

Sustainable Agriculture Skill Panel Forum
March 6, 2012
Recruitment & Retention of Workers

Chair: Serena Chamberlain

Facilitators: Beth Sanders

Recorders: Phyllis Dayao and Jessica Tamaribuchi

Discussion Outline:

- I. Introductions: Why are we here?
 - II. Setting the Context Discussion:
 - a. What is the current state of communication between educational entities and the agricultural industry on recruitment and retention of workers?
 - b. What is the current state of labor and labor shortages affecting recruitment and retention of workers?
 - III. Preferred Vision in 10-20 Years: Best Case Scenario
 - IV. Develop Priorities
 - a. What are the opportunities or supporting forces that will move us closer to our best case scenario/vision?
 - b. What are the barriers or restraints that hold us back from moving closer to our best case scenario/vision?
 - V. Outline Actions for Priorities (time permitting)
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I. Introductions: Why are we here?

- Start an Ag program in West Hawaii
- Need to put farmers and workers together; appropriate job match
- LEP, ESL is an issue
- Recruiting is an issue
- Growing farmers as an initiative
- Learn about Ag labor
- From Kauai, came to learn about forum in anticipation of event in Kauai
- Keep farmers locally
- To learn about topics (WHEA students)
- Labor law
- Recruitment and retention of Ag teachers is very important to education; current Ag teachers are retiring and there is a need to replace them
- Learn what farmers need in terms of employment
- What career opportunities are available for youth
- Find better solutions to hiring people and seasonal employees. Coffee picking season is getting longer so we need more workers
- Sustainable workforce over 10-20 years

II. Setting the Context Discussion

What is the current state of communication between educational entities and the agricultural industry on recruitment and retention of workers?

- Where can we get stable workers? Can we pair farmers with workers?
- Networking – WDD and job training internships for youth to get them excited about Ag and farming; being pro-active to determine if this is the career they'd like to pursue
- There is none (state of communication) at this time that addresses issue of recruitment and retention for this industry
- College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR) and University of Hawaii studies and data do not connect in some respects; need to work on connecting the two
- Communication in terms of finding skilled labor is zero
- Have looked at Altres Employment Agency, but their focus is not on Ag
- Department of Education (DOE) is straying away from the technical aspects relating to Ag. Membership in Future Farmers of America (FFA) have decreased. FFA program ends at 12th grade level; there is no continuity; there is a communication breakdown between DOE and industry
- Kapolena project to begin in mid-April has internships
- Unskilled, seasonal workers – when one employee leaves the others follow; it is hard to retain workers
- DOE and schools do not seem to incorporate Ag farming into education curriculum. This results in recruiting from outside; however, this is not a good match
- Seasonal workers versus long-term employees
- Sustainability in the County's community development plan. The goal is 50% sustainable by 2015 in Kohala. Need to go back to origins. How do we make farming attractive?

What is the current state of labor and labor shortages affecting recruitment and retention of workers?

- Lack of unskilled and skilled labor
- Money/pay is not attractive; minimum wage laws for Ag are confusing
- Seasonal work makes it hard to retain employees
- Industry is not well organized
- Labor laws are confusing – at what point to pay for health insurance, other benefits is unclear
- There is a need for trained workers
- Language is often a barrier
- Economics
- Variety of farmers' needs
- Change in agriculture – farm to production

- Marketing
- Some find the work is too simple and boring, which makes retention difficult
- Need training program for coffee farming
- Picking coffee is too hard work for the pay
- Engage workers more in whole process so work is more meaningful; create incentives and pride in the farm they work at
- Profit-sharing for employees is an incentive; need to increase profit margin
- Is there a future workforce?
- Providing housing can help take care of workers' needs
- Need to expose workers to different aspects of the business and involve them more
- Workers need to be educated about labor laws
- Employers/farmers need to be in compliance with labor laws and compensation
- Farmers need to be educated about state laws and requirements to encourage/help their businesses to expand
- Regulatory incentives are needed to reward farmers; i.e., through tax system, scale regulation and enforcement to even the playing field, and encourage farms to stay in business

III. Preferred Vision in 10-20 Years: Best Case Scenario

10-20 years from now, from a workforce development perspective, what is the best case scenario for recruitment and retention of workers?

- Focus on finding local workers first
- An organization facilitating learning, i.e., Ma'ō, will create a pool of workers who learn on the farm; there will be community programs to support learning on the farm
- Project management will be used for crop development and diversification; horticultural skills will be integrated with other skills, i.e., project management, business, marketing, management
- High schools will address the need for Ag workers; put an academy in every school, similar to Construction Academy program, funded by the legislature
- A program will exist to stimulate more small farmers
- Project management will have a strategy that fills gaps between seasons; making farm workers employed year-round
- Farmers will have multi-skills
- FFA will be brought back as a resource
- Chambers of Commerce will focus on Ag
- School curriculum will focus on Ag from K-16
- School curriculum will teach an understanding of profit from early on through entrepreneurial activities and business plans
- Local students will stay here; we will keep what was learned here, i.e., will have a local program similar to WWOOF (World-wide workers on organic farms)
- The public will understand and value Ag products; branding
- Local Ag will feed the community; link with other resources for a common goal, i.e. WIB

- Farmers will be able to compensate workers in order that they can make a living wage with both farmers and workers keeping up with American lifestyle
- Optimal use of Workforce Development and other governmental agencies

IV. Develop Priorities

<i>What are the opportunities or supporting forces that will move us closer to our best case scenario/vision?</i>	<i>What are the barriers or restraints that hold us back from moving closer to our best case scenario/vision?</i>
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**Priority 1: Improve Image: Make Agriculture a Desirable Profession (Cluster A)
(7 of 7 votes)**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ag is a “hot topic” now—keep momentum • State focus on “buying local” and consumer focus on cooking • Plantation and agriculture legacy • Farmers desire to focus on local workforce • Can use branding to change the perception of the community; helping view Ag as a noble and valuable profession 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception of low pay and lack of benefits for farm workers • Older generations told their children to go to college so they would not have work on a farm • Plantation and agriculture legacy • Size—limited land in islands; there is little to no image of large farms existing in Hawaii
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**Priority 2: Take Advantage of Best Practices, Training and Education (Cluster C)
(7 of 7 votes)**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction Academy programs (partnership of Hawaii CC and DOE made possible by State Legislature) can be a model for Ag Academies • Current shift in education students about AG at a young age, i.e. elementary school gardens; Kohala Center School Garden project • Huiana Program educating students and teachers (K-12) about range of opportunities in AG and growth potential • Can learn from other industries, i.e. look at other industries to see how they recruit and retain workers; adapt successful management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Colleges do not currently give credit for internships and do not have a viable internship program • Lack of integration in skills of farmers and farmer workers • Farmers most likely have not had training in how to be a good manager • Farmers need skill set enabling them to start and maintain their own business • Some farmers do not have the skills needed to do crop development research • There is no coordinated effort on what should be grown; nothing to stop overproduction of some crops
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<p>strategies used by other industries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have university and community college resources locally which can be used to train farmers with integrated skills 	<p>and underproduction of others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average farmer may not have the knowledge or resources to maximize land use; i.e. windmill, biofuels • Lack of integrated planning • Need to take inventory of what is needed by local consumers, how much is needed and then grow it locally • Longevity – knowing products will be available in the long term
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Priority 3: Foster Political Interest and Cooperation (Cluster B)
(7 of 7 votes)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Labor and Industrial Relations and Department of Agriculture have a collaborative relationship; their willingness to work together is beneficial to Ag • Need to establish enforcement priorities to level the playing field 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is lots of red tape which makes it difficult for farms to be profitable • Lack of scaled regulation and enforcement • Government agencies do not have the staffing needed to level the playing field between farms • Reduced funding has resulted in the reduction of important programs such as FFA • Lack of information and data on what is being grown locally and what is needed locally; providing farmers with such data could reduce the need for imported products • Restrictive market access • Blocked contracts
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V. Outline Actions for Priorities

Priority 1: Improve Image: Make Agriculture a Desirable Profession

- Make use of “Farm to Table” being a hot topic
- Utilize the local food movement to help develop a brand which will get the public to understand and value locally grown products
- State and county focus on “buying local” and cooking make Ag a more acceptable occupation
- Make it possible and known that there is a future in agriculture.

- Improve pay and benefits for farm workers while still making it possible for farmers to make an acceptable profit margin.

Priority 2: Take Advantage of Best Practices, Training and Education

- Integrate agriculture education and training throughout K-12, as well as colleges and universities.
- Develop internship programs where high school and college students can earn credit by participating in internships on farms
- Create more opportunities for management training for farmers for a better understanding of administering and complying with labor laws and for establishing programs and practices to help retain a quality workforce
- Establish or utilize an existing organization, such as the Farm Bureau, to have a pool of trained agricultural workers and coordinate seasonal employment. The agency can provide all the same services like a staffing agency.
- Utilize existing incumbent worker programs like ETF
- Build curriculum for a certified training program for trained coffee workers

Priority 3: Foster Political Interest and Cooperation

- Implement a minimum wage that is livable for farm workers
- Level the regulatory playing field by having scalable regulation such as with workers compensation and health insurance
- Provide incentives for farmers who are in compliance
- Increase funding for school-related programs focused on agriculture, such as FFA
- Create outreach programs from the government agencies, both for the benefit of the farmers and the agencies so that the agencies will have a better understanding of the changing farming and ranching environment. Educate state and county workers about what farms are doing.
- Produce data on what is grown locally and what is needed locally so farmers will know what to grow, eliminating over production and zero production
- Develop regulations that will help Ag be a “good job” for both the farmer and the farm worker
- Provide funding for an Ag program similar to Construction Academy program which allows high school students to earn college credit while taking Ag classes