



# Great Lakes Fruit, Vegetable & Farm Market EXPO

## Michigan Greenhouse Growers EXPO

December 9 - 11, 2014

DeVos Place Convention Center, Grand Rapids, MI



## Labor

### Wednesday morning 9:00 am

**Where:** Gallery Overlook (upper level) Room A & B

**Moderator:** Ben Kudwa, Michigan Vegetable Council, Grand Ledge, MI

- 9:00 am      What Do Your Employees Say About You As A Manager? And How Might That Affect Their Work Performance?
- Phil Durst, Dairy and Beef Educator, MSU Extension, West Branch, MI
  - Stan Moore, Dairy & Human Resource Management Educator, MSU Extension, Bellaire, MI
- 9:45 am      Our Experience Using Seasonal Guestworker Programs
- Sarah Pion, H-2A Pilot Project, Michigan Farm Bureau, Paw Paw, MI
  - Mark Miezio, MSHS Board, Suttons Bay, MI
  - Katie Rasch, H-2A Pilot Project, Joe Rasch Orchards, Conklin, MI
  - Ken Forth, Vegetable grower and President of FARMS (Foreign Resource Management Service), Lynden, ON, Canada
- 10:30 am      Questions and Discussion
- 11:00 am      Session Ends

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What do your employees say about you as a manager?

*How might that affect their work performance?*



Phil Durst  
Stan Moore  
MSU Extension Sr. Educators

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Employee management

- Increased importance of employees on farms
- Daily care of animals, trees, bushes, etc. is performed by employees.
- Increase in number of Latino employees
- Farm work is hard, demanding work and can be long hours and repetitive work. Conditions can be less than ideal.

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Farm employees:

- The degree of success of the business depends on the management of employees.
- “Engaged” employees perform better.



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Engaged: a connection between an employee and employer which results in that employee giving *Voluntary* effort.

Charles Contreras  
Zoetis PeopleFirst

- Employees that work to get the desired results, not just to do the job;
- Employees that take initiative or ownership;
- Employees that are trustworthy;
- Employees that have a positive impact on the team as well as on the business;

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Employee management

- But many producers least like managing employees, lack training to do it better and feel inadequate at it.
- Some dairy owners think that Latino employees solve their labor problems.
- Many industry professionals say that the availability of Latino labor masks and magnifies problems in labor management.

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- Therefore, we designed a project to use employee feedback to make employee management recommendations and to help producers understand the perspectives of their employees.

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### Employee Management Project

- OK, it was dairy and you are not.
- But it is about managing people and you do that.
- The issues we identified may be common to the issues in your industry.

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### Employee Management Project

- 2012 initiated the project to improve employee management using what we learned from employee feedback.
- Work with owners who agree to contract with us
- 14 dairy farms enrolled to date in 4 states

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### Managing Farm Employees More Effectively

- Employees receive a paper copy (English or Spanish) of the survey (29 Q's) and instructed to call a bilingual interviewer.
- Interview employees about management
- Totally anonymous input
- Owners and managers surveyed also about what they think their employees will answer.

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- Look for common themes from employees
- Develop recommendations for owners & managers to improve employee management
- Provided written report and met with owners/managers to review report and recommendations

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### Dairy Employee Management Project

- 174/230 employees have called for interview (76% response rate)
- Our project was not intended to look at differences by ethnicity, but we had our interviewer collect that information.
 

Spanish-speaking:	(97)	56%
English-speaking:	(77)	44%

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### Main problems identified to date:

- Failure to provide training
- Failure to specify goals
- Failure to provide specific positive feedback
- Failure to encourage employee input
- Employee-to-employee problems and lack of communication

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### Training

- Essential for being able to meet standards and make better decisions
- Rate the frequency of training  
(1 = never, 2 = only when started, 3 = 1x/yr., 4 = every 3 mos., 5 = 1x/month)

Spanish-speaking: 2.94  
English-speaking: 2.86



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### Training

- Was it because they have little interest in learning?
- Employees were asked to rate their interest in learning on a scale of 1 – 5 where 1 = “already know enough to do my job”, and 5 = “I am interested in dairy and I want to learn more”

Employees: 4.73



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### Training:

- Employers were asked what their employees would respond to that question:

Employers: 3.27

Employers underestimated the interest of their employees in learning. Why?



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### Training:

- Must be applicable
- Must teach the “why”
- Must be progressive
- Must be repeated.
- “Tell the, show the, tell me, show me”



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### Goals:

- Because employees need context
- Because employees need standards
- Because goals move us to new levels
- Elements of “good” goals



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- We asked employees how familiar they were with the farm goals
- Then we asked employees to tell us some of the goals they remember
- We also asked owners and managers to tell us 3 goals of the operation



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- Guess what: employees aren't real good at stating the farm goals.
- Guess what, owners and managers are only a little better.

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- Quote from a Spanish-speaking employee in response to a question about their familiarity with the farm goals:

*"All the companies usually put (up) charts (with the company goals), but here there is nothing. We come here like donkeys to do what we are told to do."*

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**Key Performance Indicators (KPI's):**

We believe that in order for employees to be full team members that they need to know both the goal (or KPI) and the performance.

- Set them
- Communicate them
- Hold employees accountable to them

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**Specific feedback on employee performance:**

- Reinforces the standards you set
- Holds them accountable to those standards
- Enables them to improve

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Q: In the last 15 days how often have you received recognition and praise for good work?

1 = Not once did he/she recognize what I did well  
 5 = He/she praised and thanked me at least several times in the last 15 days

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Q: In the last 15 days how often have you received recognition and praise for good work?

37%	Rated it 1: Not once in the last 15 days
5%	Rated it 2
13%	Rated it 3
19%	Rated it 4
26%	Rated it 5

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Comments:

- “Negative = 5, Positive = 1”
- “Feedback is always negative, our job is (always) wrong.”
- “Positive – never; Negative – every week”
- “It seems that we never do a good job”
- “We normally don’t get stuff like that”

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Failure to create an environment encouraging employee input

Open-ended question (employees):  
*“How often do you come up with ideas to improve the operation (whether you share those or not)?”*

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What we think this question means:

- Are their minds engaged?
- Have they been encouraged with past ideas?
- Do owners/managers recognize the “gift” of working to improve the operation?

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*How often do you come up with ideas to improve the operation?*

Employee responses typically fall in one of three categories:

- Frequent ideas
- Infrequent ideas
- No ideas or Have ideas, but do not share

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*How often do you come up with ideas to improve the operation?*

**50% Frequent ideas**

- “I have ideas, they ask us for ideas to share too.”
- “Always thinking of things”
- “Quite often, if I see that I can make it better.”

**25% Infrequent ideas**

- “Once in a while. The other day I came up with an idea and shared it with the boss too”

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*How often do you come up with ideas to improve the operation?*

**25% No ideas or Have ideas, but do not share**

- “I come up with ideas but I don’t share them, as it is not my business, it’s always how they want to run it.”
- “I just do what they tell me to do.”
- “I have a lot of good ideas. I don’t share them because he thinks we are stupid. He is not open to hear new ideas.”
- “Sometimes I have ideas, but they never take my advice, they don’t care what we think or they don’t agree.”

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### Engagement

Frequency of ideas to improve the business:

	Spanish	English
Frequent	17.5%	40.3%
Occasional	43.2	45.5
"Disengaged"	39.2	14.3

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### Engagement

- Is it cultural or is it management related?
- Individual farm data where they had both Hispanic and English employees

	A	B	C	D	E	F
	N=6	n=13	n=13	n=13	n=10	n=6
Frequent	0	23	39	8	0	50
Occasional	17	54	31	62	50	17
"Disengaged"	83	23	31	23	50	33

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### Engagement

Therefore, we believe that good employee management is the primary factor determining whether employees on a farm are engaged or disengaged.

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### Problems between employees

- Rate the Teamwork within the dairy: 3.78
- Farm range: 2.71 – 4.83
- Communication problems between shifts
- Good employees want others to work hard
- Employees see it as the manager's role to hold employees accountable.

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- "There are some co-workers that don't do much hard work. They are always waiting for somebody else to do it. There is no communication."*
- "Certain people that are not working with each other. You can feel the tension."*
- Q: What would you change? *"Be more serious on who they hire, check their background."*

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### Employee to employee relations

- Employer can't force people to like each other, but they do have a role:
  - Involve employees in the interview process
  - Facilitate communication between shifts
  - Emphasize teamwork and helping each other, even at the end of a shift.
  - Hold employees accountable for results and methods.

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### Communication

- The language barrier is a big barrier on most dairies. Therefore, Spanish-speaking employees tend to be isolated from their employer and from English-speaking employees.

*"The owner sometimes comes near me and starts talking; I don't know if he is talking to me or to himself. I don't understand English."*

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### Demonstrate that you value employees

- Know their names
- Have them explain an area of management to visitors or new employees
- Praise them in front of others

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### What we've learned from farm employees:

- Employees can reveal the strengths and weaknesses of management
- Employees can help us understand how to increase their engagement
- Employees show us the roots of turnover and lower productivity

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*"The Employee Engagement Survey . . . helped us gain a better understanding of our strengths and opportunities as an employer. Our ownership team of five has different management styles that were yielding different results. This report allowed us to target areas to work on. It also gives us the opportunity to measure progress moving forward . . ." KS*

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*" . . . The most valuable thing we took from the project is that we need to better communicate our goals with our employees and help them improve by giving them tangible measurements of performance. I also think it was important that the employees know how much we value their input, and hopefully this survey helped accomplish this." L.H.*

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### Owners and managers can profit by listening to their employees:

- Managers need to be humble enough to listen
- Managers need to be wise enough to take it into account and act on it.

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We believe that good employee management:

- Involves all employees as team members
- Values the minds of employees
- Communicates goals and performance standards
- Provides meaningful and positive feedback
- Treats employees with respect and fairness.

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*Questions?*

*Thank you!*

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# The 2014 Michigan Farm Bureau Guestworker (H2A) Recruitment Pilot Program

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Michigan has been faced with a challenge to secure adequate labor for harvesting agriculture commodities (specifically, as it pertains to specialty crop production) over recent years. In response to our member and grower needs in the state, a guest-worker recruitment pilot program was created for the 2014 apple harvest. The federal H2A program was utilized by growers (with the support from Michigan Farm Bureau and MACMA) to recruit and bring in foreign guest-workers for this year's harvest.

A selected group of apple growers were invited to participate with the pilot program in its first year, during the spring of 2014. Several independent H2A service providers were researched and Mid-Atlantic Solutions (MAS) Labor, Inc. out of Virginia was selected to work with the pilot program. A meeting was held in late spring of 2014 with 18 interested, selected apple growers representing 9 farms. Farm Bureau staff, along with a program manager from MAS Labor were in attendance to explain the H2A and pilot program details to the growers. From the meeting, 5 apple growers expressed further interest and engaged in the pilot program. Please note, that 1 of the 5 farms later withdrew from the program due to 514 housing issues. The remaining four farms worked over the summer months with MAS Labor to submit applications to the Department of Labor to participate with the federal H2A program and request foreign guest-workers for the 2014 apple harvest. In the meantime, Farm Bureau staff were engaged in conducting on-farm housing reviews; H2A program compliance education; and assisting these farms with effective employment document implementation. 4 grower meetings were held with the pilot group over the summer months to ask questions, share ideas and learn more about how to best implement the H2A program requirements on their farms.

In early September, 90 guest-workers from Mexico arrived to begin harvesting apples for 4 west Michigan apple farms. Once workers arrived, Farm Bureau staff assisted the growers with conducting worker orientation and training sessions; assisted with translation services; and continued to monitor grower success within the H2A program. Farm Bureau staff also assisted with the coordination of bringing staff from the local social security office to a common location near the four farms to assist with the social security number application process for all H2A workers on the participating farms. Weekly visits were made to each farm to answer questions and assist the participating growers with any issues they may be having throughout the entire harvest season. Upon conclusion of apple harvest the foreign guest-workers all returned to their homes in Mexico. Workers began departing the last week in October through the first week in November.

A final evaluation and "wrap-up" meeting was held on November 11<sup>th</sup> with the participating program growers, along with Farm Bureau and MACMA staff. The growers were asked a series of questions and encouraged to provide their feedback on their experiences with the program. Overall, the program experiences were positive. Due to the quickness/fast pace of the application process and the complexity of the H2A program, the growers felt that having the ability to work with a service provider was important and crucial to their success.

Many growers felt that the workers had good work ethic and were very respectable to the farm and housing accommodations. In addition, the farms that utilized a "preferred list" of workers (many referred to them by current employees) were very satisfied with the experience of their workers. Even with the complexity of the program and additional paperwork and tasks required, many of the farms did comment that the H2A program is a viable option for their farms and plan to participate with the program for 2015.

In conclusion, the growers felt that overall the program was a success for their farms. They felt that the H2A program provided them a more consistent labor supply for their farms this year. They also felt that by bringing in H2A workers to the area, there was a “competition” created for domestic workers to work harder and perform better, thus creating an overall better labor force for the area farms (higher production and improved quality). A majority of the growers participating with the pilot program this year, plan to work through the H2A program next year to secure their labor force and are expected to increase the number of workers requested.

