

NYFarmNetWorking

A newsletter for people working with the farm community

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Farmers Meet Challenge of Off-Farm Employment

Barbara Lipe, Regional Learning Service Career Center

In my work as a career counselor at the Regional Learning Service Career Center in Syracuse, no two days are alike. New client assignments are always an adventure and a challenge. There is one group I especially enjoy working with; that group is farm people. I am biased because of my own farm background, but there are professional reasons as well. Exploring career options with farm family members invariably means working with multi-talented individuals. Self-employed people who have endured difficult economic times usually have far more skills to offer a potential employer than they realize.

One gentleman who comes to mind was amazed at his first job interview to find that it involved working only five days a week, and included a regular lunch hour, insurance and retirement benefits. In addition, he would be responsible for only one aspect of the operation, not the whole company. This individual had been accustomed to driving a school bus in addition to running a total farm operation. He got the job!

In another instance, a farm wife came to our Career Center from across the country. She was interested in training for immediate employment with the potential for future career advancement. She enrolled in a short term training program to become a Home Health Aide. She then began taking courses at a community college for eventual entry into nursing school. A tuition reimbursement program has made this goal a possibility. This individual also found and furnished an apartment, and created her own support system while going through this process. She credits her successful entry into the health field to her experiences on the farm, raising a family, and participating in the life of her community.

Another woman came to us recently widowed. Her sons were taking over the farm business and she did not feel pressure to support herself or leave the farm. She had been encouraged by friends and family to pursue a career that could provide her with her own identity, and recognition of her own value. This person had always "kept the book" for the business as is so often the case for a farm wife, and she was quite comfortable with the idea of working in an office. She started out inquiring about employment at farm-related businesses where she was well received but did not immediately find an opening. Meanwhile, she took computer courses at BOCES to increase her skills. On May 1, she began her new job working as an administrative assistant in

the office of a very prestigious local funding organization. She was one of the many candidates applying for this job.

So, farm folks, stand up and be counted! No matter what you have heard about the difficult job market, there are opportunities for talented people. Anyone who can juggle the complex demands of any given farm day can accept the challenge of today's work world and come out a winner. Employers recognized the value of self-motivated people who are resourceful and reliable.

FYI -

Farm Labor in Short Supply

Thomas R. Maloney, Cornell University

If you think that good farm employees are getting harder to find, you're not alone. Many farm managers today report difficulty in finding and keeping good workers. Here are some reasons why:

Demographics. As the baby boom generation entered the workforce in the 1960's and 70's there was a constant supply of 16- to 20-year-old workers. In recent years the number of 16-20 year old workers entering the job market has decreased significantly and is expected to remain relatively low.

Wages and Benefits. Agriculture, in general, has traditionally offered jobs with long, demanding hours and only moderate pay. In addition, few farms offer benefit packages that can compete with those of non-farm businesses. Consequently, non-farm jobs sometimes seem more attractive from a financial perspective than farm jobs.

The Image of Agriculture. The image of agriculture in the late 20th century does not lend itself to attracting new people into the industry or encouraging children of farm families to continue farming. Attitudes of farm parents are mixed. Some farm parents want more for their children than farming offers and advise them to seek careers outside of agriculture. Others continue to feel that farming offers exciting opportunities and challenges.

Decline in Agricultural Graduates

agricultural colleges, is not nearly enough to meet the demand of farm employers. This is due in part to a smaller pool of college-age students and the lackluster image of agriculture.

Tight Regional Job Markets. Regional development and growth have severely constricted the labor supply in some areas, making it difficult for farmers to recruit good employees.

Personnel Management. As farms grow in size and family labor makes up less of the farm workforce, more farm employees are hired. This shift means that farmers need to be good personnel managers with skills in communication, motivation, and delegation.

From Our Database:

1994 Impact

800 line calls	1,244
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On-farm consultations	1,463
Family members assisted	2,117
Rural jobs represented	2,223
Farm assets impacted	\$229,198,864

Agricultural Training Program Offered

Dan Twentyman, Tompkins Cortland Community College

The Agricultural Workforce Certification Program was developed in 1993 by the New York State Departments of Economic Development, Agriculture and Markets, Labor, and the State University of New York. Certification programs have been established at seven state colleges to meet regional industry needs by providing training in dairy, horticulture, and fruit production.

The program was initiated in response to the demand for skilled employees by farm business owners. Unlike other industries, agriculture does not have a formal, structured training program or career ladder for employees. The goal of the Agricultural Workforce Certification Program is to offer farm employees the opportunity to earn a title that demonstrates a high degree of skill and knowledge. At the same time, farm owners gain access to more qualified workers possessing greater skill levels, thereby improving farm profitability, production, and safety.

Tompkins Cortland Community College is one of the sites offering certification. The successful 1990 Milker Training Pilot Program at the college served as a model for the Dairy Herdsperson and Milker certification programs currently offered. Dairy farmers and their employees in surrounding counties are benefitting from this innovative training program. Individuals with little or no farm experience are being trained and serving as a new resource for dairy farmers.

The objectives of the certification program are to teach students new skills, increase their knowledge of tasks they are already responsible for, and promote a positive attitude toward safety. These objectives are achieved through classroom and on-the-job training at working dairy farms. The program also provides students with job counseling, support, and placement. Another important aspect of the program is the half-day Employer Workshop available to farm owners and managers, which includes information on farm personnel management.

The program at Tompkins Cortland Community College appears to be working. Ninety-five percent of the employers felt that the course objectives were being met. Employers reported a 12.1 percent increase in overall performance, and a 10 percent increase in productivity as a result of their employees' participation in the certification program.

Agriculture continues to be a major industry in New York State. Finally, farm business owners and employees can benefit from a certification program that recognizes agriculture as a high skill and technical industry.

Training Farm Employees is Good Business

Carol Keene, Northeastern Center for Agricultural & Occupational Health

Farm Help Wanted ads appear frequently in local newspapers and agricultural publications. Although the words vary and job tasks are diverse, the bottom line is: farm managers prefer well-trained, informed, competent employees.

Unfortunately, employees with these qualifications are harder to find. Historically, nearly everyone either worked on a farm, lived near a farm, or had a relative that owned a farm, so people possessed general knowledge about machinery, animals, and the hard work that farming entail. Today, high schools are phasing out vocational training, and agricultural education is becoming unavailable. As a result, young employable people now lack the unique training to prepare them for the agricultural job market.

Like any other job, working on a farm requires training. However, farmers many times expect relatively untrained employees to milk and feed their animals, and to operate complicated machinery.

Commonly, employees operate with little supervision, making the need for adequate initial instruction imperative. In addition, isolated fields can make it difficult to get prompt first aid or help in the event of an accident.

A survey on accidents in agriculture by Paul R. Hoff at Cornell University, found that farm accidents more often involve farm employees. The employee accident rate was 25.6 accidents per 100,000 work days, while the rate for family members was only 15.6 per 100,000 work days.

Hoff's study found that young workers and males had the most accidents. Additionally, and not surprisingly, June, July, and August are peak months for accidents.

Agriculture has the highest worker death rate of all industries. Mechanization has revolutionized farming, but hasn't decreased the accident rate. Inexperience, combined with the more complex and powerful machinery, can potentially result in more accidents, according to research produced at the New York Center for Agricultural Medicine and Health.

These facts point out the need for more formal training for new farm employees - particularly the young with little or no farming experience.

Farm managers should be urged to train all employees as if they were new to the farm scene. This approach serves two purposes. First, if the employee has little or no farm training, the manager can help develop an informed, dependable, and responsible worker. Secondly, the employee will be trained according to the manager's unique style and preferences.

In any successful business, preparation is key. As a manager seeking far help, adequate training and good communication skills can ultimately save the farm time, money, and more important, prevent a costly accident.

Seniors Find Employment, Independence

Barbara Reese, Green Thumb, Inc.

Green Thumb Inc. is the oldest and largest operator of employment and training programs for older Americans. It is one of ten national organizations that operate the Senior Community Service Employment Program which is recognized as one of the most successful employment and training programs funded by the federal government.

Green Thumb was founded in 1965 by the National Farmers Union, as part of President Johnson's "War on Poverty." Beginning with 280 participants in four states, Green Thumb was originally designed to put older, rural Americans' "green thumbs" back to work to beautify our nations' parks and highways. Today, Green Thumb serves more than 18,000 seniors and 10,000 nonprofit and public agencies nationally.

Enrollees and host agencies are the key players in Green Thumb's program. Enrollees are individuals who are

55 years of age or older, eligible to work in the United States, and who meet certain income guidelines. Enrollees are assigned to work part-time for a qualified government or nonprofit agency, called a host agency.

In rural upstate New York, Green Thumb enrollees perform a variety of community service work. They tutor students, teach skilled trades and crafts, provide home health and day care, prepare and deliver meals for homebound persons, care for the disabled, operate computers, work as clerks, mechanics, and laborers. Enrollees are provided training, work experience, educational opportunities, counseling, and information that will help them find and keep a job.

Green Thumb enrollees find fulfillment from their work by helping others to live better lives. They often enjoy improved attitudes and health. By using their talents, skills, and abilities, Green Thumb enrollees help change negative stereotypes about aging and older people. They demonstrated the value of seniors as full participants in our state and nation's workforce: a workforce that will increasingly depend on them to fill its labor needs as the "baby boom" generation becomes the "senior boom." And, by their positive example, Green Thumb enrollees open doors for other seniors to continue working and learning.

Green Thumb, Inc. is proud to contribute to the dignity, well being, and independence of its enrollees, specifically the rural older workers of New York State, and the people and communities they serve. For more information about Green Thumb in New York State, call (800)562-2776.

Farmworker Services Available in Wayne County

F. Brandon Mallory, NYS Dept. of Labor

Migrant farmworkers have been coming to New York for decades and are invaluable to local farmers. Indeed, farmers have become dependent upon them, as the local community is largely uninterested in doing seasonal farm work. Increased job prospects are the reasons these migrants leave their homes and families and travel many hundreds of miles year after year. Farmworkers must sometimes access services to meet their employment, food, shelter, and medical care needs.

As a Rural Labor Services Representative for the New York State Department of Labor, much of my time is devoted to farmworker services, including helping workers find farm and nonfarm jobs, inspecting migrant labor housing, resolving employment disputes, and assessing and referring farmworkers to various service providers. I also serve as Chairperson of the Wayne County Coalition of Farmworker Agencies. The mission of the Coalition is to develop the most efficient means of delivering services to the farmworker population through our networking efforts.

For more information about the Coalition or farmworker services provided by the Department of Labor, feel free to contact me at (315) 331-2011.

Over The Fence

Here's a list of farm-related networking and support activities we've heard about. Please call and let us know what your group is doing!

Schoharie Rural Women's Group, Contact Eleanor Wages (518) 234-4304.

Herkimer Barnfire Support Group, contact Harry Robbins (315) 866-7920.

Delaware County Farmers Night Out Group. Contact Glenice Brannigan (800) 343-7527.

After Farming Support Group. contact Joan Petzen (716) 699-2377.

Soon to be Released...

NY FarmNet is in the process of completing an Employment Workbook for farmers. In response to requests from farmers calling the 800 line, FarmNet staff have put together this comprehensive workbook to help farmers assess their employment needs and make career decisions. The workbook includes valuable information, exercises, and resources for farm men and women on the topics of self-assessment, career exploration, and the job search. The workbook is sponsored by Cornell Cooperative Extension and the Northeast Center for Agricultural and Occupational Health. It is expected to be available by Fall 1995. For

NY FarmNet Mission:

To provide farm families with a network of contacts and support services to help them develop skills for dealing with significant life challenges and transitions, through personalized education, confidential consulting and referral.

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