

Supervising Agricultural Work

Few farmers or ranchers turn biological material and processes into marketable products by themselves. Hired workers, family members, or a combination of both make it happen with their hands and their minds. Whether engaged directly by crop growers, livestock producers, labor contractors, or other service providers, they work under an influence called “supervision.”

Many business operators are not even in touch with the employees they hire to perform production work. Sheer size of their organizations, if not location and language differences between them and production workers, necessitates one or more intermediate levels of management. Supervisory influence for their employees comes from managers closest to the production level, commonly known as first-line supervisors.

Employees Who Supervise

Foremen, crew leaders, majordomos, first-line supervisors – by whatever name – are employers’ agents in managing workers. They are involved in most aspects of personnel management, by explicit delegation or a drop in the lap, and they often have roles in other functions, such as record keeping and grower-contractor communication. They are also employer agents from a legal perspective, so growers are liable for penalties that result from any labor law violations committed by supervisors while working for them.

From the worker’s point of view, the first-line supervisor is the principal point of contact, often is taken *to be* the employer, and in many firms has so much autonomy that he may as well be. How the crew foreman translates grower goals into worker tasks and how he interprets employee suggestions or complaints to a general manager affect operational results and the people involved. Even seemingly simple things, such as how the foreman relays a request for a day off or a revision in the employee health insurance plan, can color the basic relationship between growers and workers. In all their dealings, supervisors affect whether or not capable workers are attracted to the business, whether they stay as long as wanted, and how well they perform.



The supervisor is often seen as the employer.