

# Eight Farm Management Tips for the 2018 Season<sup>1</sup> or How to Grow Better Workers

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A good time to make New Year's resolutions is at the start of the new growing season. This year why don't you try adopting one or more of the following 8 key management strategies of good managers on your farm. They might help you help get your employees off to a good start this year.

**1. Actively Involve Your Employees in the Operations of the Farm.** In the business world, it's known as participative management style. Remember that the person who does the job knows the most about how the job can be done (or changed). Despite a farm's hectic schedule some owners do find time to:

- Be with their key employees during a short morning session once the work crews are going to check in and see how things are going.
- Take key employees equipment shopping and to meetings and shows.
- Encourage their employees to work directly with their service providers, i.e., the vet and extension specialists, who can be effective trainers.
- Try to see and greet all employees each day.

**2. Create a Positive Attitude.** "Have you caught an employee doing something right today?" (from The One-Minute Manager book) If we feel an employee is stupid, lazy, and no good, then they will sense this and fall into this rut. If we feel an employee is moral, trainable, and a worthwhile human being, they probably will be. Again, put into your vocabulary the phrases- "well - done," "thank you," "I appreciated the extra effort."

**3. Understand That Time Off Is Essential.** Planting and harvesting seasons are long. Most employees accept this and enjoy the challenge. What they don't accept is getting only every other Sunday off. Probably the #1 pet peeve for farm employees is not having enough time off, especially weekends. Many farmers are organizing their schedules to create at least one weekend day off a week for each employee, so they can spend time with family or friends.

**4. Train a Trainer.** If you have skills that you want developed in your employees but haven't the time to do the training yourself or don't have the patience, then develop training skills in some of your key people. Send them to seminars, etc. to learn skills they can bring back to train your other employees.

**5. Establish Systems to Improve Communication.** Some that are working quite well include: maintenance schedule checklists, blackboards to write messages to one another, texting and 2-way radios. To help your employees see the results of their labor and post production results (i.e., CSA bags packed this week, number of cases of apples packed/hr). These become monitoring tools and goals that offers opportunities for working together.

**6. Do Not Give Titles Without Authority.** A market manager in charge of farmers markets had better be in charge. If they can't load and unload the produce, set up the display, handle cash and customers and

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Rogers, Don Human Resource Management Practices in Action in Maloney, Thomas et al. *Human Resource Management on The Farm: A Management Letter Series*. Department of Agricultural Economics, Cornell University. 1988. pp21-22.

supervise other workers independently, then they aren't a market manager. One of the major miscommunications with employees is the perceived expectations versus the real-world responsibilities. Although it is important to encourage employees to assume responsibility and grow in their jobs, it is a mistake to give someone a title and responsibility for a job that they cannot meet expectations in, especially if that job involves managing other employees.

**7. Do Performance Appraisals - Frequently.** An employee has a right to know how they are performing. Have you sat down and discussed with your employees for at least an hour their strengths and weaknesses and how you can help them do a better job. Farmers who do this regularly have told us how rewarding it is to both parties.

**8. Prepare an Employee Handbook.** Businesses with several employees are putting together written information for their new employees on expectations, rules and policies (i.e., vacations, holidays, absenteeism, etc.), and details regarding fringe benefits. This creates fair standards for everyone and eliminates politics and favoritism, which, if not controlled, become roots of employee discontent.

*This material is based upon work supported by USDA/NIFA under Award Number 2015-49200-24225.*

