



# Positive Practices in Farm Labor Management

## Keeping Your Employees Happy and Your Production Profitable



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# Positive Practices in Farm Labor Management

## Table of Contents

*The positive practices identified in this handbook are arranged in order of importance from the perspective of employees interviewed for CIRS research conducted in 2006.*

*These factsheets define the practices, offer suggestions and examples of how to implement them, explain their benefits to the farm, and provide resources for more information.*

Introduction: Creating a “Triple-Win” Situation for Farmers, Employees and Agricultural Communities .....	4
1. Respectful Treatment .....	5
2. Fair Compensation .....	6
3. Year-Round Employment .....	7
4. Traditional Benefits .....	8
5. Non-Traditional Benefits .....	9
6. Safe and Healthy Workplace .....	10
7. Direct Hiring and Recruitment .....	11
8. Team-Based Management Structures .....	12
9. Open Communication and Decision-Making .....	13
10. Opportunities for Professional Development and Advancement .....	14
Adding Value to Your Products with Positive Labor Practices: A Guide to New Market Opportunities .....	15
Further Agricultural Labor Management Resources .....	16

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## Positive Practices in Farm Labor Management

# Keeping Your Employees Happy and Your Production Profitable

Do you want to improve working conditions on your farm but . . .

. . . aren't sure what's most important to employees?

. . . don't think you can afford to?

. . . don't know where to start?

The 10 Positive Practices described in this handbook will provide you with specific ideas and strategies to:

- Improve employee satisfaction and retention
- Increase productivity while reducing costs
- Improve access to markets seeking products from farms with fair labor practices

This handbook highlights a broad range of positive labor practices—including many that are no-cost or low-cost—that can help to improve worker satisfaction and retention on your farm.

The information is based on recent case-study research conducted by the California Institute for Rural Studies, located in Davis, California. Interviews with farmers, farm managers and over 100 employees on 12 farms throughout California have demonstrated that positive working conditions for farm employees can, and often do, go hand-in-hand with healthy profits for farm businesses.

For more information about this study or handbook, or for information about where to get technical assistance to help you make changes on your farm, please contact:

The California Institute for Rural Studies  
[info@circinc.org](mailto:info@circinc.org)

### About ATTRA—the National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service

ATTRA offers hundreds of publications—many in Spanish—on organic and sustainable agriculture topics including marketing, crop production, processing, livestock, composting, ecological soil & pest management, farm energy, and agroforestry.

All of these publications, including a list of all ATTRA materials, can be downloaded free of charge at ATTRA's website, [www.attra.ncat.org](http://www.attra.ncat.org). Paper copies can be ordered by calling the toll-free telephone line, 800-346-9140; en español: 800-411-3222.

ATTRA is a project of the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT). To learn more about NCAT, see page 16.

### About this Publication

This handbook is based upon "Best Labor Practices on 12 California Farms: Toward a More Sustainable Food System" by R. Stochlic & K. Hammerschlag, published in 2006 by the California Institute for Rural Studies, [www.circinc.org](http://www.circinc.org)

Nine of the farms in the study are certified organic, two are mixed conventional and organic, and one uses low-input sustainable agriculture practices. Eight are family-run medium-sized operations, with fewer than 70 employees and annual revenues between \$600,000 and \$2.5 million. Four are larger, with labor forces ranging from 80 to 4,000 employees and revenues from \$10 million upwards.

The publication of this handbook is made possible by the generous support of the Columbia Foundation, the Western Center for Risk Management Education (WCRME), and the Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (WSARE).

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## Positive Practices in Farm Labor Management

# Creating a “Triple-Win” Situation for Farmers, Employees and Agricultural Communities

How do growers benefit from the practices identified in this handbook?

1. **Increased retention and reduced training costs:** One farmer, with a retention rate of approximately 90%, estimates annual savings of approximately \$20,000 to \$30,000 as a result of reduced training costs.
2. **Reduced management costs:** Motivated and committed employees require less supervision. Farms with fewer foremen or managers can save thousands of dollars while increasing worker satisfaction.
3. **Improved product quality and better prices:** A skilled, knowledgeable and committed workforce translates to higher quality products.
4. **Reduced accidents and lower workers’ compensation rates:** Reduced pesticide exposure on sustainable and organic farms, a slower pace of work, diversity of tasks, and teamwork in lifting heavy items can reduce accidents, injuries, and workers’ compensation costs.
5. **A more stable, knowledgeable, and trustworthy workforce:** Employees who feel respected, valued and trusted are more likely to work harder and feel committed to the success of the farm business.



Photo credit: Judith Redmond

## Ten Positive Farm Labor Management Practices

Employees interviewed by CIRS in 2006 identified the workplace conditions they most value. This list is arranged in those employees’ order of importance.

1. Respectful Treatment
2. Fair Compensation
3. Year-Round Employment
4. Traditional Benefits
5. Non-Traditional Benefits
6. Safe and Healthy Workplace
7. Direct Hiring & Recruitment
8. Team-Based Management Structures
9. Open Communication and Decision-Making
10. Opportunities for Professional Development and Advancement

**Strategies** for how to implement these practices fall into low-cost, medium-cost and high-cost categories. You’ll notice how many things you can do with very little monetary investment!

### Low-Cost Strategies

- 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
- Diversity of tasks
- Allow social services to conduct on-farm outreach
- Celebrations, team-building and appreciation parties

### Medium-Cost Strategies

- Bonuses and profit-sharing
- Year-round employment
- Paid time off
- Retirement plans
- Educational assistance
- Opportunities for training, skill acquisition and professional advancement

### High-Cost Strategies

- Higher wages
- Health insurance

# Positive Practices in Farm Labor Management

## 1. Respectful Treatment

*“Before, I worked with a contractor and I was treated badly. Here there are policies. No one says anything in a mean way. They say ‘please.’ That means a lot. When you are happier you work harder.”*

– Employee, Central California

### What does this mean?

Respectful treatment encompasses a broad range of issues including positive communication styles, direct grower-worker communications, a healthy work environment, and decision-making structures that recognize the contribution and value of each employee. Many farm employees cite respectful treatment on par with or higher than wages in terms of importance.

### How do I implement this practice?

- Create and enforce policies about how employees are to be treated.
- Provide formal training for supervisors and foremen about respectful communication styles.
- Survey employees to find out what their needs are, both personal and professional.
- Provide employees with a degree of freedom to take care of personal and family needs.
- Check in with employees, inquire about their personal lives, etc. Show that you care about them as people.
- Show regular appreciation for your employees. Celebrate birthdays, successful completion of projects or company goals. Even a simple thank you and personal recognition of a job well done goes a long way.

### ☆ What are other farmers doing?

One Northern California diversified farm has a “no-yell” policy. Supervisors are not allowed to yell at anyone.

### ✏ Farm-Level Benefits

- Increased employee loyalty
- Higher retention rates
- Higher productivity
- Low cost to implement
- Increased employee loyalty and satisfaction

### Additional Information and Resources

- Ag Help Wanted (Chapters 4 & 6) by Rosenberg et al., 2002. [www.aghelpwanted.org](http://www.aghelpwanted.org)
- Labor Management in Agriculture (Chapters 9 & 12) by G. Billikopf, 2003. [www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/7labor/001.htm](http://www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/7labor/001.htm)

*“We come back here each year because of the way people are treated, even though the money is a little less.”*

– Employee, California North Coast

Photo credit: Rex Dufour



*It's important to treat all employees with respect in every aspect of work.*

# Positive Practices in Farm Labor Management

## 2. Fair Compensation

*“We work harder here because we know that if the farm does well, we do well. At the end of the year, there are bonuses. In other places where I worked, they don’t have bonuses.”*

*– Employee, Central Coast*

### What does this mean?

Fair compensation rates a close second to respectful treatment in terms of what is most important to farm employees. Farm businesses in California typically spend 40-70% of costs on employees and wages. While most farmers would like to be able to offer their employees a wage that provides for the needs of an average family, this is not always possible. However, when all forms of compensation and benefits are taken into account—profit-sharing, bonuses, health insurance, retirement plans, paid time off, housing assistance and food from the farm—the total value of compensation can increase significantly.

*“We pay minimum wage and use the bonus [profit-sharing] program to supplement that. That enables us to protect ourselves in a bad year, since once you raise the minimum wage you can’t go back. It gives us more flexibility.”*

*– Employer, Central Valley*



Photo credit: Judith Redmond

### How do I implement this practice?

- Ensure that your pay scales incorporate both external equity (how it compares to wages offered on other farms) and internal equity (how employees are paid within the business).
- Offer incentives at least once per year. Some farms provide bonuses on employees’ birthdays or as a reward for staying through the end of the harvest.
- Communicate clearly and consistently with employees about how profit-sharing and bonuses are calculated and how the farm is faring financially to avoid adverse impacts on morale and satisfaction.
- Account for cost-of-living increases when making wage adjustments.
- Create consistent pay levels based on skill and responsibility. Reward initiative whenever possible.

*Farmworkers put their bodies at risk every day. They deserve fair compensation for the difficult and valuable work they perform.*

### ☆ What are other farmers doing?

One mid-sized diversified farm provides seasonal and permanent employees with approximately \$40,000 in profit sharing each year, the equivalent of 25 to 50 cents per hour. Profits are distributed twice per year—during the harvest and at the end of the year—as a means of thanking and incentivizing employees.

### ✎ Farm-Level Benefits

- Increased employee motivation
- Higher productivity
- Profit-sharing is a risk management strategy for growers.

### Additional Information and Resources

- Employment Standards Administration, Department of Labor (includes minimum wage standards, workers’ compensation info, required posters, etc.) [www.dol.gov/esa](http://www.dol.gov/esa)
- Ag Help Wanted (Chapter 5), by Rosenberg et al., 2002. [www.aghelpwanted.org](http://www.aghelpwanted.org)
- Labor Management in Agriculture (Ch. 7 & 8) by G. Billikopf, 2003. [www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/7labor/001.htm](http://www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/7labor/001.htm)

### Piece Rate vs. Hourly Wages

**While employees note that they can make more money per day with piece rate, they also note that piece work is short-term and generally followed by underemployment, so that total income under the two systems is comparable. Farmers note that hourly wages usually result in higher quality work and fewer accidents, although carefully designed piece-rate systems can have advantages for both employers and employees.**

# Positive Practices in Farm Labor Management

## 3. Year-Round Employment

*“We provide year-round employment. That’s huge. It means that our workers can live here with their families. This is their community now. Families go to school here. Kids learn English. They are part of the community now.”*

– Employer, Sacramento Valley

### What does this mean?

Farm employees identify year-round employment as one of the conditions they most value, after good wages and respectful treatment. In addition to a steady income and job security, year-round work enables employees to maintain a stable family life, with benefits for their children and communities. A permanent workforce is also good for business. With increasing labor shortages, growers have access to a steady supply of labor. High retention rates keep recruitment and training costs low, while year-round production increases grower revenue.

### How do I implement this practice?

- Diversify crop mix to allow for year-round production.
- Contract with neighboring farms or other businesses to provide employment for workers when there is little work on your farm.
- Hire field staff to help with maintenance and repairs during the winter.
- Include value-added products that can be made and sold during the winter.

### ★ What are other farmers doing?

- A Ventura County, Calif., farm plants 40 crops on 30 acres, four times a year, creating year-round work for 10 to 12 people and seasonal work for an additional 15.
- A vineyard contracts with a neighboring olive grove to provide employment during December and January, when there is no work at the vineyard.

### ✏ Farm-Level Benefits

- Winter cropping schemes improve market retention
- Increased revenue from added-value products
- Increased labor retention

### Additional Information and Resources

- ATTRA publication: “Season Extension Techniques for Market Gardeners”  
<http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/seasonext.html>
- Check with your local Ag Extension office for ideas about diversifying your crop mix.
- Publication from the University of California Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program: “How to stabilize your farm work force and increase profits, productivity, & personal satisfaction”  
[www.sarep.ucdavis.edu/pubs/pubs.htm](http://www.sarep.ucdavis.edu/pubs/pubs.htm)



Photo credit: Judith Redmond

Drivers from a Yolo County farm visit a school in Oakland to talk about the farm’s Community Supported Agriculture program. The classroom teacher is on the left.

# Positive Practices in Farm Labor Management

## 4. Traditional Benefits

*“Housing has been a huge issue. It’s a commitment of ours to help folks find housing. When anything is available, we snap it up. We sign a lease. We make sure the rent gets paid, even when there aren’t workers there.”*

– Employer, Northern California

### What does this mean?

Traditional benefits include a broad range of support mechanisms for employees such as health insurance, retirement plans, paid time off, life insurance, and free or subsidized housing. Farm employees rely on benefits to supplement what they earn by wages. Access to benefits can greatly improve the health and well-being of farm employees and their families.

### How do I implement this practice?

- **Health Care:** Provide some form of health insurance to all workers. If costs are prohibitive, provide on-farm access to mobile clinics, health screening and education programs, and referrals for local low-cost health care resources.
- **Housing:** Provide free or subsidized housing for employees. If you can’t provide housing yourself, then help workers locate local housing and negotiate rental agreements, or provide housing stipends as a bonus.
- **Paid time off:** Offer paid vacation to employees working until the end of the year. Offer increasing amounts of paid time off for long-term employees.
- **Retirement benefits:** Encourage employees to save for retirement

by matching contributions (up to 5% of wages) made by employees.

- **Flexible scheduling:** Allow employees to take time off to take care of personal and family needs.
- **Overtime pay:** Provide overtime after eight hours per day or 48 hours per week.

### ★ What are other farmers doing?

- Growers in Napa County, Calif. have instituted a \$10/acre self-assessment to help subsidize farmworker housing.
- The Ventura County Ag Futures Alliance Agricultural Health Cooperative has been working to promote improved access to health care for farm employees. Their health-care initiative includes (1) promoting the adoption of workplace wellness policies and procedures, (2) health education, (3) improving access to affordable health insurance for employers, and (4) on-site health services at farms. They promote increased access to health insurance by seeking group rates through the Western Growers Association “Clinicas Plan,” which offers a low-cost monthly premium (\$20-\$40) for farm employees and their families.

<http://agfuturesalliance.org/ventura>

Photo credit: Rex Dufour



### 📎 Farm-Level Benefits

- Increased labor retention
- Increased employee satisfaction and motivation
- Reduced workers’ compensation rates: Some insurance companies offer reduced rates if employees have health insurance.

### Additional Information and Resources

- Ag Help Wanted: (Chapter 5), Rosenberg et al., 2002. [www.aghelpwanted.org](http://www.aghelpwanted.org)
- Ventura County Ag Futures Alliance, a coalition of growers & other community members, has a number of publications describing their innovative efforts to improve worker access to health care and housing. “Ag Worker Health Access: A Comprehensive Local Solution,” VCAF Alliance Policy Paper #6: <http://agfuturesalliance.org/ventura/?c=Policy-Papers>
- To find a migrant clinic in your area, search the website of the U.S. Health Resources & Services Administration (<http://ask.hrsa.gov/pc>) or consult the Migrant Clinician Network’s directory of migrant health centers and primary care associations: [www.migrantclinician.org/healthcenters/healthcenterdirectory.php](http://www.migrantclinician.org/healthcenters/healthcenterdirectory.php)

*It can be very helpful for employers—who have local connections and are familiar with the regional housing market—to help employees find housing and negotiate rental agreements.*



# Positive Practices in Farm Labor Management

## 5. Non-Traditional Benefits

*“You can bring all the food home that you want. We are eating a lot of vegetables. We all have more to eat.”*

— *Employee,*  
*tCentral Coast, California*

### What does this mean?

Non-traditional benefits include a broad range of innovative strategies to help employees and their families. Due to language barriers, documentation status, and economic constraints, farm employees often don't have access to, or don't know how to access, many of the public services and institutions that are available in our communities. Employers can help to connect employees with valuable service providers, or at times, provide some of those services themselves.

### How do I implement this practice?

- Encourage employees to take home food from the farm on a regular basis. Employees report improved diets for themselves and their families and significant cost savings.
- Provide no-interest personal loans that employees can pay back through payroll deductions or retirement plans.
- Allow social service agencies to conduct outreach on the farm. Pay employees for the time spent attending those sessions.
- Contribute to community projects that support agricultural workers such as childcare centers and health clinics.
- Provide education assistance for work-related courses.

- Offer scholarships to support employees' children who attend college.
- Provide referrals for social services or legal/immigration assistance.

### ★ What are other farmers doing?

- A grower in Fresno County offers each worker access to one acre of farmland that can be used for producing cash or subsistence crops.
- A farmer in Ventura County provides on-farm English classes for employees in the evenings.

### ✎ Farm-Level Benefits

- Increased labor retention
- Increased worker satisfaction and motivation

### Additional Information and Resources

Contact these national organizations to find resources in your community:

- **Legal/Immigration Assistance**—  
American Immigrant Law Foundation:  
[www.aifl.org](http://www.aifl.org)  
Immigrant Legal Resource Center:  
[www.ilrc.org](http://www.ilrc.org)
- **Education**—  
National Association of State Directors of Migrant Education:  
[www.nasdme.org/index.html](http://www.nasdme.org/index.html)  
National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Association:  
[www.nmshsa.org](http://www.nmshsa.org)

Photo credit: Rex Dufour



*On-farm educational sessions can help employees understand how businesses operate or they can address some other common interest.*

# Positive Practices in Farm Labor Management

## 6. Safe and Healthy Workplace

*“The highest and most important product of the farm is the workers’ health, safety and happiness.”*

– Employer, Central Valley, California

### What does this mean?

In addition to complying with OSHA (the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration), growers can institute practices that help protect the health of their employees.

### How do I implement this practice?

- Diversify employee tasks throughout the day to prevent chronic musculoskeletal injuries. See “Simple Solutions” ergonomics publication for more ideas.
- Limit hand weeding or stoop labor to two hours a day.
- Encourage teamwork. For example, ask employees to carry heavy items with co-workers to reduce injuries.
- Make sure supervisors know to provide prompt and adequate medical attention in the case of serious injuries.
- In addition to legally required trainings, reiterate safety messages to employees on a regular basis, or in monthly safety meetings, in order to reduce accidents and workers’ compensation costs. Make sure safety trainings are culturally appropriate, taking into account the diversity of languages and literacy skills among employees.
- Adopt sustainable farming practices such as Integrated Pest Man-

agement to reduce worker exposure to pesticides.

### ★ What are other farmers doing?

A stone fruit farmer in the Central Valley of California lowered the height of his trees to reduce employee falls from ladders. In addition to reducing accidents, it also increased production and decreased harvest time, resulting in reduced labor costs and increased revenues.

### ✎ Farm-Level Benefits

- Reduced accidents and injuries
- Reduced workers’ compensation costs. Some insurance companies offer discounted workers comp or crop insurance rates for growers using organic or sustainable practices.
- Healthier, more satisfied workforce

### Additional Information and Resources

- NIOSH (the National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety) includes on their website publications and training manuals relating to agricultural worker health and safety:  
<http://cdc.gov/niosh/topics/agriculture/Social>
- Simple Solutions: Ergonomics for Farmworkers, NIOSH publication No. 2001-111:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/01111pd.html>
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA):  
<http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/agriculturaloperations/index.html>
- Western Center for Agricultural Health and Safety:  
<http://agcenter.ucdavis.edu>

*“I like the fact that we always have help and support from our compañeros, especially in helping us lift heavy boxes. On other farms it isn’t like that.”*

– Female employee, Central Valley, California

Photo credit: Rex Dufour



Monthly safety meetings reduce accidents and workers’ compensation costs.

# Positive Practices in Farm Labor Management

## 7. Direct Hiring and Recruitment

*“Workers contracted by farm labor contractors (FLCs) have no loyalty to the farm... A farmer using the FLC system can't really be good to his workers either. He may pay a better wage, but the FLC may pocket that. The farmer also loses control over work practices. You can have abuses going on, but you don't have to be responsible for them. It's a good way for farmers to protect themselves from liability, but it is negative in most regards.”*

– Employer, Central Valley, Calif.

### What does this mean?

Roughly 1/5 of agricultural labor in the U.S. (and 1/3 in California) are hired through Farm Labor Contractors (FLCs). While FLCs can alleviate some of the challenges, liabilities and costs of direct employment, growers who are interested in providing positive labor conditions for their employees have much less control about how employees are treated and compensated. By practicing direct hiring and recruitment, growers can have greater control over product quality.

### How do I implement this practice?

- Recruit new employees via other farmworkers; this way your employees may be related or from a similar region. Employers report that this results in a more cohesive workforce with less interpersonal conflict.
- Prepare written job descriptions for new positions. Recruitment, hiring and management will go more smoothly if everyone is clear about the duties the employee will be responsible for.

- Invest time into finding the right person for the job to save time and money later. Use a systematic process to determine who to hire, including interviews, applications, performance tests, and reference checks.

### ★ What are other farmers doing?

A farm in the Central Valley of California negotiates above minimum wage rates for workers employed by FLCs, provides safety and quality training to FLC workers, uses its own supervisors to ensure high quality work and safe, respectful conditions, and requests the same FLC crew each year.

### ✎ Farm-Level Benefits

- Increased employee loyalty
- Higher quality work

### Additional Information and Resources

- Ag Help Wanted (Chapter 3) by Rosenberg et al., 2002. <http://agecon.uwo.edu/aglabor/FrameOnlineReferences.htm>

- Farm Labor Contracting, Agricultural Personnel Management Program (contains sample contracts for growers and FLCs): <http://are.berkeley.edu/APMP/pubs/flc/farmlabor.html>
- Labor Management in Agriculture (Chapters 2 & 3), by G. Billikopf, 2003: [www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/7labor/001.htm](http://www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/7labor/001.htm)

### If you do use a farm labor contractor (FLC) ...

- Seek out FLCs with good reputations. Check references.
- Make sure the FLC is compliant with state labor laws and use a contract. See Resources for templates.
- Provide training and oversight of FLC workers.

Photo credit: Rex Dufour



*Interviews are important in order to understand the experience and knowledge base of prospective employees. Performance tests are another way to ensure that employees have the skills you're looking for.*

## Positive Practices in Farm Labor Management

### 8. Team-Based Management Structures

*“We have leaders with a lot of responsibility, but we don’t call them foremen or mayordomos. We make sure their authority is limited... We encourage team management. We look for people who don’t want to be authoritarian, who can organize people, foster cooperative work, and minimize conflict. We try to cooperate, not dominate.”*

*- Employer, Central California*

#### What does this mean?

Many growers have found that a democratic, team-based approach to management and supervision can successfully motivate employees and result in significant cost savings.

#### How do I implement this practice?

- Instead of foremen, utilize team leaders to help provide guidance and motivation while working alongside other employees.
- Practice the MBWA management style – “management by walking around.”
- Communicate directly with employees on a daily basis. If possible, learn to speak with them in their own language.
- Encourage collaboration between employees, allowing workers to help one another and train new employees.
- Define specific roles for each employee and let them know how their performance will be evalu-

ated. Formal performance appraisals should give employees a chance to evaluate themselves, their successes, and areas for improvement.

- Resolve conflicts promptly using a mediational, rather than authoritarian, approach.

#### Farm-Level Benefits

- Reduced supervision costs
- Increased employee investment and commitment to the farm
- Higher quality work

#### Additional Information and Resources

- Ag Help Wanted (Chapter 4) by Rosenberg et al., 2002: <http://agecon.uwo.edu/aglabor/FrameOnlineReferences.htm>
- Labor Management in Agriculture (Ch. 9) by G. Billikopf, 2003: [www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/7labor/001.htm](http://www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/7labor/001.htm)
- Party-Directed Mediation: Helping Others Resolve Differences, by G. Billikopf, 2004: [www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/7conflict](http://www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/7conflict)

*“They (the management) trust us. They don’t stand over us all the time. They tell us what is needed and we do it. They’ve seen that as they trust us more, there is improvement in production, in both quality and quantity.”*

*- Farm Employee*

Photo credit: Rex Dufour



*Employees can teach each other how the business works. In the process, everyone learns leadership, responsibility and cooperation.*

## Positive Practices in Farm Labor Management

# 9. Open Communication and Decision Making

*“Here we have meetings and the patrón informs us about what is happening on the farm. He takes us into account. He asks our opinion about things.”*

*- Employee, Central Coast, Calif.*

### What does this mean?

There are a range of practices that foster good communication between employers and employees. Some, such as safety meetings, employee orientations and employee handbooks, are focused on communicating information and expectations. Others, such as regular meetings and grievance procedures, provide opportunities for worker representation and participation in decision-making processes.

### How do I implement this practice?

- Hold regular staff meetings with employees to discuss important topics such as production tasks, personnel conflicts, or safety concerns.
- Encourage employee feedback and ideas about workplace practices and production issues.
- Provide formal orientations for new employees about benefits, job expectations, and workplace policies. Update all employees regularly about changes to benefits or compensation packages.
- Institute formal grievance procedures, making sure employees know they can freely approach team leaders or higher management with problems.
- Codify workplace policies and practices in written employee

handbooks. Make sure they are translated.

- Conduct employee surveys to identify worker concerns and obtain direct feedback about work-related issues.

### ★ What are other farmers doing?

A vineyard holds an annual meeting for its business partners, investors and employees. All permanent and seasonal employees are paid to attend the meeting, and a Spanish interpreter is provided.

### 📎 Farm-Level Benefits

- Valuable input and information from employees to strengthen the farm operation
- Increased sense of employee loyalty and investment in the farm

- Reduced incidence of employee dissatisfaction

### Additional Information and Resources

Easily create an employee handbook using any of these resources:

- The USDA Forest Service Employee Handbook Template: [www.na.fs.fed.us/wihispanic/Default.htm](http://www.na.fs.fed.us/wihispanic/Default.htm)
- Labor Management in Agriculture (Chapter 17) by G. Bilikopf, 2003: [www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/aglabor/7labor/001.htm](http://www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/aglabor/7labor/001.htm)
- Ag Help Wanted, by Rosenberg et. al., 2002. See Chapter 6 for links to employee handbook software and templates: <http://agecon.uwyo.edu/aglabor/FrameBookContents.htm>

Photo credit: Rex Dufour



*Regular staff meetings with employees provide a place to discuss production tasks, personnel conflicts, and safety concerns.*

# 10. Opportunities for Professional Development and Advancement

*“Here they give lots of opportunities for advancement. I started as a harvester and now I run machinery. They help you get the training and licenses to operate machinery. I have more motivation now. I want to keep moving up.”*

– Employee, Central Valley Farm

### What does this mean?

Many employees express appreciation for opportunities to broaden their skills or advance into different positions on the farm. Diversified cropping systems lead to a greater variety of tasks for workers, who enjoy learning about different aspects of the farm operation. Growers can provide formal and informal opportunities for employees to gain new technical or managerial skills through on-the-job training, formal education, or attendance at conferences and workshops.

### How do I implement this practice?

- Encourage & reward employee initiative to develop skills and take on new responsibilities.
- Create a transparent system of pay raises that rewards workers for each season they complete (steps) and clearly defined higher levels of responsibility (grades).
- Expose employees to different aspects of the farm operation.

- Encourage attendance at local trainings and conferences, many of which have Spanish-language tracks.
- Provide supervisory management training to workers who are promoted to supervisory roles. Be sensitive to conflicts of interest that may arrive when workers are responsible for managing friends and family members.
- Provide opportunities for employees to gain legal certifications that



would enable them to perform more highly skilled tasks such as equipment handling or pesticide safety training.

- Provide opportunities for formal educational advancement at local community colleges.

### Farm-level Benefits

- Increased retention of motivated and talented employees.
- Skilled and trained employees ensure higher product quality.

### Additional Information and Resources

- Labor Management in Agriculture (Ch. 4 & 5), G. Billikopf, 2003. [www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/7labor/001.htm](http://www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/7labor/001.htm)
- Contact your local agricultural commissioner office to find out about certification trainings.
- Contact your local cooperative extension for information about upcoming agricultural conferences and workshops in your area.

## Positive Practices in Farm Labor Management

# Adding Value to Your Products with Positive Labor Practices A Guide to New Market Opportunities

*Improving compensation and benefits for your agricultural employees can be economically challenging. However, new market-based opportunities are emerging that may help you offset the costs associated with improving working conditions for your employees.*

*Many consumers today are looking to buy products from businesses that demonstrate social responsibility. Food retailers and restaurant chains have responded to this*

*trend by setting standards throughout their supply chains that incorporate fair farm labor practices. Producers are differentiating themselves by advertising their responsible labor practices either directly to consumers or through certification and labeling programs.*

*Below are several examples of U.S.-based programs that support and/or certify growers who cultivate positive labor management practices.*

### Food Alliance

[www.foodalliance.org/](http://www.foodalliance.org/)

Food Alliance is a nonprofit, third-party certification program that promotes sustainable agriculture.

### National Sustainable Agriculture Standard (DRAFT)

[www.leonardoacademy.org/Projects/SustainAgStdDevelopment.htm](http://www.leonardoacademy.org/Projects/SustainAgStdDevelopment.htm)

Formal proceedings to establish the first national standard for sustainable agriculture were launched in October 2007. Stakeholders are invited to shape the standard in a collaborative process governed by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI).

### Scientific Certification Systems

[www.scscertified.com](http://www.scscertified.com)

SCS is a third-party provider of certification services offering numerous certification programs including

social responsibility standards, a Fair Labor Practices and Community Benefits label, and the Veriflora label for the floral industry.

### The Agricultural Justice Project (AJP)

[www.cata-farmworkers.org/ajp](http://www.cata-farmworkers.org/ajp)

The AJP is a collaboration of organizations that has developed a set of social justice standards for organic and sustainable agriculture. In the summer of 2006, AJP and the Local Fair Trade Network in Minneapolis launched a Domestic Fair Trade label based on the AJP standards.

### Socially Accountable Farm Employers (SAFE)

[www.safeemployer.org](http://www.safeemployer.org)

SAFE is a nonprofit organization that provides independent auditing and certification of fair, lawful farm labor practices in the agriculture industry.

### Lodi Rules

[www.lodiwine.com/lodirules\\_home1.shtml](http://www.lodiwine.com/lodirules_home1.shtml)

The Lodi Rules are sustainable winegrowing standards that are being implemented on a regionwide basis. The Rules originated in 2001 with grower-members of the Lodi-Woodbridge Winegrape Commission. Participating growers can get their vineyards certified as producing sustainably grown wine grapes. The program is certified by a third party—the nonprofit organization Protected Harvest.

### California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance (CSWA)

[www.sustainablewinegrowing.org](http://www.sustainablewinegrowing.org)

The CSWA has an online Code of Sustainable Winegrowing Practices workbook that translates sustainability principles into specific winegrowing and winemaking practices, including labor management and community responsibility.

# Positive Practices in Farm Labor Management

## Further Agricultural Labor Management Resources

### Ag Help Wanted: Guidelines for Managing Agricultural Labor

By H. Rosenberg, R. Carkner, J. Hewlett,  
L. Owen, T. Teegerstrom, J. Tranel, and  
R. Wegel. 2002.

[www.aghelpwanted.org](http://www.aghelpwanted.org)

This book is available at no cost  
online and contains numerous links  
to further resources.

### Agricultural Labor Management University of California

[www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor](http://www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor)

Developed by Gregorio Billikopf,  
this site offers downloadable books,  
research papers, articles, audio semi-  
nars, electronic discussion groups,  
and other resources about agricul-  
tural labor management in English  
and Spanish. *Labor Management in  
Agriculture: Cultivating Personnel  
Productivity* (2003), by G. Billikopf,  
is available to download at no cost.

### Agricultural Labor Management University of Vermont

[www.uvm.edu/~farmlabr/](http://www.uvm.edu/~farmlabr/)

The University compiles this infor-  
mation about labor management  
for agricultural producers.

### Ag Manager Info Kansas State University

[www.agmanager.info](http://www.agmanager.info)

This site provides useful informa-  
tion and tools for agricultural  
employers and managers.

### Agricultural Personnel Management Program University of California, Berkeley

[www.apmp.berkeley.edu](http://www.apmp.berkeley.edu)

This is an information center  
on farm employment, manage-  
ment, and related policy issues.

### Dr. Vera Bitsch Agricultural Economics & Agribusiness Management Michigan State University

[www.msu.edu/~bitsch](http://www.msu.edu/~bitsch)

News and information about  
labor laws and labor manage-  
ment are found on this site.

### Farm Employers Labor Service

[www.fels.org](http://www.fels.org)

Here are resources about com-  
plying with labor laws and effec-  
tively managing labor relations.

### Farmworker Institute for Education and Leadership Development (FIELD)

[www.farmworkerinstitute.org](http://www.farmworkerinstitute.org)

This nonprofit offers education  
and employment training for  
agricultural employees.

### How to Stabilize Your Farm Work Force and Increase Profits, Produc- tivity, and Personal Satisfaction

By Suzanne Vaupel, Gary Johnston,  
Franz Kegel, Melissa Cadet, and  
Gregory Billikopf. 1995.

[www.sarep.ucdavis.edu/pubs/pubs.htm](http://www.sarep.ucdavis.edu/pubs/pubs.htm)

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load for free on the Internet at the  
ATTRA website: [www.attra.ncat.org](http://www.attra.ncat.org)  
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### California Institute for Rural Studies

is a nonprofit research organization that  
works toward a rural California that is  
socially just, economically balanced,  
and environmentally sustainable. In  
keeping with a public-service ap-  
proach to research, CIRS disseminates  
its research findings to policy makers,  
stakeholder organizations, and the  
general public.

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[www.cirsinc.org](http://www.cirsinc.org)

### The National Center for Appropri- ate Technology

is a private nonprofit  
organization that since 1976 has helped  
people by championing small-scale,  
local and sustainable solutions to  
reduce poverty, promote healthy  
communities, and protect natural  
resources. ATTRA—the National  
Sustainable Agriculture Information  
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