



Author

Dr. Michael K. Swan, Washington State University

Reviewers

Dr. Diane Jackman, Eastern Illinois University
Mr. Gary Thome, Riverland Community College
Dr. Nicole Olynk, Purdue University

Job Satisfaction

The most valuable resource that a farm operation can have is dependable and productive workers. As a farm manager or owner you need to attract and keep the best employees for your farm team. The following factors should be important to you and your employees' job satisfaction.

Wages

Be realistic about the wages you offer. You will have to offer a package of wages and benefits that is competitive in your local area. The days of paying low wages for enthusiastic and hard-working people are gone. Pay attention to the wages offered by others including retail merchants, as they are direct competitors with farms for entry-level employees. Make sure that employees and potential employees are aware of the value of all benefits, including housing, farm products, flexibility in work hours, ability to take time off during the day for family, and use of farm equipment.

Other factors contribute to good working conditions. Having an up-to-date organizational chart showing the positions on the farm is vital and shows everyone their place and responsibility. All employees should appear on the chart, so that there is no question about where they fit and whom they report to. Everyone should have a job description detailing the responsibilities of the position.

Recognition

Recognition repeatedly reappears as a vital part of job satisfaction. Recognition of a job well done will help to instill a sense of pride. Recognition, particularly in the context of the operation of the farm as a whole, will help to create a sense of belonging and being part of a team effort. "You did a nice job with the sow facility today" can easily be expanded to "You did a nice job with the sows today, and the careful way you did it will probably make a difference in farrowing numbers."

Farm operations can have more formal means of recognition with programs such as "an employee of the month" or inclusion in a farm newsletter or web site. As a farm operation, you have the opportunity to do things on a more personal perspective. Your appreciation of your employees will in turn help to build employee loyalty. Relatively small expenses can reap large benefits. When workdays are more intense than usual, you can bring in coffee, sandwiches, or cold drinks. Perhaps you keep a refrigerator stocked with cold beverages, or ice cream on-a-stick in the summer. Supply each employee with "farm" t-shirts or hats and order enough for family members too. With a bit of creativity, you can communicate your appreciation to your employees.

The best way to keep star employees is for them to be convinced that they have excellent jobs and an excellent place to work. Job design, team building and employer image are the key ingredients. Employees are individual people and what is motivating to each individual may be different. Being flexible, and spending some time and energy figuring out what motivates different employees can be time well spent.

Design Jobs for Employees

Uninteresting jobs cause problems. Take advantage of on employees' interests. Managers have the primary responsibility for designing jobs.

Managers first need to take into consideration the tasks that must be accomplished. They can also take into consideration what individuals want in their jobs. Sometimes minor changes in job design can dramatically improve an employee's view of a job. Job design cannot overcome the fact that no job is perfect, but open lines of communication between managers and employees can go a long way to help employees recognize the pros and cons associated with a position. Further, open lines of communication will help managers envision what individual employees are seeking from their positions, facilitating future job designing tailored to individual team members.

Swine jobs have some disadvantages managers need to address when designing jobs. Each of the following characteristics responds to often stated employee complaints:

- Reasonable number of work hours per day and per week,
- Proper equipment in good repair,
- Well lighted and ventilated work areas,
- Training,
- Some flexibility in scheduling work hours and
- Regular communication with the manager or owner.

Motivate Employees

- Design jobs whenever possible to encourage employees to use a variety of skills.
- Design jobs whenever possible so that an employee does a total job.
- Design jobs so that the employee understands the significance of his or her job to the business.
- Design jobs so that each employee has responsibility, challenge, freedom and the opportunity to be creative.
- Provide a suggestion or complaint box for employees and read them.

Make feedback a part of job design. Employees rarely complain about too much communication with their supervisor. They often want more communication.

Teamwork

Saying that we are a team is easy. Actually functioning as a team is difficult.

Making employees feel important to the team and farm takes time. It often starts with how the employer views employees. Are employees working managers or managed workers? An employee as working managers suggests that each person in the farm operation has ideas on how to improve the operation. Even those people incapable of understanding much about the farm beyond their own jobs may have ideas about how to do their jobs better. Useful suggestions often stay hidden inside employees' heads when they do not feel they are an important part of the whole farm.

Emphasize team building. Teams are built through four stages: organizing, invasion, agreement and performing.

In the Organizing stage

- Employees get to know and trust each other
- Become oriented to the farm goals
- Begin to exchange ideas

The organizing stage is particularly important when integrating new employees with established employees.

The **invasion** is the stage of conflict, open disagreement and the surfacing of conflicting ideas. Managers face the challenge of getting disagreements out in the open for discussion and resolution. Hidden disagreements constrain trust and growth of the team.

Agreement follows from resolving conflicts. Team agreement and unity take place. By this stage, team members' roles are clear.

By the **Performing** stage, the team is functioning well. The team solves problems for the good of the whole farm operation. The team is involved in decision making.

Turnover among team members forces the team to move back to a previous stage of progress followed by rebuilding. Sometimes the retreat is all the way back to the organizing stage. Clearly, continually rebuilding a team negatively affects long term employees. Thus, employee satisfaction and employee turnover are closely related.

Managers can improve dedication to team building by rewarding employees for their contributions to the team efforts. Rewarding only individual efforts sends a strong signal to employees that the farm is a collection of individuals rather than a team.

An employer should avoid saying, "We are a team" and then encourage employees to look out first for their own interests.

Farm Image

One's reputation is highly personal. The good news is that each employer "owns" his or her reputation in the community. Being known as a good farm to work on immediately gives new employees pride in having been hired. As manager you should make sure that the working conditions are comfortable, and that the atmosphere is pleasant. Present a workplace that demonstrates you care about employee needs, such as clean bathrooms and a break rooms.

Keep your equipment clean and in proper working order, this not only pleases workers and helps them to be productive, it shows them that you care about their safety.

One common complaint from farm employees is that they don't know what the boss thinks of their work. Praise those that do well and let them know how important they are to the farm's success. Retrain and coach those who need help, but be sure to praise them for what they do right. Make it a practice to catch workers doing things correctly and praise them specifically for what they've done.

When building a positive image the following list of strategies, policies and practices may be considered. Some of these item overlap with job design and team building discussed above.

- Appreciate Employees
- Written Job Descriptions
- Training and Cross Training
- Show or Demonstrate Trust
- Catch People Doing Things Right
- Develop Pride
- Celebrate Successes
- Communicate Clearly and Often
- Compensate Fairly
- Provide Benefits
- Promote from Within
- Make the Farm Family-friendly
- Be Proud to Advance Employees

Summary

Every farm needs quality workers who develop a commitment to the success of the farm. Whole farm success goes hand in hand with employee success.

Employee turnover, lack of qualified applicants, people seemingly satisfied to just get by, labor shortages and employees more me-caring than we-caring are chronic frustrations for many managers.

Making the farm an appealing place to work helps overcome these frustrations and build a high quality satisfied labor force.