The Farmer
and
His Help

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“Farm labor is one of three inseparable and indispensable factors in the operation of both commercial and family-sized farms. Farm labor problems take their place in farm production along with problems of soil maintenance and crop selection and with marketing processes. All these problems are community-wide and nation-wide.”

—Executive committee of the Association of Land Grant Colleges and Universities

Herman Darley, Marion County beanfield owner, explains to his prospective foremen what he expects of them. Left to right: La Rue Richards, Darley, Russel M. Adams, Eldon Morse, and Dick French.

Cover picture: The Potat-O Combine, manufactured by Frank Bell Machinery Co. of Klamath Falls, at work on a Wilson Farm near Malin. Bulker handles work done by three times as many people under the old system. Seven or eight people are required to operate this bulker: tractor driver, machine operator, three or four persons to pick off potato vines or weeds, and two cart drivers. These workers do the labor of 12 to 15 hand pickers, 2 truckers, 2 buckers, and 3 cellar-men. The hopper holds 7,000 pounds.
We all know farmers who give much time and attention to upkeep of their buildings and repair of their machinery. They take advantage of improved methods of maintaining soil fertility, producing better crops and livestock, and controlling insect pests and diseases. Yet these same farmers too often give relatively little effort to obtain, train, or maintain their man labor on an efficient basis.

Introduction

This bulletin is intended for the farmer who employs a substantial number of workers as is done by growers of fruits and vegetables. It is a summary of ideas and experiences gained through the operations of the Oregon State and County Farm Labor Offices from May 1, 1943 to December 31, 1947. During this time, the Agricultural Extension Service Farm Labor Division was responsible, among other things, for mobilization, recruitment, training, and placement of farm workers. As many as 128,220 individuals were placed in one year; 17,381 foremen and 22,421 workers received training in farm skills during a similar period. Carrying out these responsibilities required a large personnel in our farm labor offices. Field trips were made to the farms, and help was often given to both employers and employees on matters affecting their relationships with each other.

Experience of the Oregon Extension Farm Labor Service has shown that a certain small percentage of our farmer employers always have considerable difficulty with labor, while another small percentage are outstandingly successful in gaining the good will and support of their employees. Most farmer employers can make some improvement in their labor relationships.

This bulletin deals largely with what farmer employers can do to better their relationships with their help. We recognize fully the problems created by the workers themselves, but this publication, as a part of our Extension Service for farmers, is intended for reading by employers rather than employees.

Labor management factors, important to a farmer employer, discussed in this bulletin include:

1. Labor expense as a part of operating cost.
2. Procedures and adjustments which have been found most successful in obtaining, keeping, training, and supervising labor, and reducing labor turn-over.
(3) Types of hand labor available to Oregon farmers and the effects of new labor-saving machinery.
(4) Housing facilities and community acceptance of the worker and how they affect worker stability.
(5) Importance of personal relationships as applied particularly to foremen and their methods of instructing and getting along with workers.

Labor expense half of operating cost

Labor expenses represent at least half the cost of operating the average intensive farm in Oregon. More efficient use of labor represents an opportunity for cutting costs. But more efficient use of labor does not mean merely cutting wages or forcing workers to produce more. It means training, supervision, and wise relationships.

It is a human tendency for each automobile driver to think he is safe and capable, while others observing him are not so sure. The average farmer similarly thinks of himself as a capable manager of those who work for him. But ask his neighbors, ask any labor office where he goes for help. They are not so sure he is a capable and efficient employer of farm help. One evidence of inefficiency is the constant turn-over of labor that occurs on many farms.

Happy labor relationships depend on many things. The problems of obtaining, keeping, training, and managing farm labor are important. A recognition of these problems and discovery of the elements at play in their successful solution are necessary. Applying principles and practices which will result in satisfaction for both the employer and employee is timely.

Discussion meetings held with farmers and foremen

This year the Extension Service has been conducting discussion meetings with farmers and foreman groups in seven western Oregon counties on these labor relationship problems. These discussions have brought out some pertinent information which, it is thought, will help solve problems arising in farmer-foreman labor relationships.

The kind of farm and the crop produced will have much to do with the kind and amount of help needed and the distribution of employment. Some year-round help is required on most farms where the amount of work is more than can be done by the farm family. Though only one man may be employed on this basis, the problems of employer-employee relationships still exist. It is common knowledge in every farm labor office that some farmers who employ only one or two men have a constant turn-over of labor.

The problems in labor turn-over are, of course, multiplied many times when large numbers of people are employed on a seasonal basis.
Oregon farms producing large acreages of intensive crops such as berries, beans, and hops typically employ such seasonal labor. The importance of labor reliability and efficiency is intensified by the brief period during which the crop must be harvested. Here again farm labor personnel will testify that while many farmers are able to maintain a satisfactory working crew, others are faced with a continual shift of workers.

**Types of workers vary greatly**

While the principles that govern successful labor management are generally applicable to all types of labor, special recognition needs to be given to the kinds of labor employed. This is evident when one considers the fact that Willamette Valley farmers usually have an opportunity to employ all sorts, men, women, or youths, who in turn may be single, local, migrant, in families, operating independently, or working in organized groups, such as the youth platoons. Some will require transportation and some will have their own. Some will provide their own housing and others, including a large number of the migrants, will have to be housed if the farmer is to secure their services. Some will be experienced and others completely inexperienced. A study made in 1946 revealed that 65 percent of the people harvesting the bean and hop crops in the Willamette Valley were doing so for the first year. In most cases, the farmer will have to provide for the necessary field supervision and training if any is given. In others, such as youth platoons, the supervisor and instructor will accompany the group.

Daily earning ability and comparative living costs are important in keeping a satisfactory crew. During the war, farm workers became accustomed to the highest wages ever paid by farmers. We are now in a transition period, during which many prices paid to the farmers are coming down more rapidly than are living costs for the workers. For the time being, it would appear that many farmers will be paying out a larger proportion of their total income in wages to secure necessary labor.

Earning capacity is influenced also by individual ability, the yield of the crop, condition of the field, the help or instruction given the worker, and the kind of crop that is being harvested. When two crops, such as beans and hops in the Willamette Valley, are being harvested simultaneously, it is a common experience for the majority of the workers to leave the crop in which their daily earning capacity is the lower. What can a farmer do to maintain a crew under such conditions?
New labor-saving machinery being introduced

For the sake of economy and to provide a reliable means of getting the work done, some farmers are purchasing increasing quantities of labor-saving machinery or using other devices that reduce the amount of hand labor required.

An unusual feature of the hop picture during 1947 was that 1,200 acres in Josephine County were picked by machine, leaving only 400 acres for hand pickers.

A single line stationary hop picker tried out in Josephine County required 40 to 50 workers. It did the work of 200 to 250 hand pickers in the field. Even with the machines the labor requirement was still high, however, for 1,500 to 2,000 men were needed to operate the number of stationary and portable machines used in the county.

A potato combine machine in Klamath County requires 7 to 9 people to operate and will harvest about 5 acres per day. Harvesting by the old method—digger, pickers, bucking crew, unloaders—requires twice as many men.

A farmer in Marion County has invented a machine to hoe strawberries which will do the work of 6 men. He also has a strawberry plant digger that has cut his costs in half and leaves his soil in better condition.

Picking potatoes directly into a sack suspended from a picking belt increases output by 20 to 30 per cent over use of a wire basket under Colorado conditions. Mechanical injury may also be reduced. The picking belt is satisfactory only for men and strong boys unless the sack load is adjusted to the strength of the picker.

J. L. Paschal, associate economist at Colorado A. and M. College, reports that records of 121 mechanized sugar beet harvesters showed an average of 4.76 man hours required to place an average acre yield of 15.5 tons into the truck. These 4.76 hours compare with 34 hours for doing the same amount of work when the beets are topped by hand.

Experiments are being conducted with thinning apples and pears by spraying with elgitol. This is expected to reduce the amount of hand thinning.

Numerous other examples could be given from all parts of the country. In all cases, however, since the man is the power behind the machine, some hand labor is still required.

Factors affecting adoption of machines

It is well to recognize that the rate of adoption of labor-saving machinery is not entirely dependent on the ability of each machine to reduce the amount of hand labor required. The quality of the work
the machine does is also a factor. Damage to or losses of the product during machine operation may make such a machine undesirable, in the farmer's opinion.

Labor-saving machinery cannot be applied to all harvesting operations. Berries and beans selected from the vine on the basis of ripeness or grade would seem to require human judgment and hand harvesting for a long time to come.

The safety factor also must be considered. Machines were involved in 6 per cent of the farm accidents in Oregon in 1946, according to the report of the State Industrial Accident Commission. As a result, more attention is being paid to machines that are safe to operate.

So the problems of labor relationships remain, as long as farmers employ help. It seems pertinent, therefore, to devote some thought to factors affecting successful farm labor management.

**Housing of major importance**

For the full time farm employee or seasonal migratory workers, housing conditions and living accommodations often are as important as earning possibilities. It has frequently been impossible to place

![Army barracks partitioned inside to provide room for several migrant families.](image-url)
Permanent on-the-farm housing in Clackamas County insures good quality of help for the farmer.

available labor because of lack of housing. A study made during August, September, and October of 1946, involving interviews of 393 migrants having 1,422 persons in their families or groups, revealed that only about 6 per cent of them had a trailer or a tent; 30 per cent of these people were children under 14 years of age. Such facts stress the importance of housing. It is estimated that between 15,000 and 20,000 transient workers are needed in Oregon each year.

The kind of housing acceptable varies with the duration of the job and the time of the year the work is done. The longer the job and the more inclement the weather, the better the housing needed. The Agricultural Engineering Department at Oregon State College has arranged a farm building plan service through which farmers may obtain tracings of building plans for various kinds of farm structures. Oregon State College Extension Circular 487 provides the details on materials available. Your county agent can assist you.

The number of bedrooms needed will vary with the size of the family. Running water, electricity, suitable heating, and sanitary facilities are desired and often insisted upon by full time workers. Seasonal workers during warm weather can often be satisfactorily accommodated in small cabins or tents, especially if board floors and walls are provided. In such cases, clean central sanitary, shower, and laundry facilities, as are often provided in camps, are usually acceptable. Farmers have reported to the writer that they found it much
The Dalles, Wasco County Camp, for cherry harvest workers. Here 200 tents provide quarters for approximately 400 persons.

easier to obtain and keep good help after improving the living accommodations for their workers.

Community acceptance of the worker is closely connected with the living facilities provided. If he is made to feel at home, living is much more pleasant. Nurseries in camps for transient workers are desirable for children of working mothers. Of considerable value was a program of classes and games conducted for younger children.

These hollow-tile cabins in the Milton-Freewater farm labor camp were constructed in 1947.
in farm labor camps during the daytime periods while their parents
were working. A state migrant committee representing 23 Oregon
denominations conducted the program. During the school year, ac-
ceptance of the children by the schools is appreciated by most parents.
Church services at camps or a warm welcome by the community con-
gregations also help make these people feel comfortable in their
surroundings.

**Field conditions affect satisfaction**

Conditions in the field have much to do with the farm laborer’s
attitude toward his work. Many local people as well as transients
shop around to find the places where working conditions are the best.
A strawberry field clear of weeds is more desired than a weedy
one.

A well-pruned orchard is easier to work in than a brushy one
with interlocking branches.

Plenty of good drinking water and clean sanitary facilities pre-
vent discomfort and embarrassment. A shady place to rest and eat
lunch is attractive.

The longer the distance to be traveled to and from work, the
less attractive the job.

Some farmers furnish hot coffee at noon on cool days or a cold
drink when the weather is hot. A picnic at the end of the season is
not uncommon. Such things add to a feeling of friendliness and
promote understanding and cooperation.

A good yield, making it possible to earn a satisfactory amount
per day, also attracts workers.

An efficient field organization, so that the worker knows where
he should go and what he should do, is also important. If the yield
is poor or transportation difficult, wage or other adjustments may
sometimes offset these disadvantages in the minds of workers.

**Personal relationships most important of factors**

Personal relationships in the field are probably the most im-
portant of all the factors involved.

As Marty McIntyre, American Federation of Labor organizer,
says concerning industry, “As a professional trouble shooter for
labor, I know that the worker’s principal beef is ill-chosen foremen.—
Either a foreman is a smooth roller-bearing or else he is so much
sand in the gears.—He needs tact, tolerance, intelligence. Product-
vity and morale are ruined by ‘worry warts’ and by unjust over-
seers.” (Readers Digest, June 1947.)

Although there may be no roof over the place where he works,
the farmer is as truly a business man, and agriculture as truly an
industry, as the man or enterprise in the city. The farm employers and foremen bear relationships fully as important to their help as foremen in industry.

**Essentials of successful foremanship**

What, then, are the essentials for a successful farm foreman? A number of years ago a study was made of the reactions of some of the seasonal farm workers in the Portland area. They were asked if they would want to work for the same farmers again another year, and why. The study resulted in the following list of descriptive terms as applied to the people they had worked under.

**A DESIRABLE FOREMAN**

- Cooperates with the worker
- Is friendly
- Is helpful
- Is fair and reasonable
- Has understanding
- Is firm when necessary
- Is generous
- Is appreciative
- "Treats me like a human being"

**AN UNDESIRABLE FOREMAN**

- Is uncooperative
- Is bossy
- Is irritable
- "Big I, little you"
- Is unwilling to help
- Is unfair and unreasonable
- Is uncertain
- Is pinch-penny
- Is unappreciative

These terms indicate that people like to work for foremen who are friendly and have leadership qualities.

Much more advancement has been made in training foremen for city industries than for farming. It is thought that human relationships will be about the same in any circumstances where foremen operate. Industrial studies indicate that good foreman leaders have certain ways of doing things the workers like. These methods may be partly outlined as follows:

**WHAT A SUCCESSFUL LEADER DOES**

1. Understands and likes people
2. Places each worker on the job he can do best
3. Anticipates workers' needs
4. Keeps employees informed of changes
5. Sells employees on the importance of their job
6. Gives praise when due
7. Handles grievances with quiet attention
8. Makes corrections constructive
9. Does not hesitate when correction is needed
10. When correcting a worker, opens his remarks with a question
11. Compares a worker’s accomplishments with a standard, not with other employees’
12. Criticizes methods but not intentions
13. Does not make corrections in public unless unavoidable
14. Is consistent
15. Is fair and square
16. Teaches and helps
17. Has a sense of humor but does not wisecrack

Leaders preferred

1. The boss drives his men; the leader coaches them.
2. The boss depends on authority; the leader on good will.
3. The boss inspires fear; the leader inspires enthusiasm.
4. The boss says I; the leader says we.
5. The boss assigns the task; the leader sets the pace.
6. The boss says “Get here on time”; the leader gets there ahead of time.
7. The boss fixes the blame for the breakdown; the leader fixes the breakdown.
8. The boss knows how it is done; the leader shows how.
9. The boss makes work a drudgery; the leader makes it a game.
10. The boss says “go”; the leader says “let’s go!” (The National County Agent and Extension Review, May 1947. Leaders Preferred, A. B. Graham.)

As we think about our experiences with the people who work for us and other foremen we know, we will doubtless discover that men have varying degrees of ability in labor management. Most of us can improve. The question is how.

Methods of handling labor can be improved

The first essential is to think through the troubles we have with our workers and determine what we can do about them.

Ask yourself these questions: Am I a boss or a leader? Are there some qualities of leadership which I can adopt to the benefit of myself and my workers? For instance, am I as helpful as I could be? Are my foremen good instructors?

Foremen can usually be placed in one of these three groups:
1. Those who put people to work without instruction.
2. Those who are natural teachers and are successful in getting people to work as they wish them to.
3. Those who try, but do not have much ability to put things across to their workers.
Each farm job should be analyzed

We must first understand the job we want to teach and be able to do it well enough to demonstrate it clearly to others. Each farm job to be taught should be analyzed. Any job can be broken down into (a) the important steps and (b) the key points to be observed under each step. Steps are the main parts of a job, arranged in consecutive order. Key points are the ways of doing each step. Thus, with picking strawberries—

Steps   Key Points
1. Assume position   1. Kneel on one knee
   2. Carrier in front of you
      a. Close to bushes being picked
      b. Closest to hand that carries and deposits the berries.
2. Select berries to be picked   1. Part leaves from top and center of plant to uncover berries. Select only ripe marketable fruit. Grasp the stem on which each berry grows with one hand, the thumb and forefinger close to the berry to be picked.
3. Picking the berry   1. With the thumb and first one or two fingers of the other hand, grasp the berry:
   a. If for fresh market, grasp just over the calyx or green top so the stem will be broken by pinching with thumb nail close to the berry and allow the calyx to remain with the berry. The stem should never be over \(\frac{1}{4}\)-inch long.
   b. If for the cannery, grasp just under the calyx so that it will be detached. Do not squeeze the berry so as to squash it. With thumb and forefinger twist the berry free of the calyx so that it rolls back into the palm of the hand. Do not break the main stem to detach immature or undesirable berries.

As soon as you know your job well enough to proceed with confidence and have equipment in order, you are ready to start instruction. This is usually best done when there are not over ten individuals in a group. Some persons in larger groups may have diffi-
culty seeing what you do or hearing you. Instructing one individual at a time is the most effective method.

**Steps in instructing workers**

Repeated trials have shown the following steps to be most effective in instructing workers.

**Step 1.** Prepare the worker.
- Put him at ease.
- Find out what he knows about the job.
- Explain importance of the job.
- Get him interested in learning the job.
- Place him in correct position.

**Step 2.** Teach him the job.
- Tell, show, illustrate, explain, and question carefully and patiently.
- Take up only one step at a time.
- Stress key points.
- Emphasize safety factors.

**Step 3.** Try him out.
- Have him do the job; correct him if necessary.
- Have him do the job again, explaining steps, key points, safety factors.
- Ask questions and prevent errors.
- Repeat until you know he knows.

**Step 4.** Follow up.
- Put him to work.
- Check often; encourage questions.
- Tell him where to get help.
- Explain what to do in an emergency.

Anyone following this procedure for the first time will need to think through and practice these steps with workers before he gets the best possible results.

It is important that any field supervisor be aware of individual differences in people when he tries to help them. One has to gain the confidence of many of his workers before progress toward improvement can be made. Some people are naturally slower than others and require more patience. Tact is necessary.

**Instruction pays off**

The question may have arisen: Will all of this effort pay? Early in the war period, a study was made in Marion County of the accomplishments of platoon children under supervision and
Foreman of a youth group discusses proper picking methods with two workers. Good instruction in harvesting such delicate crops as strawberries is a real saving for the farmer.

instruction as compared with children of similar ages and conditions not under platoon leaders. The study revealed that platoon children picked about 16 per cent more beans per day than nonplatoon children.

In November 1946 in Tulare County, California, during the cotton harvest, a test was run on Mexicans by the county farm labor office to determine the effectiveness of good training. Two groups of Mexicans were selected and put to work in the same cotton field under similar conditions. Group A, composed of 20 workers, was given excellent instruction in Spanish. Group B, composed of 19 workers, was set to its task by the grower’s experienced foreman. Neither group contained any individuals who had ever picked cotton before. Both groups were made up of representative members of a labor camp. Group A the first day picked an average of 21 pounds of cotton per hour. Group B averaged 15 pounds per hour. The group with good training was approximately 30 per cent more productive than the group handled in the traditional fashion.

By learning and following developed and tested rules for effective picking, average tomato pickers can increase their output by 16
to 20 per cent. The influence of individual practices on output is indicated by these experimental, field-checked results:

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<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Output Increase</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use both hands fully, keeping hands close together, rather than letting one hand remain idle</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fill each hand (2 or 3 tomatoes) before moving hand to hamper, rather than taking only 1 tomato per hand per trip</td>
<td>11%</td>
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Such examples show that effort given to improved instruction will pay the employer in the quantity and quality of the work done, and the worker in the amount he can earn per day. This means he will be better satisfied and more likely to stay.

Just as improvement can be made in instructional help, it can be made in the other phases of human relationships with which foremen and employers are constantly faced. But it cannot be done without thought, effort, and a willingness to make changes in ourselves and our ways of doing things.

**Farmers tell how field problems are met**

Many examples of how field problems have been successfully met have been given the writer by farmers during the discussion meetings that have been conducted. Such examples show the value of correct use of practical psychology in the hands of a conscientious foreman.

It is recognized that there are two sides to many of these problems. Workers also need to make changes, but the writer can conceive of no better place to start than with those of us who have workers in our charge. The conditions we provide and the things we do influence worker attitudes and accomplishments. We need to bear in mind that there are always many more workers to be helped than there are field supervisors. For this reason, it would appear that most of the workers must be reached through the employers and foremen.

Cooperation between the farm labor personnel, farmers, and workers will spell improvement in labor relationships to the mutual advantage of both employer and employee.