



A grower can be relatively deliberate in making many big decisions such as whether to sell half the ranch business to a long-lost brother, whether to move operations to Idaho, how to comply with requirements for pesticide safety training, where to go for a loan, and at what price to buy the neighbor's herd. A licensed FLC can take some time deciding whether to work in olives next year, which counties to expand into, and when to replace the bus. Many more of a crew leader or majordomo's decisions are reactions to situations with which he or she must cope immediately. When a valve won't close, a planter is plugged, a cow is in distress, two loaders are throwing cartons at each other, half the crew doesn't show up, people are getting dizzy in a new field, or a driver is drunk on his machine, something has to be done quickly.

First-line supervisors' reactions, as well as their planned activities, commonly entail doing some operational level work themselves. Few supervisory positions are strictly limited to managerial work. Staying in close touch with production tasks and lending a hand when needed serve the ranch business and employees in various ways. Yet many supervisors and other managers do their businesses great disservice by over-involving themselves in operational work. Keeping some distance from routine tasks is not the same as never walking around to see what is going on and to talk with employees.

### **Lonely in the Middle**

Successful performance as a foreman begins with the prospective incumbent's and agricultural employer's understanding of what the job entails. For all the heat around it, the first-line supervisory role is not well illuminated. Many farm managers and workers do not appreciate the complexities of the position. Written descriptions of supervisory (and other) jobs in agriculture appear to be used more now than in years past, but they still are not the norm.

Analysis of the job of crew foreman in several California field harvest operations has produced a composite description that includes no fewer than 38 identifiable duties grouped within seven major functions (a variant of the classical five). Twenty-three of the 38 duties refer to the foreman dealing chiefly with people, six with data (i.e., payroll, production, administrative records and information), and nine with things (i.e., tools, equipment, and supplies).

## Sample Supervisory Position Description

### Title: Iceberg Lettuce Harvest Crew Foreman

**Job Summary:** Directly supervises and supports the work of crew members in harvesting mature lettuce, packing it into cartons, and loading the cartons onto a truck. Carries major responsibility for quality control, crew staffing, discipline, and recordkeeping.

### Major Job Functions and Examples of Duties

- A. Direct and facilitate field operations of crew
  1. Inform crew members of production requirements in relation to daily market and field conditions.
  2. Position truck crew and harvest crew members in field; adjust harvest crew assignments to rows as needed for even distribution of work.
  3. Assist occasionally in workflow by spreading cartons, replacing poor quality heads, cleaning open pack, etc.
  4. Stop crew when production goals are met; announce break times.
  5. Relay from harvest supervisor to crew members instructions about location, starting time, and cartons required from next field of work.
- B. Evaluate and control work performance
  1. Inspect cut heads and packed cartons for quality of head selection, cut, trim, and pack.
  2. Observe/check harvest crew members performing their work.
  3. Weigh packed cartons periodically and transmit weight information to HS.
  4. Call work deficiencies to attention of employee; discuss or demonstrate to correct.
  5. Administer progressive discipline when warranted and document in accord with company policy.
- C. Staff crews and train employees
  1. Conduct word-of-mouth recruitment when crew vacancies arise.
  2. Orient each new employee to work rules and other members of the crew.
  3. Explain to new employees the flow of work and specific job requirements.
  4. Assess probationary employees' skills and potential for development as regular crew members.
  5. Train employees in techniques associated with any new assignment.
  6. Announce and document seasonal layoffs.





- D. Assist in policy making and harvest planning
  1. Participate in regular management staff meetings.
  2. Know current company rules and union contract provisions, if applicable.
- E. Transport employees
  1. Check bus daily for safe operating condition and full equipment; service as needed.
  2. Drive bus to pick up employees at designated points in morning, transport to field(s) of work during day, and drop off after work.
- F. Provide supplies and personal assistance
  1. Distribute to employees special supplies, forms, administrative documents, and information about terms of employment.
  2. Issue equipment (gloves, knives, boots); order replacements as needed and/or maintain small inventory.
  3. Answer questions from employees about scheduling, crew assignments, or other issues.
  4. Settle conflicts within crew; help with personal problems; refer serious disputes to HS.
  5. Provide first aid to accident victims and arrange for continued medical care if needed.
- G. Record/report payroll and production data
  1. Act on requests for excused absences from work; document decision; obtain report (from office staff) on daily absentee call-ins.
  2. Complete and submit time/attendance reports daily.
  3. Distribute pay checks and obtain receipt signatures; transmit questions about pay computation to HS or office staff.
  4. Complete reports of work-related accidents.
  5. Report daily production results.
- H. Perform various related tasks

#### Minimum Qualifications

- A. Knowledge of what good quality lettuce pack is and how to perform every job in the harvest crew.
- B. A basic understanding of people and what affects their work performance.
- C. Communication skills: ability to explain, teach, direct, counsel, and listen to employees with respect and tact.
- D. Ability to drive, to lift at least 60 pounds, and to withstand physically demanding conditions for extended period of time.
- E. Honesty, reliability, and willingness to assume responsibility for achieving company goals.

Growers in various commodity sectors have adapted the above job description/specification for their own operations. While supervisory jobs vary both between and within industry sectors, their fundamental place in any organization makes them more similar than different. Probably most common among supervisory qualifications is an ability to communicate well with people and build interpersonal relationships conducive to honest exchange.

In the description on pages 111-112, the job specification (list of human attributes needed to perform the job) is compatible with the job content emphasis. Among the 22 knowledge, ability, and skill qualifications, 12 are closely related to the capacity for effective communication. A Spanish version of the description is available at *AgHelpWanted.org*.

When supervisors appear stressed, it should be no surprise. Their jobs are extremely demanding. They have to know how to supervise, how to operate, and when to do each. To be effective, a first-line supervisor has to deal well with a variety of people, information, and tangible items such as equipment, tools, supplies, and products.

### Views of Good Supervision

In *Keeping the People Who Keep You in Business*, Leigh Branham stresses that employees respond to how well managers perform in developing workers and relationships. They informally evaluate their supervisors on the following behaviors:

- Provides a thorough introduction to the job for me and other newcomers
- Teaches specific job-related or technical skills
- Makes sure I have specific goals in key performance areas
- Assigns work so that I am able to use my skills
- Communicates to me the formal and informal realities of advancement here
- Makes sure I have opportunities to learn and develop
- Gives me feedback and guides me on how to improve my performance
- Provides opportunities to discuss performance problems
- Asks for my opinion on pending decisions
- Represents my interests and concerns to higher management

Most growers, hired managers, and workers have their own notions, which are consistent with Branham's, of what makes a good supervisor. According to one orchard manager, a good supervisor:

- Is assertive – gets started on his or her own
- Is organized – sets up and keeps to a daily schedule
- Leads – adapts style to get the job done with others

---

***Most important for  
a good supervisor is  
the ability to  
communicate well.***