

# Agriculture Insights

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## Success with Non-Traditional Employees

The agriculture industry has learned to deal successfully with a lot of changes in technology, finances, and marketing. But, we have given far less attention to human resource changes. With the unemployment rate in Pennsylvania at 4.2 percent and Lancaster County's unemployment rate at 2.5 percent, farmers are faced with seeking non-traditional employees in non-traditional ways.

Bernie Erven, a professor of Agriculture Economics and extension specialist on human resources at Ohio State University, recommends that we first pay attention to the basics for human resource success. Employers must offer fair compensation with benefits to attract employees. You need to hire the right people that "fit" the business and the job. Proper

orientation and training is strongly recommended. To help avoid confusion, good communication with each of your employees is needed. By following these guidelines, you can help to build your reputation in the community as a preferred employer.

Erven suggests we should change the emphasis placed on human resource management. We need less emphasis on what employers want from employees, and more emphasis on providing what employees look for in their employers and their jobs. Understanding the tremendous competition for good employees in a tight labor market will help an employer focus on their employee needs. Remember there is also someone else in the community that is interested in hiring the best employee candidates.

There are four key groups of non-traditional employees that Erven suggests can be an excellent opportunity for farm employees, each of which offers special challenges. Working parents, teenagers, semi-retired and Hispanics all are key sources of non-traditional farm employees.

1. Working Parents - will need work schedules that fit their family responsibilities and include day-to-day flexibility. Some farmers will train 3 working parents to fill 2 jobs, and will let the parents work around their own schedules and choose when to work. Childcare is one big benefit you could possibly provide to attract working parents. Health insurance is another incentive that parents appreciate.

2. Teenagers - will need flexible work schedules around school sports teams, clubs, etc. Teenagers often are motivated to work harder when shown appreciation and recognition. Another key to keeping teenagers happy is a ready supply of food and beverage at the work place. Transportation is another benefit you could offer to attract teenagers unable to drive.

3. Semi-Retired - often enjoy the opportunity to socialize at the work place. They, too, require flexible schedules for extended vacations, etc. A mixture of part-time, full-time and time off may be needed for a semi-retired employee.

4. Hispanics - some may need support in navigating through the agriculture community. Communication challenges must

be recognized and addressed. This can present an excellent opportunity for both employers and employees to increase their awareness of diversity.

These four groups of employees can all be excellent resources for any farmer who is experiencing challenges in locating employees. Managers must keep close daily contacts with employees and their needs. A detailed, written job protocol is strongly recommended

by Erven to avoid any later confusion.

Considering a non-traditional employee may provide the solution to the human resource challenges farmers are facing in today's competitive employment market.

Feel free to send your comments or questions by email to Brent Landis at the Lancaster Chamber at blandis@lcci.com or call him at 717-397-3531.

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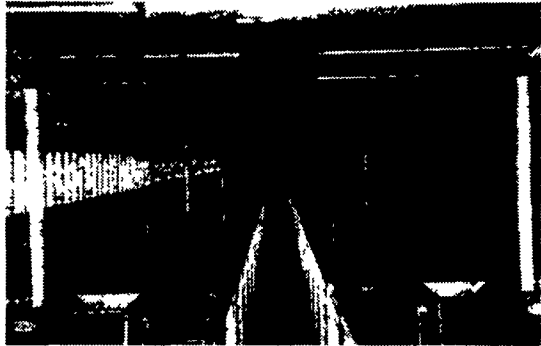
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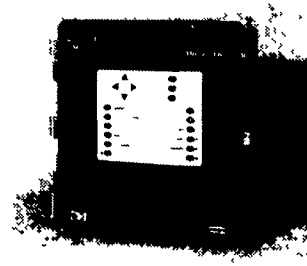
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