.5

Other Benefits: House in very good condition plus paid utilities. Two weeks paid vacation after one year.

Work Environment: Modern 200-cow freestall operation with 500 acres of field crops.