

General Farm Labor



AUTHORS & INSTITUTIONS

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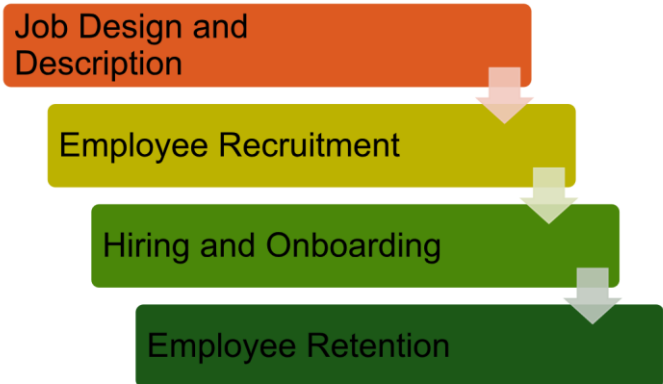


INTRODUCTION

Industry sources indicate that recruitment of new farm employees often comes by word of mouth from existing employees who reach out to family members and friends to fill job vacancies at a farm. For new farms, the process will likely differ. In this chapter, we will cover some of the basics of getting started with labor on the farm. You should also research your local, state, and federal guidelines to make sure you are in compliance with the law as you hire and start employing workers. At a minimum, you should be aware of the applicable minimum wage and other workplace rules that agricultural employers must abide by.

How To Get Started

When hiring farm employees for your new business, consider starting by developing a job description and posting it online through platforms like MichiganWorks! Once you have posted your job description, you will want to vet employees through an interview process, select the employees you want to hire, and put them through an onboarding process to get them up to speed with the tasks they are going to perform for your company. After employees are hired, you may want to consider developing employee retention strategies so you don't lose good employees to other businesses.





SECTION 1

Job Design and Description

Hiring the right employees is one of the most important aspects of a business. Some people say "**without the right people, no amount of money can make a business succeed.**"

Businesses need qualified staff to help them run smoothly. Hiring is one of the most difficult decisions a business can make. Hiring someone who can't do the job or won't do it the way you want it to be done can be costly. Moreover, hiring the wrong people can create unnecessary stress and lower the company's profitability. Bad employees shift attention from running the business to making sure the employee doesn't make mistakes. They can also lower staff morale, endanger the business' assets and equipment, and lead to increased conflict in the workplace. To avoid hiring bad employees, you can implement a standard hiring process.

You can start by developing a job description. A job description should contain the following details: the major tasks that need to be completed, the job duties and responsibilities, and the job specifications. The job specifications should include the types of qualifications required for the job, sometimes referred to as "skills." Examples of skills may include: **time management, computer skills, problem solving, teamwork, etc.**



The following list includes the elements of a good job description:

- Job title
- Worksite location
- Whether it is full-time or part-time
- A brief overview of the company
- Information about fringe benefits (holiday pay, vacations, health insurance, etc.)
- Key duties and responsibilities
- Key skills required for the job (bullet points are helpful)

Primary Considerations

- Recruiting the right employees is very important for a business.
- Bad hires can be very costly to a company.
- Businesses need to provide a job description.
- There should be a plan for the selection and interviewing of job candidates.
- Ultimately, the goal is to find the most qualified candidate for the job.

Process for Getting Started

- Determine details about what is required for the job you need to fill
- Design your job description and specifications





SECTION 2

Employee Recruitment

Recruiting is the process of creating a pool of qualified candidates for a job opening. Some of the recruiting options include posting job descriptions on the internet, posting a sign and interviewing “walk-ins,” and hiring the services of a recruiting agency.

The goal of a job applicant is to match their qualifications (or resume) to the job they are applying for. The goal of a recruiter is to listen to the job applicants, let the applicant know what the expectations are, respond to the applicant’s questions, and find the best candidate for the job. There are four steps to the hiring process, which are listed below:

1. Determine who will create the list of qualified applicants
2. Review the applications
3. Create the list of qualified applicants
4. Interview the candidates

The person who will create the list of qualified applicants should be the person who has the most insight into the job being advertised. If the opening is for a manager position, it might be best for the business owner to select who is qualified. If the position is for a laborer position, it might make sense for someone with managerial experience to select the list of qualified applicants. It is important to make sure that everyone involved in the hiring process has a copy of the job description, understands the position's roles and employee responsibilities, and understands the job selection criteria. When interviewing multiple candidates, make sure to ask them all the same questions. It can also be helpful to create a ranking form where you can take notes.



When interviewing candidates, give yourself time to reflect before making a decision. Moreover, you should ask for three work-related references and check them to ensure accuracy of the candidate's statements. When you call references, you can use a reference form to record their answers (see for example [**14 Questions You Should Ask When Checking References**](#)).

When you make a job offer, it is good practice to put it in writing. You can email it or deliver it to them in person. Also, it is important to make sure you meet all the legal requirements with respect to the terms of employment. For example, you should check state and federal laws for minimum wage and overtime pay requirements. Ignorance is not a valid legal defense to labor law violations.

Primary Considerations

- Post your job listing
- Decide who is going to do the interviews

Process for Getting Started

- Research common advertising platforms
- Discuss amongst your existing business partners who is going to interview job candidates



SECTION 3

Hiring and Onboarding

The process of choosing the best candidate for the job is known as employee selection. An application standardizes information so it is easier to compare applicants. After sorting through the applications, you will want to select four to five finalists to interview. The initial interviews can be virtual or by phone, and some interviews may require some basic testing. Once you conduct the initial interviews, you will want to select one to three candidates to conduct a second interview with. When you do the second interview, you may also want to do a background check, including credit, criminal history, references, and web searches (including social media). Once you have selected the candidate you are going to make a job offer to, you should provide a conditional job offer, which typically consists of an offer with some kind of drug screening and a physical examination if necessary.

The practice of onboarding includes the set of actions the business takes to get new hires up to speed and "on board" with the company. Onboarding is important because it helps make sure the employee really knows what to expect and how to do it, and it will set the employee up for success. Onboarding can include employee orientation and training.



New employees can form opinions about the company quickly, so it is important that their initial experiences are positive. Employees who start off on the right foot tend to be happier and more productive, and they tend to stay with the company longer, which reduces costs. Orientation involves teaching the employee about the business, signing them up for benefits, and doing all the legal paperwork. Orientation may also include introducing the employee to their coworkers. If you find yourself in a management role where you are onboarding employees, use common sense and make sure to teach the employees what they need to know.

Some of the types of questions you should be prepared to answer are listed below:

- What exactly will I be doing?
- Who is my boss, and who do I take instruction from?
- What are my work hours?
- When and where do I take lunch breaks?
- Who do I go to if I have questions?
- When and how do I get paid?

Typically, new employees are not a perfect fit for the job, so they need to be trained. Employee training involves teaching the employee about the skills they will need and their duties on the job, and this will sometimes consist of both formal and informal "on-the-job" training.



To develop your employee training routine, you must first assess what your needs are and figure out how you need to shape the employee's behavior. It is good practice to design a training routine, deliver the training, and then assess whether the training was effective at meeting its goals.



First, you will want to make the new employee feel comfortable, help them get prepared, and allow them to ask questions. Next, you should show the new employee the task that needs to be done and watch the employee repeat the task. Then you can assess the employee's work and give them tips for improving while allowing them to try the task again and again until they get it right.

Then, once the employee is good enough to do the task on their own, check in with them frequently during the first few weeks to make sure they are on track to be successful and follow up with them if they need a refresher.

You can use the following five-step process to train employees to do certain tasks:

1. **Get Ready:** Explain what you are going to teach them and why it is important.
2. **Step-by-Step Explanation:** Explain the task step-by-step.
3. **Demonstrate:** Show how the task is done, let them ask questions.
4. **Repeat:** Ask employees to explain the process back to you.
5. **Confirm:** Have employees perform the task while you watch.

If your employees speak Spanish, you should consider having someone interpret your orientation or have someone that speaks Spanish perform the orientation. You should also explain why certain tasks are being done and point out the hazards of the job. The employee should have a good understanding of the safety procedures and regulations.

Primary Considerations

- Employee selection is important. Bad hires cost time and money and reduce farm productivity and profitability.
- Onboarding gets new employees up to speed on the job.
- Onboarding can include orientation and training.
- Proper training is important for new employees.

Process for Getting Started

- Determine who is going to train the employees
- Make sure that someone can speak the language of the employees (e.g., Spanish)
- Provide hands-on training experience to get employees up to speed





SECTION 4

Employee Retention

Employee retention is a top concern for many farms; however, few farm managers or owners take the time to talk to their employees to determine what will make them stay. Some reasons why people change their jobs include higher pay, better work-life balance, and geographic preferences, to name a few. Retaining employees starts with recruiting the right employees.





STRATEGIES FOR GOOD EMPLOYEE RETENTION

During recruitment, differentiate your company from others in a meaningful way.

- Explain how your company is interesting and different from others
- Small and mid-sized companies that are interesting to employees have high growth rates

Identify what talents your employees have.

- Put employees in a position where they can use their talents
- Allow employees the opportunity to develop their skills

Listen to employees and develop personal relationships with them.

- Help employees resolve their problems
- Make sure employees know they are being cared for

Offer compensation items that solve some type of personal problem.

- Child care (if feasible)
- Scheduling flexibility
- Housing (if feasible)

Primary Considerations

- There are a number of reasons why people leave their jobs. Many of them involve compensation or work amenities (e.g., location, housing, bad management).
- Retaining employees is a number one concern for employers.
- There are steps you can take to help retain good employees.

Process for Getting Started

- Determine what types of things can help address employee problems
- Offer solutions to employee problems to create a situation where they want to stay employed at your company. Examples might be scheduling flexibility, access to housing, etc.

Disclaimer. For a specific list of resources in the above description, view the Necessary Resources area of this section.



FARM LABOR

COMMON QUESTIONS

01

Where do I source employees from?

Sourcing employees can come from recruiting employees within the US or recruiting foreign temporary guest workers through visa programs such as H-2A or TN. You can post job descriptions or try to recruit from word of mouth. If you want to hire H-2A employees, you might want to consider hiring an agency to recruit the workers for you. There are several agencies in Michigan that recruit H-2A workers, such as Great Lakes Ag Labor Services.

02

What do I need to know about the H-2A program if I want to use it?

The H-2A application process is administratively burdensome and somewhat complex to navigate. Employers need to provide evidence they have attempted to recruit domestic workers and were unable to, file an application within a specific timeframe, and adhere to a number of program rules, including paying employees a super-minimum wage known as the Adverse Effect Wage Rate and paying employees at least 3/4 of the hours in the contract. There are many other rules of the program, and rules may change from year to year, so employers need to stay up to speed on them.

Organizations such as the National Council of Agricultural Employers provide timely information about emerging H-2A rules and how to stay in compliance with them. You can also find the legal language of new H-2A rules in the Federal Register.

03

What are best practices for recruiting and retaining a sufficient labor force?

Following an identical interview process for similar employees and taking notes during interviews can help you select employees when you get ready to hire them. Offering compensation items, such as scheduling flexibility or housing, and establishing good relationships with your employees can help retain them over time.

04

What laws do I need to follow once I hire employees?



Employers must pay the maximum of the applicable state or federal minimum wage and follow all OSHA guidelines. Moreover, toilets and hand washing facilities for field laborers must be located within a quarter mile walk, and there must be at least one toilet and hand washing facility for every 20 employees. Potable water shall be provided and placed in locations readily accessible to all employees. You should consult official government sources or a labor attorney to make sure you are in compliance with the law.



RESOURCES & PARTNERS

Necessary Resources

[MDARD Agriculture & Foreign Labor Services](#)

[1928.110 – Field Sanitation. | Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#)

[H-2A Temporary Agricultural Workers | USCIS](#)

[Labor and Personnel Management in the Agri-food System](#)

[Michigan Works!](#)

[MSU Overview of Youth Employment \(Child Labor\) Provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act \(FLSA\) for Agricultural Occupations](#)

[Federal Register](#)

[TN USMCA Professionals](#)

[Agricultural Employment Under the Fair Labor Standards Act \(FLSA\)](#)

[MDARD Agricultural Operations Standards](#)

[Michigan Minimum Wage Rate 2025 Increase Schedule](#)

[Labor Laws and Michigan Agriculture](#)

[TN USMCA Professionals](#)