

Deciding to Become an Employer

An agriculture labour specialist from Michigan State University tells the following story:

Some years ago I met a man of about 45 who was the owner-operator of a large, very successful farm in California. When I asked him about his success, he told me this story.

“The farm was not making an adequate return so I expanded. I borrowed more money and hired more labour but it didn’t seem to help much. It just gave me more to do and more to worry about. A tightness in the chest sent me to a doctor who said I was a prime candidate for a heart attack, that I must slow down, lower the stress level. I went back to the books, considered alternatives, but nothing looked promising.

Then one night when I couldn’t sleep, I lay there pondering the problems and a thought hit me: I am not a producer, I am an employer of people and those people produce the product. I am wearing the wrong hat. The next morning I got up and went out and actually purchased a new hat, then went to the library and checked out books on personnel management, business organization and business relations.

That was five years ago. Now, the farm is making big profits, I have very few problems. On the contrary, my employees are a real source of enjoyment. Of course, I haven’t thrown out my producer hat. I just wear it a lot less often and my health has returned, not because of more sleep but because of low distress and good sleep.”

Deciding to become an employer requires careful consideration. Being a successful manager of farm labour may require changing how you operate on a day-to-day basis.

The creation of a new position must benefit both you and your employee. If the employee’s needs are not met, you will suffer high turnover and training costs.

Many farms operate with the labour force which happens to have been readily accessible. Most farmers do not consciously decide to become employers. They see themselves as farmers first, employers second. As demands upon their time overwhelm them, farmers hire additional labour. Hiring without careful planning can lead to disappointment.

Economic Benefits

Non-Economic Benefits

In analyzing the need to hire a new employee, you must take into account both economic and non-economic benefits.

Economic benefits:

- increased farm efficiency
- more of your time for marketing, pricing and financial activities
- increased likelihood of completing tasks on time
- more efficient use of capital and overhead
- increased production for profit
- opportunities for growth

Non-Economic benefits:

- reduced stress and pressure
- increased flexibility of time for leisure, health, family activities, etc.

Your objectives in hiring should be carefully thought out and written down so you can refer to them when you evaluate results.

Some questions you should ask yourself before hiring are:

- a) What type of help do I need?
 - a short term employee to perform only specific projects such as yard cleanup, a construction project, stone picking or similar tasks.
 - a part-time employee to perform specific tasks on a regular basis, for example, someone who does morning feeding only.
 - a full-time seasonal employee to perform specific or a wide range of duties throughout the production season
 - a permanent employee to perform a wide range of duties on a year-round basis.
 - b) Do I have sufficient cash flow to maintain the type of employee I need?
 - c) Will the job keep the interest of a highly motivated employee?
 - d) Do I have sufficient people skills and patience to train, supervise and evaluate an employee?
 - e) What type of employee is best suited to the job?
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