Human Resources Inventory Assessment

Inventorying Farm Resources

In order to manage the farm business effectively, and to strategically position the farm for success moving forward, managers must assess and inventory the resources available for employment.

• Managers commonly inventory and assess natural resources by keeping records regarding land available, the quality and productivity of that land, and the challenges associated with various plots. For example, managers assess whether land is best employed for corn, soybeans, or in pasture for grazing. In other regions of the U.S. farm managers must actively manage their water resources and allocate scarce water to its most highly valued use.

• Farm managers must effectively assess and employ their financial resources to ensure the continued operation of the farm. Managers must determine whether to use debt or equity financing, when to borrow, how much to borrow, and how to allocate funds on the farm to achieve the goals and objectives of the farm and/or family.

• Livestock operations must effectively assess their livestock resources, including how to most profitably employ livestock in the various enterprises in the operation as well as manage the feed and other supplies inventoried on the farm.

• All farming operations, at least implicitly, must inventory and assess their human resources. That is, managers must assess the quality and quantity of labor available to the operation and decide how to best employ that labor in the operation.

Human Resource Inventory: Skill Assessments

Not all labor is of equal value. A highly trained diesel engine mechanic, for example, may be of great value in a large row cropping operation, but is of less use on a swine operation processing piglets. In order to ensure that the major needs of the farm business are covered it is necessary to assess the competencies and areas of strength and weakness for each manager and employee. On a swine operation, for example, mechanical skills would be employed very differently from human resource management skills, or knowledge in working with the pigs. Farms will vary on the exact categories which should appear on a skills assessment. Farm management teams should take the time to outline skill assessment categories for their own operation to ensure that all key areas are being adequately covered on their operation. An admittedly incomplete list, for the purpose of an example, might include:
**Self-Assessment**

Managers and employees should rate their own skill level on the various areas of importance highlighted for the farm. Self-assessment requires some reflection on what we believe ourselves to be good at – and – what areas we think we may need improvement in. Assessing your own skills is a good opportunity for reflection on professional areas of strength and planning for future professional development.

**Assessing Others**

In addition to assessing your own skills, each manager and employee on the farm should assess their coworkers, employees, and bosses strengths and weaknesses.

Learning what others see as your strengths and weaknesses can be eye opening! You will likely find that you are harder on yourself than others are on you. You might just find that there is a skill that you bring to the farm that is unique and very highly valued by your coworkers. On the other hand, you might find that your self-proclaimed strength in mechanical skills is actually not recognized by any of your peers. Perhaps such a finding should prompt another honest look at your own skills and a determination of whether additional training is necessary to get you to the level at which you wish to be.

Compare and contrast your self-assessment with the assessments provided by your colleagues, boss, or employees. Managers or supervisors can plan to discuss the assessments with each employee to help determine where employees should focus for improvement.

**You Have Assessed … What Next?**

Open dialogue surrounding skills assessments should help the farm determine areas of strength for the team as a whole – as well as identify areas of weakness which might need to be addressed. If the farm as a whole is seriously lacking in skills in a given area this is an opportunity to begin to take steps towards remedying that situation.

Be sure to employ your human resource assessments in your whole farm planning and on-farm decision making once you have taken the time to complete self-assessments and for each employee to assess their colleagues. Human resource inventories and assessments can be employed in on-farm decision making, much as assessments of natural resources or financial resources are employed in on-farm planning.

After the assessment, be open and willing to discuss operational changes. Should someone else be handling hog marketing? Should the operation consider raising corn given the agronomic and farming experience of the group?

**Planning for the Future**

Once assessments have been completed as to which skill sets employees bring to the table, farm managers can more effectively make decisions regarding task assignments.

**Cross Training**

It is not uncommon to have a situation in which one person always completes a certain task, and therefore, nobody else on the farm knows how to do it. If a key employee were to leave the operation, or a family member were to be no longer involved in the operation, would there be tasks on your farm that would be difficult to cover? Consider cross training employees so that it is possible for employees to cover tasks outside of their normal areas if the need arises.

**Things Change …**

Roles of various employees, managers, and even family members will evolve over time. Having assessments as a regular part of farm planning and employee reviews will facilitate adjustments as employee roles evolve. Strategic planning surrounding human resources on the farm can aid managers in ensuring that key jobs on the farm do not go uncovered. Strategically planning for labor requirements on the operation can alleviate a great deal of stress when an employee leaves unexpectedly or if an injury puts an employee out of commission.
**Hiring in the Future**

Consider areas of weakness in the current portfolio of employee skills when hiring; hiring a new employee is a time to screen for people skilled in areas in which the farm may be weak currently.

Having current assessments of employees skills can help with timing when labor needs arise. Management does not want to be in a situation where they are forced to hire hastily because tasks need to be covered and the farm is experiencing a labor shortage. Employee training should also not be rushed because of poor planning in which labor shortages require new employees to take on responsibilities they may not be ready for. Regular skill assessments can help identify areas of weakness or potential trouble spots if certain skills sets are unique to a very limited subset of the farm employees.

Finally, look down the line to consider what the future has in store and how the operation might be changing. Will animal health concerns make it a necessary to hire someone with experience in the area? Will the use of new technology, such as GPS, make it worthwhile to hire someone that is more tech-savvy than the current management?

**Summary**

Human resources should be inventoried and assessed on the farm to facilitate on-farm decision making and whole farm planning, just as natural resources or financial resources may be assessed. Self-assessments and assessments of colleagues can be compared to identify areas of discrepancy. Assessments of employee skill sets can be used to help plan professional development activities for employees as well as help farm management plan for future labor needs.