Unpacking the Farm Labor Puzzle

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What we know about farm labor...

- Significant expense
- Barrier to scale-up
- Scarce labor pool
- Increasing regulatory barriers
- Seasonal nature of the work
- Complex integration of legal, economic, social and cultural factors
Competing Tensions

- Lack of adequate labor pool
- Profit margin too small to support labor
- Cost of living exceeds wage limits
- Farmers not prepared for the reality of managing
- Available labor pool is not prepared for the work
- Increasing demand for “local” product
- Out-migration of youth
- Growing economy
- Low unemployment
- Addiction issues
- Season extension
- QoL considerations
Selecting the right employee mix...

- Full Time
- Interns
- Volunteers
- Apprentices
- Contract
- Year Round
- H2A
- Seasonal
- Family
- Part Time
- Family Volunteers
Supervisory Responsibilities - Ideal

- Planning and Research: 5%
- Recruiting and Hiring: 5%
- Orientation and Training: 20%
- Day-to-Day Supervision: 15%
- Supervisory Responsibilities: 15%
- Conflict/Ending Employment: 2%
- Feedback and Evaluation: 15%
- Recordkeeping/Legal Issues: 5%

Supervisory Responsibilities - Actual

- Planning and Research: 5%
- Recruiting and Hiring: 5%
- Orientation and Training: 20%
- Recordkeeping/Legal Issues: 20%
- Day-to-Day Supervision: 30%
- Conflict/Ending Employment: 15%
- Feedback and Evaluation: 15%
• Farmer Readiness
• Finding and Retaining Employees
• Legal Issues
• Professionalism (aka Next Level Management)
• Tools and Resources
Farmer Readiness

- Self-assessment
- Systems in place vs “winging it”
- Safety procedures
- Can you make payroll?
- Are you aware of the legal and tax implications?
Finding and Retaining Employees

- Adequate planning
- Job descriptions
- Know the employment environment
- Start early
- Screen carefully
- The wrong employee can be more costly than no employee
Legal Issues

• Consult an expert
• Maintain a paper trail
• Compliance is key
• Maintain separation between profit centers
Professionalism

- Keep communications open, transparent and professional
- Have a clear anti-harassment policy
- Be aware of the motivations of different employee types
- Be aware and observant
Tools and Resources

- Job description tool
- Labor Cost Estimator
- Farmers’ Labor Readiness Assessment
  - [http://www.uvm.edu/aglabor/dashboard](http://www.uvm.edu/aglabor/dashboard)
- Policy Manual
  - (ex. Farm Commons – Farm Employee Handbook)
Welcome to the Labor Dashboard

- **LABOR READINESS ASSESSMENT**: Find out if there are areas where you need to prepare.
- **JOB DESCRIPTION GENERATOR**: Produce and download accurate, professional job descriptions.
- **COST CALCULATOR**: Determine the full cost of hiring an employee on your farm.
Future research

- Mechanization decisions
- Wearable technology
- Gendered elements of labor mgmt
- Better econometrics on the optimal labor profile
- Revisiting labor coop models
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