



Assigning Work, Delegating, and Getting Things Done

To delegate is, literally, “to entrust.” Delegation is fundamentally tied to first-line supervision in two ways. Growers or upper-level managers delegate to supervisors, and supervisors, in turn, delegate to operational workers.

What gets delegated? To the supervisor, it is his or her responsibility to achieve results through the use of resources and judgment. From the supervisor, usually physical tasks are delegated. In general, the higher the position is in the organization, the broader the judgment expected and the fewer the operational duties. Agricultural supervisors typically have a mixture of some doing and much decision making, including discretion about what to do and what to delegate.

Delegation is absolutely necessary because the volume and range of work that has to be done are large. One person cannot do it all, and the mix of work to be performed in agricultural operations normally requires a variety of abilities that one person simply does not possess. In the short term, delegation helps accomplish necessary tasks; moreover, it also serves a long-term business purpose by developing abilities within the workforce and giving employees the chance to grow. In building staff capacity, delegation also allows for flexibility in the operation, provides a form of training, prepares people for more responsible jobs, and reduces the expense of recruiting from the outside.

Why Not Delegate

Occasionally, the process of delegation breaks down in application. First-line supervisors’ participation in production tasks and their lending a hand when needed can benefit the ranch business and employees in various ways. Yet many supervisors and other managers do their businesses a great disservice by over-involving themselves in operational work. Consider the following case of the busy supervisor at Blue Boulder Farms:

A foreman has to do, to manage, and to decide when for each.