

# Training & Retaining Great Farmworkers

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MSU Student Organic Farm & Organic Farmer Training Program



# ORGANIC FARMER TRAINING PROGRAM



## Make your farm dream a reality...

Join a vibrant learning community where everyone shares their unique farming skills, experience and goals.

### Learn at the MSU Student Organic Farm:

- Visits to 20+ Michigan farms
- 50/50 mix of farm and classroom activities
- Hands-on farming with year-round vegetables, fruits, cut flowers & more
- Test soils, scout pests, drive a tractor, use a broadfork, trellis tomatoes, etc!
- Farm walks and demonstrations
- Classroom activities & discussions
- 15+ Guest speakers
- Video lectures & readings
- Write your own Farm Business Plan

\$3,900 for 33 weeks - Scholarships available!  
Mondays from March 16 - November 9

**MSU Student Organic Farm**  
East Lansing, Michigan  
[www.msuorganicfarm.org](http://www.msuorganicfarm.org)  
[msufarm@msu.edu](mailto:msufarm@msu.edu)



## ORGANIC FARMER TRAINING PROGRAM



Make your farm dreams a reality!  
Join the OFTP each Monday at MSU Student Organic Farm to learn real-world skills on a 15-acre year-round production farm.



*The Organic Farmer Training Program teaches aspiring farmers in a 50/50 mix of field and classroom activities at the 15-acre MSU Student Organic Farm. You will learn through hands-on farmwork, farm walks, discussions, video lectures, readings, 15+ guest speakers and visits to 20+ Michigan farms. Practical assignments like writing a Farm Business Plan will connect daily learning themes to YOUR farm goals.*

**Daily Learning Themes**

- Field Trips to 20+ Farms
- 15+ Guest Speakers
- Values & Goals
- Land & Credit Access
- Soils and Plant Biology (2 Days)
- Transplant Production
- Marketing (2 Days)
- Production Plans & Crop Rotations
- Tractors & Equipment
- Weeds, Pests & Diseases (3 Days)
- Vegetable Crop Families (4 Days)
- Farm & Business Planning (5 Days)
- Partial days on Organic Certification, Irrigation, Livestock, Season Extension, Food Safety, Bees, Fruit, Cover Crops, etc.

**33 weeks (March—November)**  
**Mondays 9am-5pm**  
**East Lansing, MI**  
**Scholarships Available**

[www.msuorganicfarm.org](http://www.msuorganicfarm.org)  
[msufarm@msu.edu](mailto:msufarm@msu.edu)  
517.230.7987

# Farmer Field School

2020

- **April 17: Fertigation & Irrigation with Ben Bylsma**  
@ KVCC Food Innovation Center in Kalamazoo
- **May 4: Food Safety with Phil Tocco**  
@ MSU Student Organic Farm (half day)
- **July 13 Weeds & Pests with Fred Monroe**  
@ Monroe Organics (full day)
- **August 10 – Ann Arbor Study-A-Farm trip**  
@ four farms (full day)
- **August 19 - Dried Flowers with Alex Cacciari and Julia Griffin**  
@ Seeley Farm (half day)
- **September 28 – Battle Creek/Kalamazoo Farm Tours**  
@ four farms (full day)
- **November 12 - Tool Maintenance with Brad Smith**  
@ Full Hollow Farm (half day)
- **December 1: Farmer Brain Trust**  
@ MSU Student Organic Farm (Free, 10am to noon)
- **December 1: Regenerative Agriculture & Cover Crops Roundtable**  
@ MSU Student Organic Farm (Free, 1 to 3pm)



# Farm Labor

## Finding

Good Workers

- Attracting Farmworkers
- Interviewing & Selecting workers
- Pay & Benefits
- Interns?  
Apprentices?  
Employees?



## Training Good Workers

- Delegating Management
- Organizing Tasks & Systems
- Hands-on Training
- Formal Training
- Mid-season evaluations & raises
- Being a good boss



## Retaining Good Workers

- Worker Retention
- Year-round opportunities

**+ Farmer Sanity**

## Groundswell Farm, Zeeland, Michigan

Year	Infrastructure	Sales	Inf.\$	FTE	Challenges	2 Farmers/payroll
2005	Lease 7 acres of muck in December!	\$0	\$0	0	Nerves, decisions	\$0
2006	16x48 Greenhouse, Well, Truck	\$17K	\$12K	2/0	Zero infrastructure, few building skills	-\$20K/\$1K
2007	Tractor, 8x8 Cooler, Disc, Rotavator	\$38K	\$9K	2/1	Doubling business	\$4K/\$3K
2008	Truck, Brush Hog, Hiller, Spin-Spray	\$46K	\$5K	2/1.5	2Floods, interpersonal	\$12K/\$9K
2009	GH expansion, \$10K Farmer buyout, buy farm \$24,500	\$63K	\$2K	2/2	1 Flood	\$26K/\$14K
2010	G Tractor, Potato Planter	\$87K	\$8K	2/2.5	New farmer	\$28K/\$17K
2011	Potato Digger, Paper pot planter*	\$131K	\$4K	3/4	Special orders	\$32K/\$32K
2012	NRCS Hoophouse, 10 acre (\$63K),well*	\$132K	\$11K	2.5/5	Drought, Baby	\$32K/\$48K
2013	Delivery Truck, Manure spreader, Lifter	\$166K	\$9K	4/5	Cooler space	\$32K/\$50K
2014	30x48 Wash Station, Tractor, Rotavator, Plow, Delivery Truck, Semi-trailer cooler	\$190K	\$55K	5/5	Building delays	\$32K/\$73K
2015	Driveway, Wash Station, Barrel Washer	\$199K	~ \$10K	4.5/6	Staff turnover, Tom arm, high yields, \$	\$32K/\$77K
2016	Increase cash on hand, 22x32 greenhouse, Well	\$214K	\$4K	4.7/6	Selling CSA shares	\$32K/\$72K
2017	Sell the farm!	\$217K	\$4K	3/6	Katie & Tom not onsite	\$10K/\$26K+\$16K + \$72K

# Day to Day Management

- Be Prepared / Organized ahead of crew's arrival
- Have materials ready
- Share estimated task times for tasks
- Write, Share & Post the Plan for the entire day
- Have back up or contingency plans
- Share the big picture

**REMEMBER: LABOR IS THE MOST EXPENSIVE INPUT ON A SMALL DIVERSIFIED FARM**

- Be prepared to use it well!

# Finding Good Workers

- Pay & Benefits

- Clear & Consistent
- Spell out pay & benefits in writing
- Round robin:
  - What is everyone paying?
  - Does it attract & retain workers?

**Position Description:** The Crew Member position at SOF is an immersive, hands-on working and learning experience in diverse organic vegetable production. Crew Members perform all necessary farm labor tasks, including seeding, transplanting, irrigation, weeding, harvest and more. Leadership opportunities in the various areas of the farm are available to those who show initiative and interest. To make this position an Academic Internship, students can pursue a project of interest (and of use to the farm) agreed upon by managers at the start of the season. We are looking for hard working, dependable students who take on new skills and tasks with enthusiasm and a desire to learn.

**Benefits:** Crew Members start at \$10 with raises based on performance; Free produce is available daily, as well as transplants for your garden; Crew Members are invited to the SOF Fundraising Gala in the fall.

## Fair wages

- Hourly pay starting at \$8.50/hour
- Free CSA share OR access to veggies as needed (your choice)
- Raises for talent and experience
- Time-and-a-half overtime pay

## Experience

- Learn all aspects of organic farming from greenhouse techniques to transplanting, irrigation, pest/disease control, weeding, harvesting, washing and marketing
- Experience selling produce at a farm with 150+ CSA members, 2 successful farmers' markets and sales to 4 health food stores
- A choice of work specialties (coordinate the greenhouse, direct seeding in field, food safety, volunteers & events, irrigation, special orders, CSA pickups, farmers' markets, etc)
- Work with over 300 vegetable varieties on 2 soil types (muck & sandy loam)
- Potential to become farm manager at either of our two farm sites or to be field manager at our main farmsite
- Opportunity to tour other sustainable farms once per month

## Good working conditions

- Eight hour workdays
- Five-day work-weeks
- Paid half-hour break and unpaid hour-long lunch
- Focus on safety
- Workers' compensation in case of accidents

# Finding Good Workers


- Hours

## Farmworkers

- Clarity!
- 40-hour weeks?
- Overtime?
- Shift times, lunch breaks, etc.

## Farmer

- Fieldwork time
- Computer/off-farm work time



7. What is your weekly availability for the 2020 Spring Semester?

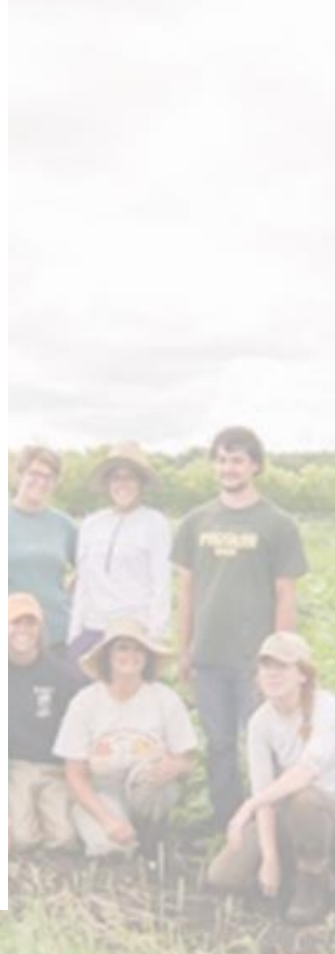
- Monday 8am-12pm
- Monday 1pm-5pm
- Tuesday 8am-12pm
- Tuesday 1pm-5pm
- Wednesday 8am-12pm
- Wednesday 1pm-5pm
- Thursday 8am-12pm
- Thursday 1pm-5pm
- Thursday 1pm-7pm
- Friday 8am-12pm
- Friday 1pm-5pm
- Saturday 10am-2pm
- Sunday 10am-2pm



# Finding Good Workers

## • Interns? Apprentices? Employees? Subcontractors?

- Student Organic Farm
  - Crew → Employees + Work Study
  - Volunteers, Service Learning, etc.
- Groundswell
  - Employees for pay & taxes
  - Train as if apprentices
- Interns
- Apprentices
  - Registered apprenticeship program
  - Farm School
- Employees
- Subcontractors
- Landlord/Mentor



casfs.ucsc.edu/about/publications/Teaching-Direct-Marketing/pdf%20downloads/Unit.8.pdf

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### UNIT 8.0

## Farm Employees and Innovative Models for Interns and Apprentices

Introduction	351
Lecture 1: Farm Employees—Definitions and Employee Protections	353
Lecture 2: Employers' Obligations—Taxes, Safety, Workers' Compensation, and More	359
Lecture 3: Innovative Models for Apprenticeship or Internship Programs	365
Resources and References	368

# Training Good Workers

- Delegating Management

- Groundswell
  - Farmers
  - Farm Manager, Field Manager, Site Manager
  - Farmworkers (Greenhouse Manager, Wash Station Manager)
- Student Organic Farm
  - Farm Manager & Production Manager
  - Crew Lead, Rotating leads (Irrigation, Wash/Pack, etc.)
- USDA loans – 3 years of farm management experience

## Farm Manager – Suzanne |

- Harvest
  - Oversee daily and weekly harvesting
  - Write harvest lists
  - Record yields
  - Cooler counts (perform or delegate)
  - Train and lead a harvest crew on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays (lettuce crew?)
- Make day-to-day decisions about worker tasks and priorities, including decisions about timing of planting, trellising, harvesting and tilling crops under
- HR
  - Train and manage 10 farm employees
  - Co-manage or oversee head farmer
  - Oversee and/or train wash station manager, head farmer
  - Delegate to special order people
  - Oversee farmworkers
  - Route farmworkers to best specialties
  - Delegate truck prep and loading
  - Call in hours, figure out schedules, get employee paperwork and IDs,
  - Interviewing and hiring (with Head Farmer)
- Farmworker training powerpoints?
- Newsletters?
- Special order email?
- Marketing?
- Co-lead farm walks with farm manager
- Tractor work – Comfortable with most farm implements, especially rotovating, mowing
- Ability to cultivate with G if field manager is unable to do so (optional?)
- Work with farm manager to prioritize harvest & non-harvest tasks
- Buy supplies as needed
- Ask Katie questions as needed and notify her of issues, problems, etc.
- Mid-March to early November or late December
- Pay begins at \$10/hour
- 2-year commitment preferred

# Training Good Workers

- Planning for Labor Needs

- Map out labor needs for year
- By person
- By title: Farmer, Field Manager, Harvest Crew
- Reassess as needed
  - Whenever the farm & staff feel overwhelmed
  - Peak planting or harvesting times
  - Building new infrastructure
  - Baby!

**Worksheet 4.18 Tasks and Workload**

Use the space below to describe the marketing, operations, human resources and finance tasks associated with each new enterprise. Refer to Worksheets 4.12-4.13 (Describing Potential Crop and Livestock Systems) for operations workload estimates. Then estimate the workload (hours) associated with each task. If your business tends to be seasonal, distribute the total hours for each activity by periods of the year. Use a separate sheet of paper if more space is needed or make copies of this Worksheet to detail workload changes for each year in your transition period, as appropriate.

Enterprise *Processed dairy products* Timeframe *January-June 2002*

Tasks	Hours/Month											
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
<b>Marketing:</b>												
<i>Customer service (orders)</i>	56	56	56	56	56	56						
<i>Deliveries, loading</i>	120	120	120	120	120	120						
<i>Promotion</i>	20	20	20	20	20	20						
<b>Operations</b>												
<i>Order supplies</i>	20	20	20	20	20	20						
<i>Transport milk, test</i>	40	40	40	40	40	40						
<i>Pasteurize, process and package milk</i>	320	320	320	320	320	320						
<b>Management:</b>												
<i>Oversee plant operations</i>	40	40	40	40	40	40						
<i>Manage staff</i>	20	20	20	20	20	20						
<i>Oversee training, meet with Padot representative</i>	40	40	40	40	40	40						
<b>Finances:</b>												
<i>Bookkeeping</i>	10	10	10	10	10	10						
<i>Payroll</i>	4	4	4	4	4	4						
<i>Tax preparation</i>	1	1	1	5	5	1						
<i>Financial analysis</i>	10	4	2	2	2	2						
<b>Total Hrs/Month</b>	<b>701</b>	<b>695</b>	<b>693</b>	<b>697</b>	<b>697</b>	<b>693</b>						

# Training Good Workers

- Organizing Tasks & Systems

- Plan in winter, delegate in summer
- In season, white boards!

tp compl date	# flats done	actual date	gh seed date	crop	suc cision	variety	row feet	note s	pl per foot	# of pl	cell size	flat need	liney need	cro p type	# beds	row per bed
			3/22	LEEKs	1	1megaton	1400		3.00	5040	72	70.00		allium	3.73	3
			3/22	LEEKs	1	2lexton	250		3.60	900	72	12.50		allium	0.67	3
			3/23	ONION			0	0	2.00	0	200	0.00		allium	0.00	3
			3/23	ONION			0	0	1.00	0	200	0.00		allium	0.00	3
			3/24	HERB - PARS	1	Forest green	80		2.00	192	liney - 12	1.60	9.60	greer	0.21	3
			3/24	HERB - PARS	1	Giant of Italy	220		2.00	528	liney - 12	4.40	26.40	greer	0.59	3
			3/25	SCALLION	1	deep purple	125	8 per	2.00	300	200	1.50		allium	0.33	3
			3/25	SCALLION	1	white spear	200	10-12	2.00	480	200	2.40		allium	0.53	3
			3/25	TOMATO	hoop	8.26 Jaune Fl	20		0.33	8	liney - 2"		8	hoop	0.16	1
			3/25	TOMATO, EA	hoop	3.15 glacier-t	30		0.33	12	liney - 2"	12		hoop	0.24	1
			3/26	KOHLRABI	1	kolibri	50		2.00	120	200	0.60		brass	0.13	3
			3/26	KOHLRABI		d	0		2.00	0	200	0.00		brass	0.00	3
			3/26	KOHLRABI	1	d	0		2.00	0	200	0.00		brass	0.00	3

27.15	Mon	T-Hol	T-Zee	W-GR	Th	Fri-H	Fri-GR	Calc	\$
<b>Members</b>		<b>56</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>71</b>				<b>CSA</b>	
Parsley, F/C		28	15	36		5	5	Parsley, F/C	<b>0.5</b> .75
Carrots,		56	30	71		25	25	Carrots	<b>1</b> 3.00
Chard (dry)		224	120	284		15	15	Chard	<b>4</b> .80
Lettuce		112	60	142		85	70	Lettuce	<b>2</b> 5.50
Green Garlic (GERMAN)		18	10	23		10?	10?	Green Garlic (GERMAN)	<b>0.33</b> .66
Spinach			1/3'	1/3'			1/3'	Spinach	<b>0.15</b> 1.80
Scallions		38	20	48				Scallions	<b>0.67</b> 1.63
<b>Polk St. Farm</b>									
Kale		336	180	426		25?	25?	Kale	<b>6</b> 1.20
Salad Greens			1/3'	1/3'			1/3'	Spicy Greens	<b>0.25</b> 3.00
Herbs		28	15	36					<b>0.5</b> .75

# Training Good Workers

- Hands-on Training

- I do, We do, You do (UC Santa Cruz)
- Training example from Jamie at Full Hollow Farm
  - Show & Explain 4 or 5 techniques
  - Attempt with Guidance
  - Practice
  - Compliment & Suggest Improvements
- Learning Plans – NOFA NY

Produce Learning Plan					
<b>Directions:</b> The table below is to be filled out by the beginning farmer at the start of his or her apprenticeship. Please rate your skill level, and list your current strengths and weaknesses associated with each topic, 1 being the weakest and 5 the strongest. List strengths and weaknesses and determine the year in which you would like to focus on improvement. Lastly determine if this knowledge would best be gained during an on farm task or at another farm/workshop/conference.					
Learning/Work Objective	Skill Level (1-5)	Current Strength	Current Weakness	Year	Learn On Farm/Other Educational Event
Greenhouse		1.	1.		
		2.	2.		
Tillage		1.	1.		
		2.	2.		
Planting & Transplanting		1.	1.		
		2.	2.		
Irrigation		1.	1.		
		2.	2.		
Cultivation & Weed Management		1.	1.		
		2.	2.		
Harvest		1.	1.		
		2.	2.		
Pack shed		1.	1.		
		2.	2.		
Food Safety		1.	1.		
		2.	2.		
Soil Health & Fertility Management		1.	1.		
		2.	2.		
Plant Health		1.	1.		
		2.	2.		
Equipment Operation & Safety		1.	1.		
		2.	2.		
		1.	1.		
		2.	2.		

# Training Good Workers

- Formal Training

## SOF Formal Trainings

- Food Safety
- Tractor Safety

## Groundswell Weekly Lunchtime PowerPoints

- 11 weeks on how to farm at Groundswell
- 8 weeks on how to start or manage a farm
- Collaborative Meetings
  - Mid-season Meeting
  - Variety Evaluation
  - End-of-season Meeting

## Off-farm Trainings – Conferences, OFTP, MSUE



### Potting On

- Start in 20 – row “liney” trays
- Pot on when cotyledons or start of 1<sup>st</sup> True Leaf
- Prep 132-tray soil blocks
- Fill trays in planting order
  - 1, 2 & 3 in a tray, 4 & 5 in another, etc.
- Use popsicle stick to remove part of a row
- Put into square hole in block
- **FULLY COVER** root soil with new soil from block
- **PRESS** to ensure root-soil contact

# Training Good Workers

- Formal Training

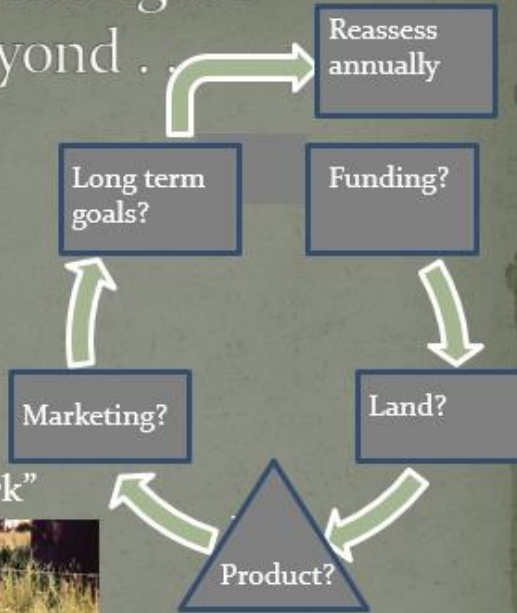
Decide on crops & marketing for the first season and beyond . . .

Try to start with a manageable focus—there will be time to diversify

- Veggies
- Dairy & Livestock
- Fruit
- Bees & Honey
- What you enjoy that could “work”



Dairy cattle at Lubbers Farm in Standale



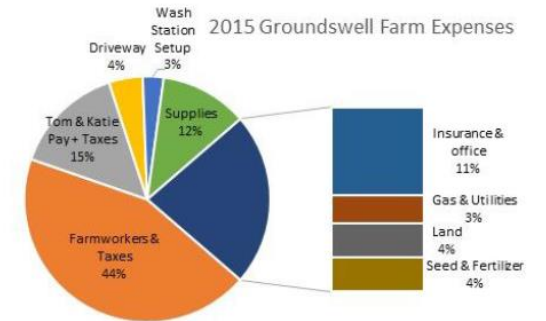
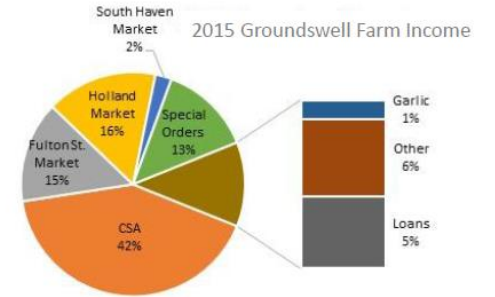
## Business of Farming

### 2016 Income

- Garlic up to 5%
- Grand Haven Market (~5%)
- No New Loans

### 2016 Expenses

- Increase Cash Reserve (7%)
- Pay Loans (~5%)
- New Well (2%)
- New Cooler & Greenhouse (1%)



## Soil Survey

- Soil layers to 5 ft. deep
- <http://websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov/App/HomePage.htm> or search for the Web Soil Survey
- Quincy St.
  - Carlisle Muck
  - 0-60" Muck
  - Kawkawlin Loam at NW corner?
- Polk St.
  - Gilford Sandy Loam
  - 0–32" Sandy Loam
  - 32–38" Loamy Sand
  - 38–80" Sand
- Granby Loamy Sand at NE corner?

# Training Good Workers

- Off-farm Training

- Organic Farmer Training Program at MSU
- Local Farm Groups
  - Mid-Michigan Farmer Meetup
  - WM Growers' Group
  - CRAFT groups
- Conferences
  - GLEXPO
  - Northern Michigan Small Farm Conference
  - Michigan Family Farms Conference
  - MSUE Beginning Farmer Webinar series
  - Farmer Field School at MSU
- Webinars & online courses –
  - Cornell
  - eOrganic, etc.





# Training Good Workers

- Mid-season evaluations & raises

- Tell them a day or two in advance
  - Two-way evaluation
  - “Think of what you need from us to do a better job”
- Farmer, Farm Manager & Worker
  - Compliment
  - Suggest Improvements
  - Ask for suggestions on better management
  - Ask for suggestion on improving systems and tools
- 4 to 6 weeks after start date
- Pay raise



“I don't have time to write performance reviews, so I'll just criticize you in public from time to time.”

# Training Good Workers

- Problems?!

- Refer back to interview
- Give concrete suggestions
- Ask how things are going
- Get input from worker on how they could do a better job
- Talk to other workers for suggestions
- Find tasks that are a better fit for their skills
- Fire as a last resort, after consulting other workers

9. Can you be on time, day after day, for an early morning start at 7am?

Yes

10. What is your transportation and housing situation ?

live in a house in Wyoming and I have a car|

11. How do you like to learn how to do a new task?

I am a very visual person and I am a hands-on learner, just verbal instruction is not the best, I like to understand and practice

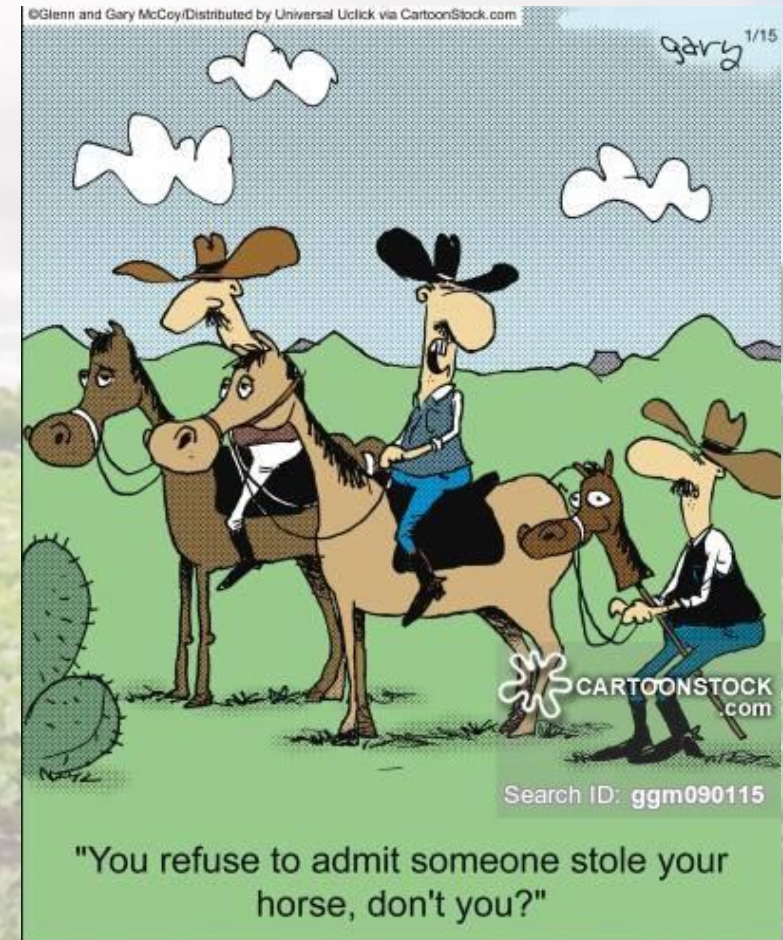
12. Often we have volunteers and working share members working on the farm and we could have them work with you. Do you like to manage people or would you rather not?

Yes, that was thing I enjoyed most at my old job, I liked to be a guide rather than a boss, I liked giving people opportunities to grow and learn new things

# Training Good Workers

- Being a good Boss

- Live up to your promises
  - Pay
  - Opportunities
  - Hours
  - Labor Ideals
- Admit your weaknesses as a manager
- Seek input!



# Training Good Workers

- Farmworker Survey

- September
- Discuss at end-of-season meeting

## 2. What are your favorite and least favorite tasks at Groundswell?

My favorite job is

My least favorite job is

I would like \_\_\_\_, but our methods/tools are not great

## 3. Please share your thoughts & recommendations on the worker trainings.

Was the info useful?

Favorite or Most Useful Topics for this year?

Least Favorite/Least Useful topics from this year?



## 4. How is the harvesting process? Give us recommendations to improve where you can think of them. Multiple answers are OK. (We'll ask about specific crops in the next question)

	Great	OK	Needs improvement
Tools	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Harvest List	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Garden Carts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learning how to harvest a new item	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Working with volunteers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Weediness level in items I harvest	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quality of crops I harvest	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quantity on harvest sheet matches	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## 5. What do you recommend to make CSA pickup, farmers markets or special orders work better?

## 6. Rate the management at Groundswell.

	Katie	Tom	Kat	Alyssa
Great to work with	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometimes difficult to work with	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pain in the @\$&*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gives clear directions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

# Training Good Workers

## • Farmworker Meeting & Survey Results

### Meeting

1. Update on Katie & Tom possibilities
  - a. "Head Farmer" position
2. Investment/improvement ideas
  - a. Loading dock
  - b. Farmall cub with basket weeder
  - c. Irrigation
    - i. Traveler
    - ii. Solid Set
  - d. Other
3. Look @ survey
4. Training ideas
  - a. Same as this year, but add readings
  - b. One day per week power point, 1 day per week tasting
5. Marketing ideas
6. Varieties
  - a. Less trials in 2017? Try to reduce to 250 total varieties?
  - b. Specific issues
7. Crops
  - a. Reduce tomatoes by 40%?
  - b. Other
8. Other??

### What are your favorite and least favorite tasks at Groundswell?

#### My favorite job is

- Anything with the crops, even if not as enjoyable. I wanted to soak up as much info as I could. Hands in the dirt is a great way to learn. I also enjoyed the tractor work.
- harvesting leeks
- harvesting anything
- Harvest
- Leading worker trainings, tractor driving,
- Tractor Work

#### My least favorite job is

- It was tiresome to do the market loading/unloading/setup/breakdown by yourself. Also, the loads of sanitizing at the beginning of the season was necessary of course but boring.
- working farmers market
- remay
- Sorting out rotten tomatoes
- Harvesting chard. Ugh.
- Repeating everything for another year
- Reemay

#### I would like \_\_\_\_, but our methods/tools are not great

- Assistant managing if it could be rotated (or any of the assigned specializations if they could be rotated, for a more holistic learning experience).
- irrigating
- Better tools/methods of direct seeding and irrigation. Not sure how this would look - different type of seeder? Making sure soil is free of old vegetation before making beds? More drip irrigation or easier access to hoses? I just think this is one area where we lose a lot of time and aren't efficient.
- Watering GH and Irrigation

# Training Good Workers

- What workers value

- California Institute for Rural Studies
- Best Labor Practices on Twelve California Farms: Toward a More Sustainable Food System
- Interesting Ideas
  - Respectful Treatment – “No Yell” Policy, Not hurrying workers
  - Non-traditional Benefits – Personal & Business Loans, Food from the Farm, Childcare, Tuition Assistance
  - Health & Safety – Limiting handweeding to 2 hr/day, growing shorter fruit trees

## What Workers Most Appreciate

Attempts to rank workplace benefits are difficult, if not impossible, since ultimately, all benefits are important. Nonetheless, the following is a rough prioritization of benefits and conditions most appreciated by farmworkers, based on the frequency, order and enthusiasm of responses to that question:

- ❖ Respectful treatment
- ❖ Slower pace of work
- ❖ Fair compensation
- ❖ Year-round employment
- ❖ Health insurance
- ❖ Personal loans
- ❖ Food from the farm
- ❖ Paid holidays and vacation
- ❖ Flexible work schedule
- ❖ Healthy and safe work environment
- ❖ Housing
- ❖ Opportunities for advancement, training and professional development
- ❖ Diversity of tasks
- ❖ Involvement in decision-making processes
- ❖ Clear and effective grievance procedures

# Training Good Workers

- You can do this!

- Try adding a new strategy or two each season



## Low, Medium and High Cost Practices

### **Low Cost Practices:**

- Respectful treatment
- Regular acknowledgement and appreciation
- Free food from the farm
- Personal loans
- Policies and mechanisms for communication and information sharing
- Clear grievance procedures
- Flexible work schedules
- Safe and healthy work environment
- Diverse tasks
- Opportunities for training, skill acquisition and professional advancement
- Surveys and other feedback mechanisms
- Assistance with social services
- Celebrations, team-building and appreciation parties

### **Medium Cost Practices:**

- Bonuses and profit-sharing
- Year-round employment
- Paid time off
- Retirement plans
- Educational assistance

### **High Cost Practices:**

- Higher wages
- Health insurance

# Retaining Good Workers

- Worker Retention

- Year-round opportunities
- Returning workers
  - Raises
  - Management opportunities
- Focus on Learning
- Enjoyable work environment
- Good Communication





# Retaining Good Workers

- Good Communication

- Respectful of all
- Target your speaking style to each individual
  - Leadership opportunities (or not!)
  - Options (or not!)
  - Reasons why
  - Other examples?
- Be open to working on your self...
  - Management Style
  - Anger, Micromanaging, Perfectionism, etc.
  - Organization, follow-through, etc.

**Figure 74.**  
**Barriers to Effective Communication**<sup>53</sup>

- **Muddled Messages**—be clear when communicating ideas or details.
- **Stereotyping**—don't assume that you know how the other person feels.
- **Wrong channel**—use appropriate forms of communication (written communication for transactions, work agreements, etc. versus verbal agreements).
- **Language**—make sure that you speak the same “language,” that terminology is clear to those involved.
- **Lack of feedback**—prompt detailed feedback by checking in regularly.
- **Poor listening skills**—always be prepared to listen; tune out other thoughts. Search for the meaning in what is being said.
- **Interruptions**—try to anticipate and limit interruptions or other distractions.
- **Physical distractions**—make sure there are no physical distractions (noise, extreme temperatures) when communicating.

# Farmer Sanity

- Hours, Pay & Benefits for the *Farmer* . . .

- Rested, happy people are better to work around
- Pay yourself a salary as soon as possible
  - GR Urban Growers found farmer/farmworker salaries of \$4 - \$10/hour in 2015
- Work reasonable hours
  - 40-hour weeks
  - Include computer time

## START-UP SUCCESS STORY

"I typically put in 40 to 50 hours as a vet and 60 to 80 hours as a dairyman."



# Questions?

Katie Brandt

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MSU Student Organic Farm & Organic Farmer Training Program



# Recruiting and Hiring Employees

Stan Moore  
MSU Extension

\*Credit

Dr. Bernie Erven, Professor Emeritus, Ohio State University  
Thomas Maloney, Cornell University



## Labor resources are getting tighter on farms

- Increased border security
- Changing demographics
- Americanization of workers
- Changing priorities of workers
- Effectiveness of recruiting & hiring
- Wages/benefits offered
- Farm culture
- Farm progressiveness
- Effective employee management
- Farm reputation



# Recruiting and Hiring

- Start with “How do you want the position to help the business”, not who to hire!
- What competencies are required to do the job and be successful in the position?
- You want your employees to succeed, so don't hire someone who won't fit or doesn't like the work.



## People need to know what is expected

- Job Analysis – Duties, tasks or activities of the job
- Job Design – Structure, Advancement
- Job Qualifications – Knowledge, skills, abilities and physical demands for success in the position
- Job Description – Written job title and duties based on job analysis, design and qualifications



## Reasons for Job Descriptions

- Organization – helps employees understand their responsibilities and how they contribute to business
- Training – lists specific tasks that employee must be trained to do
- Recruitment – promotes clear understanding between employer and prospective employee of what job entails
- Evaluation – can compare actual job performance to expectations outlined in job description
- Defense – gives basis for defending decision if employee is terminated for poor performance





# Components of Good Job Description

- Job title
- Summary
- Qualifications
- Duties or tasks
- Work relationship
- Compensation and benefits (*optional*)
- Work schedule (*optional*)



# Finding good applicants

- What has worked for you?
- Is it still working?
- What type of employee are you looking for?
- Be creative
  - Ask your current employees what they like about working for you
  - Promote this to those that you wish to hire, in creative ways. Recruiting is Marketing!



## Word of mouth is still the most often referenced method of recruitment

- How can you make it more successful?
  - Write an email job posting that they can forward on to others
  - Ask employees for input on positive things to say about the farm and the working conditions
  - Incentivize the process with current workers



## Other ideas

- Welcome informal contacts and walk ins
- Look for quality workers in other industries
- Offer student internship programs
- Consider how you structure work hours
- Advertise
  - Think first of social media, Internet, a business website
  - Consider print sources that potential applicants are likely to see
  - Use attention grabbing help wanted adds



## Selecting applicants to be interviewed

- Review written application material (application form, resume, cover letter, letter of interest) to determine which applicants best fit the desired qualifications
- Consider doing mini telephone interviews if you have a large number of applicants



## The Interview

- Virtually 100% of people that are hired have an interview.....  
What is the one group that is the exception?
- Prepare
- Interview
- Follow Up



## Prepare

- Take this process seriously (make it a priority). Good applicants want Good interviews.
- Who will be the interview team?
- Where will I conduct the interviews?
- What questions will I ask?
- How will I use the interview time?
- How will I summarize & decide?



## Interview Basics

- Structured interviews are best
- Don't let the applicant change the direction of the interview
- Ask the same basic questions of all applicants
- What is legal?
  - Questions directly related to the job and the ability of any person to do the job
- Save your “gut reaction” until the end of the process





# Questions

- Have extra interview questions – never run out
- Ask questions that encourage applicants to use their own words
- Cover a variety of topics
- Focus on what an applicant has done in previous jobs (behavioral interviewing) not what they promise to do.



## What Questions to ask

- Past behavior – “How did you resolve conflicts between co-workers when you were leading a crew?”
- Job knowledge – “What are three ways to back up critical data on a computer? Which one is easiest? Most secure?”
- What if questions – “What would you do if we asked you to do something you don’t know how to do?”



## Sample Questions

- Describe an equipment related problem you have solved in the last year & how you solved it.
- What has been your most important accomplishment in your current job?
- Describe any formal education or training.
- Describe the person who is your all-time favorite co-worker.
- What has been your most important accomplishment outside of work?



## Types of questions to avoid

- What country are you from? Where were you born?
- What is your native language?
- What religion do you practice?
- Do you have or plan to have children?
- How many children? Do you have childcare?
- Is this your maiden name?
- If you went on maternity leave, would you come back?



## Types of questions to avoid

- How old are you?
- How much longer do you plan to work before you retire?
- When did you graduate?
- How far would your commute be?
- How many sick days did you take last year?
- Do you belong to any clubs/organizations?
- How tall are you, how much do you weigh?



## Types of questions to avoid

- Traditional with easily practiced answers
  - “What are your goals and aspirations?”
  - “Why do you want this job?”
- Opinion
  - “What do you think about.....?”
  - “What are your strengths?”
- Yes/No
  - “Do you understand the importance of being on time?”
  - “Are you a hard worker?”



## Interview follow-up

- Ask all interviewers for their evaluations (scores on questions)
- Determine which applicants are acceptable
- Check references and collect additional information as needed
- Rank acceptable applicants and then offer the job to the highest ranked applicant



## Checking References

**Example questions include:**

How long did you work with this person?

What were his/her responsibilities?

What strengths did he/she bring to the job?

What skills does this person need to work on?

Would you hire this person again?





## Potential selection bias

- Halo error – Letting one or two personal characteristics favor an applicant e.g. Grew up on a farm
- Interviewer bias – Preconceived notions causing discrimination against best qualified applicants, e.g. brother was a bad worker
- Limited time – Choice based on a few minutes of conversation



## Hiring

- Make an oral offer to your first choice
- Follow up with a written offer
- Show enthusiasm
- Notify all others who were interviewed that the position has been filled



## What job seekers say annoys them most about interviewers

- Acting like they have no time to talk -70%
- Withholding information about the position - 57%
- Turning the interview into a cross-examination - 51%
- Showing up late - 48%
- Appearing unprepared - 47%

USA Today Snapshots, Source: Development Dimensions International/Monster Worldwide



## Bringing new employees On Board

- Make their first day memorable, and be there!
- Help them be successful – set expectations and goals
- Assign a mentor employee
- Meet after first day, 2-3 days, 1 week and then regularly.  
Feedback on expectations and goals, encouragement, praise, inspire!



## MSU Extension Web Resources

- Labor Law Bulletins
  - Ag Employers Check List
  - Employee Handbook Template
  - Labor Forms and Reporting
- [https://www.canr.msu.edu/farm\\_management/farm-labor-human-resources](https://www.canr.msu.edu/farm_management/farm-labor-human-resources)



# MSU Farm Management Website

## Farm Labor & Human Resources

MSU Extension educators provide group program and one-on-one consultations with farms and farm families to act as a guide in preparing farm succession plans. Through programming efforts, the team.

### MSU Publications and Fact Sheets

- [Agriculture Employee Handbook Template](#) - Stan Moore, MSU Extension Feb. 2014
- [MSU Extension Bulletin E2966 Labor Laws and Michigan Agriculture](#) [Also available at the MSU Extension Book Store](#) \*NEW Nov. 2018
- [Agricultural Employer Checklist](#) - Moore, Kantrovich, Risch, Jones; MSU Extension Oct. 2015
- [Growing dairies are healthy dairies in more ways than just financially](#) - Stan Moore, Jan. 2012
- [Michigan Dairy Employment Survey](#) - MSU Product Center, 2013

### **Labor Forms, Reporting & Information**

- [Current I-9 form from USCIS](#) (Includes English, Spanish, and Instructions)
- [MIOSHA Required Poster, Wage and Hour Program, General Requirements for Minimum Wage and Overtime \(MIOSHA\)](#)
- [Current US W-4](#)
- [Current Michigan W-4 \(Mi Dept of Treasury\) 2012](#)
- [Michigan New Hire Reporting](#)



## MSUE Bulletin “Labor Laws and MI Ag”

Michigan State University Extension Bulletin E2966, Updated November 2018

# Labor Laws and Michigan Agriculture



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## MSUE Bulletin “Labor Laws and MI Ag”

- Covers Federal and Michigan Labor Laws related to Agriculture
- Identifies Employer and Employee responsibilities and options
- Contains numerous web-links and phone numbers for applicable agencies



# Agricultural Employer Checklist

Updated March, 2020

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\*An electronic version of this checklist, with active links, is available at  
[https://www.canr.msu.edu/farm\\_management/farm-labor-human-resources](https://www.canr.msu.edu/farm_management/farm-labor-human-resources)

## **Section I – EMPLOYERS PREPARE TO HIRE AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYEES**

### **Acquire Federal and State Publications related to hiring agricultural employees.**

Publication 51 (Circular A), Agricultural Employer's Tax Guide

Publication 15 (Circular E), Employer's Tax Guide

Visit [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov) and go to the Forms and Publications section. Find the publications and save on your computer for future reference. Hard copies can be ordered from the IRS.

Publication 446-I Michigan Income Tax Withholding Guide

Publication 446-T Michigan Income Tax Withholding Tables

Publication 78 Sales, Use, and Withholding Tax Forms and Instructions

Visit <http://www.michigan.gov/taxes/> then **Business Taxes** Then use search tool on the left.

### **Get EIN (Federal Employer Identification Number)**

- Fill out form SS-4; this form assigns a 9 digit EIN to the employer
- Call IRS, 1-800-829-4933 or <http://www.irs.gov/>

### **Enroll with the IRS EFTPS (Electronic Federal Tax Payment System)**

- Payroll tax deposits must be made electronically (internet or phone). Visit [www.eftps.gov/eftps](http://www.eftps.gov/eftps) for more details.

### **Registration for Michigan Business Taxes**

- This registers you to withhold State income tax from employees' wages and the State will send you the forms for making State tax deposits (Electronic Funds Transfer is also available).
- 1-517-636-6925 or <http://www.michigan.gov/taxes>  
Click New Business Registration under Business Taxes



## MSU Extension Ag Employer Checklist

- Provides a quick checklist of steps
  - Preparing to hire
  - Hiring agriculture employees
- Links to applicable forms & posters
- Links and phone number to Ag Employer resources



## Website links to important labor forms

- I-9 form (English and Spanish)
- US and MI W-4's
- New Hire Reporting
- E-Verify – training, sign-up, Q&A



## Other useful resources and links

- Youth employment rules
- Migrant services
- Employee Management articles
- Links to other university AG HR sites.





Thank You... Questions?

