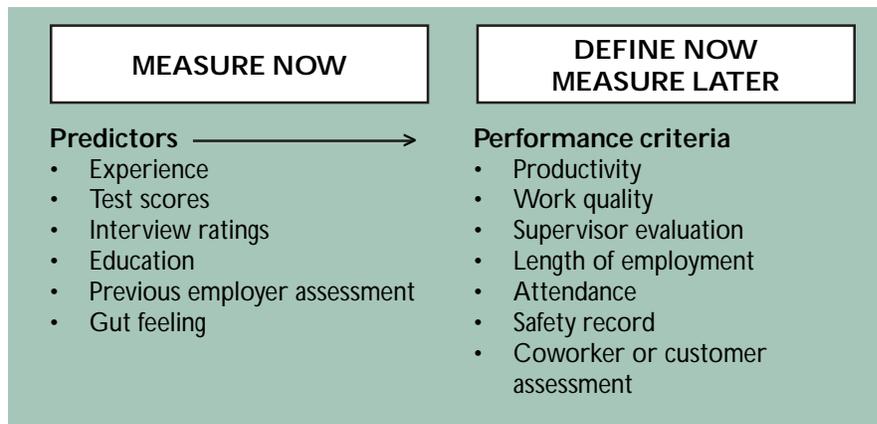


## Employee Selection as Prediction

In some cases, employers want to optimize the current fit between applicant abilities and position requirements. In others, they seek worker potential — less what employees can do today than how they will grow to function after assuming their jobs and for some time to come. In either case, the selection decision is one of prediction (Figure 3.3). If characteristics observable or measurable today are known to be lead indicators of performance on the job tomorrow—in such terms as units per hour, attendance, safety record, length of service, and supervisor’s evaluation — they make good selection criteria.

The relationship of such predictors to subsequent performance is called selection “validity,” and plaintiffs may call it into question when charging employers with illegal discrimination in hiring. Both legally and logically, for example, an employer ought not select for the highest level of education or the largest biceps available, regardless of job requirements. That could be just as illegally discriminatory as hiring only people born in Wyoming, or with black hair, or related to left-handed irrigators from Yakima. It is important to use predictive selection criteria only if there is strong reason to believe they are associated with good future performance of the job.

Figure 3.3. Selection as predicting performance.



## Layoff and Recall Priorities

Just as approaches to employee selection range from casual to systematic, so do layoff and recall decisions. The coming and going of seasonal tasks in most agricultural operations translates to fluctuations in need for labor and thus the coming and going of people. Decisions about whom to lay off before whom else, and whom to recall first when activity increases again have important consequences. They not only determine who is left to complete the remaining work but also affect everybody’s perceptions of management.

Two criteria that may be used in systematizing the layoff order are “merit”

and seniority. Although many employers would like to retain the stronger (more meritorious) workers, workers tend to prefer use of seniority as a more objective and acceptable basis for rights to continue or resume employment. Considering the operational and employee relations impacts of layoff/recall policy is particularly important for employers with large or frequent seasonal swings in production activity.



***To avoid over-reliance on chance or intuition, there are several steps to build into the selection process.***

## Steps in a Hiring Process

Employee selection evokes the concept of matching. Fitting people with jobs involves working with information, both about jobs and about people, and multiple sources are available for each (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4. Sources of information for selection decisions.

About the job	About applicants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guesswork</li> <li>• Own knowledge</li> <li>• Supervisor</li> <li>• Incumbents</li> <li>• Job description and specification</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biographical data forms (application, resume)</li> <li>• Tests</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• References</li> <li>• Physical examinations</li> </ul>

Employers may go through few or many steps, in various orders, to hire a person. To avoid over-reliance on chance or intuition, there are several steps to at least consider building into the selection process:

1. Define the objective and set a schedule to meet it.
2. Describe the job to be filled.
3. Decide who will conduct further steps.
4. Recruit potential applicants.
  - a. Advertise the opening.
  - b. Solicit referrals.
  - c. Conduct informal preliminary interviews.
5. Collect applications and other expressions of interest.
6. Screen applicants and inform those not to be considered.
7. Interview candidates.
8. Test candidates.
9. Check references of top candidates.
10. Decide on first and backup choice for job offer.
11. Extend provisional offer.
  - a. If accepted, confirm terms of employment and start date.

- b. If not accepted, extend backup offer or reconsider other candidates.
12. Confirm physical condition and eligibility for employment.
13. Orient new employee to the organization and job.

Family farm operators or other managers at an early stage of deciding whether, no less how, to hire a new employee, may see a range of possibilities for coping with an excessive workload. They could, for example, seek:

- A short-term employee to perform specific projects such as yard cleanup, a construction project, stone picking, or similar tasks
- A part-time employee to perform specific tasks on a regular basis, such as feeding animals in the morning
- A full-time seasonal employee to perform specific or a wide range of duties throughout the production season
- A permanent employee to perform an assortment of seasonal duties throughout the year

Reflecting on questions like the following should help clarify the recruitment goal:

1. For what type and timing of work do we need help?
2. What kind of payback could we expect from the addition of hired labor?
3. Do we have sufficient cash flow to pay the type of person needed?
4. Could any job(s) created keep the interest of an able, motivated employee?
5. Do we have sufficient skills and patience to train, supervise, and evaluate an employee?



## Clarifying the Job Content

No matter how the information about a job is obtained, having or putting it into the form of a written job description lays a foundation for recruitment, selection, and management later on. What is a job description? It is simply a verbal sketch of a given job—its purpose, content, and attributes or characteristics of the people likely to perform it well. Some firms also use the job description to formally state such terms of employment as pay, benefits, and performance standards.

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***Fitting people with jobs involves working with information—about jobs and about people.***



## Anatomy of a Job Description

Typical elements of written job descriptions are as follows:

**Job title:** Descriptive of the job content.

**Summary description:** A one- or two-sentence overview of the position and its role in the organization.

**Duties and responsibilities:**

**Essential functions:** The core of the job, tasks, and responsibilities tied to the very reason the job exists. Examples of duties that the incumbent must perform, with or without a reasonable accommodation for any disability.

**Other functions:** Duties and responsibilities that may be related to the essential functions but are not central to the position.

**Qualifications required and preferred:** The abilities, skills, knowledge, and other attributes (e.g., possession of a license, willingness to travel) that are needed to perform the functions of the job. Also referred to as the “job specification,” these physical and mental qualifications are job-related criteria for reasonable and lawful discrimination among applicants.

**Skills and abilities:**

**Knowledge:**

**Experience:**

**Certification or training:**

**Other:**

**Relationships:** Identification of the position or person to whom the incumbent reports, and of others to whom the incumbent is connected in work flow. Gives the position’s location in the organization. Responsibility for supervising others is generally in the section on essential or other functions.

**Special conditions of work:** Any aspects of the work environment that may significantly affect the incumbent and are not obvious from the job title or description of functions (e.g., unusual or varying schedule of work, high noise level, other hazards, equipment used, rapidly changing technology necessitating continuous learning, requirement to supply own tools).

**Acknowledgment of understanding:** Signatures of employee and supervisor or other management representative.

## Value of Job Descriptions

The shape and requirements of the job, as detailed in the description, drive the collection of job-relevant information about applicants. Descriptions save time for potential applicants as well as for employers. When shown or read the description and specification for an open job, many people self-select themselves out of the running for lack of interest or qualification. At best, the grossly unqualified applicant would have wasted some of the farmer's time. At worst, he or she could have been hired and wasted a \$20,000 machine. Of course, not all unqualified applicants will drop out of the running for a job needed to support a family.

Job descriptions are also useful in other aspects of farm labor management. They serve as important references when an employee, applicant, or government agency challenges a hiring or other employment decision. Descriptions are even sometimes requested by agencies investigating disputes that are not resolved internally. The listing of a job's duties and responsibilities has taken on extra significance with the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990. The ADA prohibits discrimination against individuals who have physical or mental disabilities that may limit a "major life activity" but that, if reasonably accommodated, would not keep them from performing essential job functions. It gives weight to the employer's judgment as to what functions of a job are essential, especially if stated in a written description prepared for recruitment or selection. Naturally, employers who have not identified the essential functions of a job in question are at a disadvantage when attempting to defend against challenges of their employment decisions under the ADA. More information on the ADA is at [AgHelpWanted.org](http://AgHelpWanted.org).

### The Difference a Job Description Can Make

Two friends were talking about experiences with their respective employers. Which farm would you rather work for? Which one do you think uses written job descriptions?

N: "A sign at the coffee shop said, 'Help wanted at 4Bar Ranch' and I was out of work at the time. I went over there to check it out. The place seemed okay and the person in the office was nice, so I put in an application."

N: "When I had an interview, we talked a lot about what I liked to do, where I went to high school, my hobbies, and my previous jobs. They kept telling me that I was the right kind of guy for the place, and that I would get along well with the other people there."

J: "I had just started looking for a full-time job maintaining and fixing tractor engines, and my brother showed me an ad in the paper recruiting for a mechanic. The ad had a lot of details about what the job was responsible for and what they wanted in a new hire. The job looked like a real good fit for me."

J: "During the interview they asked me several questions about engines and maintenance procedures and about my experience in relation to all the different tasks that were part of this job. Guess they wanted to be sure that I knew certain things and had the skills needed to do the work."

**N:** “It was very confusing to me when I started to work there because I wasn’t sure what I should be doing. I went to ask the lady in charge of the shop, but she didn’t seem to have much of an idea either. So I spent some time floating to see where I could pitch in and help.”

**N:** “When it came time for my annual review, my boss told me that my appearance was good, my attitude was okay, and that they had no problems with my work so far. She said that I was fitting in all right and would be getting a \$.20 an hour raise.”

**N:** “I am making more money than I did in my old job, but only by a little, and I’m working a lot harder. I am pretty sure that other people here who do similar things as me make more, but I don’t know how come. There’s this other guy, Jack, who I’m often told to work with on short-term tasks, and he makes a lot more.”

**N:** “I had an accident, dropped a chain saw on my foot. The doctor said I could work at different things as long as I didn’t stand for too long until my foot got better. I asked my boss if I could come back to work and do something else for awhile, but he said he couldn’t be sure that I’d be able to stay off my feet. Said he didn’t think it would work for me to come back until I was all healed.”

**J:** “My first day, a supervisor showed me around, introduced me to other people on the shift, and set me up at a station with a few tasks to start on. Later he came by with a list of things that I would be expected to take care of regularly. No real surprises, but it was nice to have it in that form. I knew who to go to with questions and how long it was supposed to take me to get the different things done.”

**J:** “When it came time for my review, my supervisor gave me a list of all my job tasks and objectives, and she asked me to think about how each of them was going, so that we could talk about it in a few days. At that meeting we discussed each area, a couple of things that I needed to do more carefully, a new way of reporting time spent on different tasks, and what I would have to learn to deal with some new equipment that was on order. At the end, she told me that with my performance rating I would get a middle-range raise of \$.20 an hour. She also told me what I would have to do to earn the maximum raise next time around.”

**J:** “My pay rate is for a mechanic level 2. At the third level, mechanics are responsible for more complex procedures, but they make \$1 an hour more than me. I’ll need other skills and more experience to get promoted to that level. I feel good about what I earn, because similar mechanic jobs that I see ads for don’t seem to pay quite as much.”

**J:** “After I had my foot injury, the doctor told me which of my normal tasks I could keep doing without danger and which I had to avoid for a few weeks. He spelled out some temporary restrictions and guidelines to follow. I talked to my boss about them, and he suggested altering my job temporarily. It was great that I could work while my foot was healing.”



While written descriptions may be of use in defending against charges of wrongful management action, their most important benefits are realized through better management decisions and employer-employee relations. The job description is a practical, relatively simple tool that supports communication every day

They are helpful, particularly in:

- **Recruitment.** Job announcements based on written descriptions that clearly outline functions and requirements give potential candidates a reasonable basis for deciding whether or not to apply, and they tend to attract a more suitable pool.
- **Selection.** In identifying the abilities and knowledge needed to perform a job, the job description helps supervisors and others who hire to focus on job-relevant criteria when choosing from the applicants.
- **Wage and salary administration.** Setting a pay rate in relation to other jobs within the company and similar jobs in other companies requires more of a basis for comparison than job title alone. The job description provides it.
- **Orientation.** Guided by a job description, supervisors can better anticipate what employees new to the company or the job need to know and help them minimize adjustment time. Employees can learn about their responsibilities both from a written description and by asking questions when reading the description.
- **Performance appraisal and employee development.** The statement of duties in a job description is the basis for evaluating employees with respect to actual performance dimensions rather than personal attributes or traits. It puts the discussion of an employee's capabilities, talents, strengths, deficiencies, and advancement aspirations into the context of the current job and other opportunities within the company. Job descriptions also may be used to inform employees of typical promotional sequences and requirements.
- **Workers' compensation claim management.** Before recommending that an injured employee return to work, a treating physician needs to know about the normal demands of the employee's job. In addition, if provided with a written job description, the physician who treats an employee under workers' compensation insurance may be able to detect links between injuries and job functions that could be redesigned.

A common objection to the use of written job descriptions stems from concern about losing flexibility to manage, especially when technology or other conditions are changing. Understandably, managers do not want their written words to restrict their right to direct what workers do on the job or how they do it. The



legendary, “that’s not in my job description,” however, does not have to be a problem to any employer making reasonable assignments to workers. In fact, the employee who does not have a written job description may be more likely to feel that a foreman’s directive is overstepping rightful bounds.

Wording within a description can advise employees that they are expected to adapt to new methods when introduced or to perform related tasks, even if not specified, that contribute to overall operations. Subheading the list of job functions as “*Examples of Duties*” (or of Major Functions) conveys a similar message.

An examination of the job, or a “job analysis,” is the logical precursor to writing a job description. Like other aspects of personnel management, a job analysis may be conducted through various methods that range in formality and complexity. Common to all the methods is the gathering of information about a job. Some managers may feel so close to all operations that they draw solely on their own knowledge (of an existing job) or vision (for a new position) when writing job descriptions. Most, however, rely on or supplement their initial understanding with information collected through systematic observation, interviews with employees, worker activity logs, or other forms of incumbent reports. Whether coming from the manager, job incumbent, immediate supervisor, coworker, an office staff member, a consultant, or others, collection of information to be summarized in the written description is essential.

## Writing Job Descriptions

Many employers do not use written job descriptions because the task of developing them looms too large or uncertain. References that lower this barrier, however, are readily available. Though not a substitute for descriptions specific to positions in a given organization, generic references that describe similar jobs can serve as models and help in launching local job analyses with which to modify them.

Examples of agricultural job descriptions that are online at [AgHelpWanted.org](http://AgHelpWanted.org) can be expanded and tailored to individual company circumstances. They are presented as starting points, working drafts for you to further develop and refine to fit your operation.

Following are tips for writing effective job descriptions:

- Make it simple, clean, and factual.
- Resist overstating or exaggerating job importance and requirements.
- Keep the duties/functions and qualifications in different sections.
- Begin each duty/function with an active verb.
- List functions in order of either significance or portion of work time spent.

- In identifying “essential functions,” consider these criteria:
  - Portion of time spent performing the function
  - Purpose for very existence of the job
  - Necessity for the incumbent of this job, rather than of any other, to perform the function
    - \* Consequences of removing the function from this job
    - \* Special expertise required to perform the function
- Develop the description in coordination with a current or recent incumbent.
- Review with the employee(s) after every revision.
  - Answer questions about it, and discuss the need for any changes.
  - Ask to indicate understanding by signing.
  - Provide a copy to employee.
  - Check each year or two for continued accuracy.



### “Jobless” Organizations?

In a world where business arrangements and technologies change fast, the mix of tasks in a job also has to change. Sometimes change is so rapid that the organization seems to not really have definable jobs. So, the classical selection strategy of identifying the tasks that make up a job and then finding people who can perform those tasks does not always work well. Managers have to be prepared either to constantly update those job descriptions or to define jobs more generally in the first place, putting emphasis on operational results and the resourcefulness to learn whatever it takes to achieve them, instead of method-specific skills.

Agricultural operators holding this view are likely to find *worker*-oriented job definitions and selection procedures much more useful than *work*-oriented procedures. They would put emphasis on finding people with positive attitudes and on assessing basic competencies, knowledge, skills, and ability to learn and adapt, rather than abilities to perform specific tasks. Even if the task content and core responsibilities of a job evolve with changing circumstances, however, a core set of qualifications needed to perform the job may be rather stable. Focusing on a basic range of skills, aptitudes, and versatility also makes sense when the employment timeframe is mid- or long-term and the farm seeks someone with potential for movement through a family of jobs.

This is not to say that job analyses and descriptions are not useful when job content is dynamic, but that care is needed to give them suitable levels of breadth, depth, and flexibility.

Below is a sample job description for the position of Herd Manager on a dairy farm.

### Sample Job Description

**Job Title:** Dairy Herd Manager

**Summary:** Responsible for overall daily, weekly, and seasonal management of the dairy herd, including milking, herd health, and breeding. Supervises employees and plans feeding program in cooperation with farm owner.

**Duties and Responsibilities (essential):** Oversee and participate in all aspects of herd management, including milking, monitoring health of cows, breeding, and raising replacements. Plan and implement feeding program in consultation with farm owner. Supervise three or four other dairy employees who milk, feed, and care for cattle.

**Minor Functions:** Assist with field work and/or machinery maintenance as time permits, especially during peak periods of planting and harvesting.

**Direct Supervisor:** Farm owner

#### **Qualifications**

**Knowledge, Skills and Abilities:** Knowledge of cow physiology, life cycle, and factors affecting health and milk production. Understanding of and ability to work with modern milking equipment and automated feeding system. Ability to organize and maintain herd health and breeding records. Ability to communicate well with and to train milking staff.

**Experience:** At least three years experience managing a dairy herd.

**Education and Training:** Associate's degree from an agricultural or technical school with a major in animal production or a closely related agricultural field. Bachelor's degree preferred.

**Safety Qualification:** First aid certificate and ambulance safety certification preferred.

#### **Conditions**

**Salary Range:** \$450 to \$600 per week, depending on qualifications

**Work Hours:** 5:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., with two one-hour breaks per full day

**Days Off Per Week:** 1.5

**Other Benefits:** House in very good condition plus paid utilities. Two weeks paid vacation after one year.

**Work Environment:** Modern 200-cow freestall operation with 500 acres of field crops.

## Recruiting

It is common in agriculture, as in other industries, to capitalize on the flow of information through friendship and kinship networks. Word of mouth from current employees is the primary channel for recruiting new ones to field crew jobs. Job seekers who become aware of possible openings may first approach crew foremen or field supervisors about employment, sometimes accompanied by a relative or friend already on the payroll. Those without a personal introduction can become “walk-in” recruits by showing up at the work site, company office, or known pick-up points in the morning.

Naturally, more workers come looking for jobs at businesses known as “good places to work.” Earning a reputation for fairness and respect is probably the most effective way of getting a leg up in recruitment, especially when the labor market is tight. Some growers who recognize the power of social networks in recruiting go out of their way not only to develop personal relations with their employees during periods of seasonal work activity but also to show them courtesies and stay in touch with them in Mexican home villages during the off-season.

Written and radio notices also reach many potential employees. Either method requires preparing some kind of job advertisement, ideally based on a job description. Length, language, and placement of a recruiting ad depend on the nature of the job to be filled. When aiming to fill a management position, for example, it is sensible to use farm magazines, major newspapers, or college placement offices. When recruiting for an entry production position, the ad is better placed in local papers, high school bulletin boards, community centers, other agricultural businesses, and service centers.

An effective recruiting ad informs, promotes interest, and encourages self-screening. To do so, it ought to include a descriptive job title, overview of major responsibilities, pay range, required and preferred qualifications, application deadline, employer identification, contact instructions, and any information about the company that may distinguish it as a good place to work — available housing, company values, bonus and advancement opportunities, etc. The three examples below obviously would have different effects on a given reader’s inclination to apply.

### Three Ads for the Same Job

**#1. Wanted:** Hired worker. Phone 123-456-7890

**#2. Wanted:** Person for general farm work, full-time, on a beef and crop farm. Requires two years farm experience beyond high school. Good wage and benefit package. Call 123-456-7890 before March 31.

**#3. Good with plants and animals?** Oak Bluff Farms has an opening for a person to assist the owner/operator in management and production of beef and crops. The position offers considerable variety and opportunity for growth. At least two years farm experience or equivalent and/or ag education beyond high school required. Pay and benefit package among the best in the county, exact wage to be based on applicant’s experience and training. Write for application to Oak Bluff Farms (address) or come to farm and request an application form. Please apply before March 31, or call 123-456-7890 for additional information.

Suggestions for writing job ads are to: (1) adopt a natural, friendly style, (2) use large type and graphics to highlight the job title, (3) start off with a catchy opening line or phrase, and (4) make the job sound as interesting as possible without creating unreasonable expectations. Which of the three ads for the same job would lead the most people to apply?

Following are two informative recruiting ads found on company websites (names changed). The first announces one managerial job opening, the second several production and administrative jobs.



**Wolf River Farms**, the region's leading employer, has an immediate salaried opening in Human Resources for an Employment Supervisor supporting the Orchards Division. The position monitors the hiring of approximately 400 seasonal orchard employees annually, oversees the orchard recruitment process to ensure legal hiring practices, and travels to neighboring states on occasional recruiting trips. Requirements include a bachelor's degree in human resources or related field or at least five years equivalent experience, bilingual ability in English/Spanish, and excellent interpersonal skills with cultural awareness. For more information, visit our website at [www.wrf.not](http://www.wrf.not). Interested applicants are urged to submit a resume by e-mail to [jobs@wrf.not](mailto:jobs@wrf.not).



#### Current Employment Opportunities at Murray Nursery

- Production
- Propagation
- Landscape Services
- Delivery Driver
- Office Personnel
- Sales Representative

#### Production

Seeking individuals who are self-motivated, willing to work hard, and are anxious to grow with our company and fellow employee-owners in the general production areas of our nursery.

**Desired Skills and Experience:** Willingness to work hard, love of plants, and good communication skills.



### Propagation

Seeking individuals who are self-motivated, willing to work hard, and are anxious to grow with our company and fellow employee-owners, in the propagation areas of our nursery.

**Desired Skills and Experience:** Love of plants, dedication, and willingness to work hard. Agricultural or horticultural background would be beneficial but not necessary.

### Landscape Services

Landscape crew leaders and laborers needed for seasonal, as well as full-time year-round positions.

**Desired Skills and Experience:** Must possess plant material knowledge, ability to operate equipment and motivate work crew. For laborers, experience is beneficial, but not required. CDL beneficial, but not necessary.

### Delivery Driver

Murray Nursery Company is looking for seasonal employees to work in a demanding job, yet be home every night. Full-time employment may be available to the right individual.

**Desired Skills and Experience:** Must have a good driving record, ability to read maps and directions and lift heavy plant material. Pre-employment drug screen and physical required.

### Office Personnel

Seasonal data entry operators.

**Desired Skills and Experience:** Proficiency in all areas of data entry including ability to work independently, to trouble-shoot problems, and to communicate effectively.

### Sales Representative

Should have a broad-based agri-related background. Will secure leads and interviews for residential and commercial landscape services in a designated Midwestern sales territory.

**Desired Skills and Experience:** Business courses, sales experience, horticulture and landscape design courses.

## H-2A Agricultural Work Visas

The H-2A program is a vehicle by which agricultural employers facing a certified labor shortage may recruit workers abroad to work on a temporary basis (less than one year). It was codified in the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 as one of the mitigations to potential effects of the new ban on hiring unauthorized workers. The program permits issuance of work visas only if and after the Department of Labor (DOL) certifies that a local labor shortage exists after the employer actively recruits locally and through the interstate public job service. H-2A rules specify several conditions of the employment contract, including wage, transportation, and housing provisions.

In recent years Congress has considered legislative proposals that would significantly revise or augment the H-2A program. Detailed information and forms related to the H-2A program are available from DOL and updates on proposed rule changes from the USDA Labor Affairs Coordinator, both available at *AgHelpWanted.org*.



***What knowledge, abilities, and other characteristics would a person have to possess to be suited for the job?***

## Assessing Applicants

In getting ready to assess applicants, employers need to be clear about (1) what the job qualifications are, and (2) how to get information about whether individuals possess them. The list of functions, duties, and responsibilities on a job description states what the position incumbent will have to do. What would the employer need to know about applicants to decide whether they are capable of performing the job? What knowledge, abilities, and other characteristics would a person have to possess to be suited for the job? Answering these questions translates the job *description* into a job *specification*, or list of qualifications, which usually becomes a section of the description document. The description characterizes a job, the specification a person.

Suppose a business needs to fill a position with the duties shown in Figure 3.5. It can afford neither the time nor other resources to train an unskilled person. A department manager wants someone who can do the job right now. What are the characteristics of a well-qualified applicant? And once those characteristics or qualifications are established, how could the employer determine whether applicants possess them? Systematic approaches to employee selection depend on information that measures applicants on criteria related to requirements of the job. Casual approaches are not designed to carefully sort workers according to qualifications, so the information requirements—and the costs of meeting them—are less.

Through what sources can information be obtained about the degree to which individuals possess each of the qualifications in a job specification? A combination of sources (Figure 3.4, p. 74) is needed to develop information on

**Figure 3.5. Greenhouse worker job duties.**

**Summary:** Plant, cultivate, and harvest horticultural specialties, and perform related duties essential to production of flowers and shrubs in a structure with a controlled environment. Report to department supervisors, as currently assigned.

Percent of time	Major duties
5%	1. Ascertain growing schedules and deviations from established procedures from supervisor.
20%	2. Sow seeds and plant cuttings in containers.
15%	3. Through both sight and touch, inspect leaf texture, bloom development, and soil condition to determine nutrient and moisture needs and to detect pest infestations.
10%	4. Set fertilizer timing and metering devices that control nutrient introduction into irrigation system.
20%	5. Apply herbicides, fungicides, and pesticides to destroy undesirable growth and pests, using spray wand connected to solution tank.
10%	6. Read and interpret sensing indicators and regulate humidity, ventilation, and carbon dioxide systems.
10%	7. Graft scions to seedling stock.
10%	8. Pollinate, prune, transplant, pinch, and cull plants and perform other duties to ensure marketability of products.

the criteria for most jobs. The ability to follow written instructions, for example, may be established through completion of an application form, the knowledge and physical skill to correctly prune vines through a practical test or demonstration, the mathematical skill to calibrate chemical dilution through a written test, a willingness to work long and irregular hours through an interview, and abstinence from use of drugs through a medical exam.

Choices of what tool to use for each qualification can be neatly expressed in the form of a matrix (Figure 3.6) that has a row for each qualification and a column for each major information source. A chart like this helps organize the assessment of applicants in any systematic selection process. What knowledge, abilities, skills, and other characteristics should a Greenhouse Worker, Tractor Driver, Irrigator, Transplanter, Milker, Forklift Operator, Supervisor, or Agronomist possess? Answers can be listed in the left-most column of the worksheet. What information is available about applicants? Column headings indicate four major sources: written biographical data, references, tests, and interviews.

The matrix format is useful in sorting out what information will come from where. Going down the list of qualifications, the hiring manager asks for each,

Figure 3.6. Qualifications and information sources.

	Biodata	Reference	Test	Interview
<b>Knowledge</b>				
1. ....				
2. ....				
3. ....				
<b>Ability/skill</b>				
1. ....				
2. ....				
3. ....				
<b>Other</b>				
1. ....				
2. ....				
3. ....				

“How can I tell if a person has this specific knowledge/ ability/characteristic?” Answers would appear as entries (along the qualification row) under each applicable information source (column). Major and minor sources for a given qualification may be indicated respectively by “X’s” and “O’s,” for example, or other symbols.

A further refinement of this method is to assign weights to the qualifications according to their relative importance in job performance. Weightings are particularly useful to consider when time or resource limits make it impossible to gather all relevant data. They also help when choosing between roughly comparable applicants who have relative strengths on different qualifications.

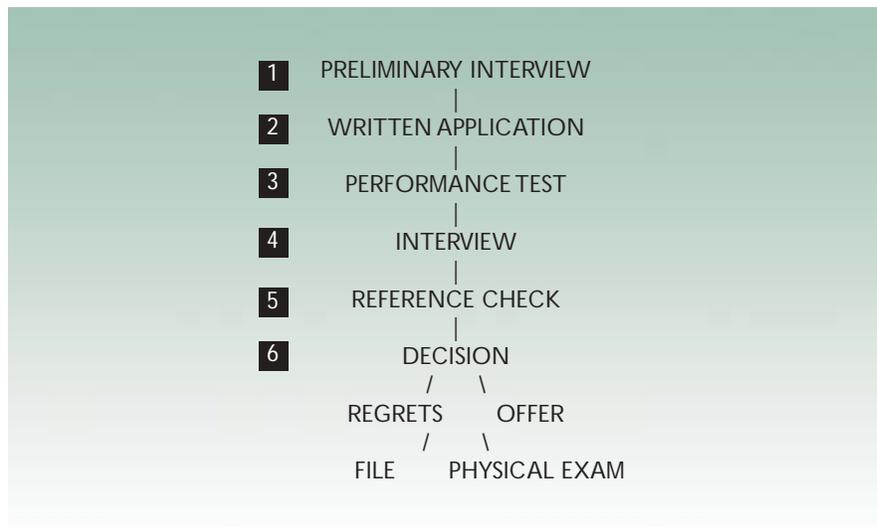
Some managers believe that hiring people to fit the organization is just as important as or more important than selecting for the requirements of a specific job:

*“I don’t really care if someone has a bunch of fancy skills. Just find me someone with the right attitude and whom I can get along with.”*

In a systematic selection process, they can give more weight to compatibility with values in the organization’s culture.

Having all relevant information about job applicants may be nice, but getting it is expensive. Does it really pay to check references or conduct careful tests of ability? How much information to obtain and which sources to get it from are cost-benefit issues faced in every selection process. In what order should the sources be used and how should they be structured if used are two other decisions that affect results.

It is wise to gather information about applicants in steps. The earlier the unsuitable applicants are eliminated, or drop from the running, the better. A “successive hurdles” process can be used to narrow the candidate pool after each major step. This kind of approach can contribute to economy, especially if cheaper

**Figure 3.7. Sample information-gathering sequence in applicant evaluation.**

information sources are used earlier, when the field of applicants is largest. Though not always cheapest, screening earlier in the process for the more important qualifications is most effective for keeping better applicants in contention longer.

Figure 3.7 presents an example of the sequence in a rather complete information gathering process. It shows a preliminary interview, followed by completion of a written application form, employment test, in-depth interview, and reference check. The post-offer physical exam may be used to ascertain pre-existing medical conditions or to verify fitness to perform certain tasks.

The steps and the responsibilities for carrying them out can be planned in advance. In large organizations, it is typical for the personnel department to conduct a preliminary interview and the written application procedures. After an initial screening by personnel staff, the immediate supervisor would conduct the in-depth interview, tests (if any), and reference check. In a smaller firm, of course, the steps tend to be fewer, and the owner or general manager might handle them all with some clerical help.

### Lawful and Unlawful Discrimination

It is an employer's prerogative to choose whom to hire and in what capacity. Employers have good reason and the right to discriminate among workers on the basis of job-relevant knowledge, ability, and skill. People possess different sets of attributes, and the law recognizes the business need to assess them in efforts to identify those most likely to perform well.

Both state and federal rules, however, prohibit employment discrimination based on several personal attributes that have no bearing on performance in most jobs—race, color, sex, religion, national origin, ancestry, mental or physical

disability, marital status, age over 40, medical condition, sexual orientation, involvement in union or other protected activities, or prior record of arrest not resulting in conviction. Major federal discrimination laws are the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Act (EEOA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). For detailed information, see agency links at *AgHelpWanted.org*.

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### ***Discriminatory questions to avoid***

Selection validity, the relation of hiring criteria to on-the-job performance, is what gets called into question when illegal discrimination is charged. If answers to a pre-employment question that has nothing to do with valid qualifications are used to decide who gets the job, the employer is vulnerable to a legal complaint. In fact, questions that could be used directly or indirectly to classify applicants according to one of the factors protected by discrimination laws are prohibited. When an employer collects information in a job interview or job application on any protected attribute, the worker may conclude that the hiring decision is based, at least in part, on this information.

Several states provide pre-employment inquiry guidelines and examples of questions to avoid, based on federal Equal Employment Opportunity standards. These guidelines advise against asking applicants their maiden names or about such topics as their children, medical condition, credit worthiness, or social affiliations. Online guides are accessible from *AgHelpWanted.org*.

A criterion on which all managers are legally required to discriminate is eligibility for employment in the United States. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 requires all employers to verify that persons they hire are legally authorized to work. Instructions and the Form I-9 for doing so are online at *AgHelpWanted.org*. Pictures of the various documents that prospective employees may use to prove their work authorization in completing the I-9 are at *AgHelpWanted.org*.

Another form of mandatory discrimination involves restrictions on hiring minors without work permits, for certain dangerous jobs, and during certain hours. Prohibitions for minors in agriculture under federal law are specified at *AgHelpWanted.org*.

### **The Preliminary Interview**

The initial contact with a prospective employee is a good time for the grower to give information about the job and the organization. While most pre-employment communication is devoted to obtaining information for the employer to use, applicants too need information to make decisions throughout the process. They develop a sense of the “psychological contract,” or set of unwritten expectations about the job and its conditions, and form attitudes that will affect whether they (1) continue pursuing the job, (2) accept it if offered, and (3) perform enthusiastically once in it. The step most effectively spent informing the applicant is the preliminary interview.

Misinformation or misinterpretations about the job can be minimized through good communication at this early stage. Some employers who want to get it straight from the beginning offer applicants a written job description. Some supplement the description with other written information about the company and its terms of employment. Others communicate solely through personal discussion.

A “realistic job preview” that describes pleasurable, as well as problematic, aspects of the job encourages many an unsuitable candidate to self-select out of the running. If the job requires long hours under a hot sun, endless repetitions of the same operation, fending off corny jokes from Cousin Louie, heavy lifting, tolerance of a surly supervisor, strict punctuality, or concentration amidst deafening moos, why not let the applicant know it right up front? You may lose a few applicants, but you also will prevent much early turnover caused by disillusionment and reality shock.

Similarly, using the preliminary interview to inform applicants about the balance of the selection process often saves the employer from considering further some of the unqualified candidates. In typical cases, applicants withdraw after merely being told that a performance test and reference check will be used to confirm their statements on a written application form.

### **Written Applications and Resumes**

Next to the interview, the written form is the most commonly used selection tool. Both application forms and resumes can efficiently deliver large amounts of relevant information about workers cheaply and in reasonably comparable form. Work experience, education, training, and personal characteristics usually are included. An application form to be completed at the office can serve as an elementary test of literacy and ability to follow instructions. Written biographical data may raise specific points to be explored in a subsequent interview.

The employer can ask specific questions about job history on an application form to get an idea of whether and when the person has worked in similar operations before and to help gauge how much training the worker would need if hired. To help assess familiarity with the language of commodity production, the application might ask workers to describe the kind of work they have done or positions held.

Many application forms ask for information of little job relevance and dubious legality. While standardized or commercially available forms may seem useful, generally they both contain some irrelevant items and omit information that is pertinent. Laws, court rulings, and administrative guidelines have challenged the job relatedness of items that used to be part of most application forms. Farm operators are well advised to either develop their own forms from scratch or carefully tailor standard ones.



State and federal laws ban discrimination on the basis of race, religious creed, color, national origin, ancestry, physical handicap, medical condition, marital status, sex, or age. In addition, they discourage questions about personal variables as child-care arrangements, a spouse, height and weight, pregnancy, membership in organizations, or home ownership. While by themselves such items are not illegal, the employer shoulders the burden of proving nondiscrimination if a complaint is filed.

A final consideration with regard to written biographical data is that fabrications are common. Every now and then we hear about a surgeon who has been operating at the county hospital without benefit of medical degree and formal education. How did he get there? Somebody once took his word about his qualifications. Although some surgeon stories end with an ironic twist about the impostor's superior performance, how frequently do fabricated claims about nursery experience, mechanical knowledge, or typing speed lead to lousy on-the-job performance?

The moral is obvious. The written word does not necessarily reflect reality (nor does the spoken word). Talk can be cheap, even in written form. It is best to use written forms to gather data on objective, verifiable items, and to use one or more of the other information sources to spot-verify them. Tests and structured interviews can be used to check applicant allegations and manager assumptions. References also may be useful as a supplement to, not substitute for, the other sources.

## Tests

The very word—test—strikes fear into the hearts of both job applicants and managers. Emotional, practical, and legal factors have kept many farm employers from using tests in pre-employment screening, and that is regrettable. Only through some form of testing can farmers (and other employers) find out what a job applicant really can do. Testing helps distinguish a person who can actually do the job from one who talks a good game in an interview.

Basically, a test is any means of sampling a person's behavior for assessment. The ideal selection test samples the behavior required in performance of a given job. Since it is rarely possible to present actual job conditions to all applicants, different types of tests are used. The important principle to remember in using them is that the scores or assessments they yield should correlate highly with future job performance.

The extent to which a test does correlate with job performance is its validity. No test, in itself, is either valid or invalid. Validity is job specific—and often site specific as well. The exercise that effectively distinguishes good from bad milker candidates is probably far less valid as a predictor of truck driving performance.

Research shows, however, that some types of tests tend to be more valid, and therefore better, than others.

Personality tests are the least valid and reliable as selection tools. Standard personality tests were designed more for pre-therapy diagnosis than pre-employment screening. While many large companies put top executive candidates through extensive personality testing by specialists, these devices are of virtually no use in most selection decisions. They are best left to the purposes of therapists and counselors.

Paper and pencil tests can have high validity if well chosen or specially constructed. They typically measure knowledge, general intelligence, and aptitudes in cognitive areas. Managers can design their own to assess specific knowledge needed in a position. Standard paper and pencil tests are also available commercially. Catalogs of some vendors include informative discussions on testing in general and touted tests in particular. Links to examples are at *AgHelpWanted.org*.

Performance simulations sample behavior similar to but not quite the same as actual job duties. Examples include flight simulation exercises on fixed machines rather than airplanes, mechanical ability tests using tinker toys or other materials, strength and balance demonstrations using weights and balance beams, and supervisory role-plays. Among many standardized simulations with colorful names are the O'Connor Finger and Tweezer Dexterity Test, Minnesota Clerical Test, and Crawford Small Part Dexterity Test. They assess such job-related abilities as hand-eye coordination, manual dexterity, spatial relationships, and color discrimination. Apparatus, administration and scoring guide, and norm scores for comparison come with most packaged simulations.

An agricultural business that used a battery of six standardized simulations (administered by an external consultant) in selecting new entry-level employees has been very satisfied with the results. Finger-dexterity and eye-hand coordination trials resembled the small-plant grafting and cutting work required on the job. The employer found people who definitely were capable, and applicants who were hired felt good that they had fairly established their qualifications. Because they became familiar with the kind of work expected as they went through testing, new employees hired under this system also were more rapidly oriented once on the job.

Work samples, slices of the actual job to be done, are generally the most valid form of testing. They are relatively easy to construct for most manual jobs that produce a tangible result. When hiring a mechanic, lettuce cutter, egg sorter, or truck driver, why not ask applicants to diagnose a "clank," select a few heads, tray-up some eggs, or drive the machine? Testing for abilities that are easily

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***Testing helps distinguish a person who can actually do the job from one who talks a good game in the interview.***

measured, however, should not take precedence over testing for those that are relatively more critical to job performance.

A work sample was used to good effect in the selection of forklift operators in a packing shed. Each applicant was asked to stack and then unstack five large bins. The test was administered under conditions consistent across applicants, and performance was measured by the number of errors and the time taken to complete the task. An extensive list of references on personnel testing and assessment is at [AgHelpWanted.org](http://AgHelpWanted.org).

## **Interviews**

The interview is the single most commonly used source of information in employee selection, and it has multiple functions. As a two-way communication vehicle, it provides information to employer and applicant. The savvy applicant understands that the conduct of the interview reflects management attitudes and organizational practices that will affect her worklife if she comes aboard. But wanting to make a good impression on prospective employees is certainly not the main reason for being organized in selection interviews.

Despite its widespread use, the traditional interview is notoriously invalid and unreliable as a predictor of performance, so reliance on it results in the wrong person getting selected. Problems with interviews mostly boil down to interviewer subjectivity and bias.

Specifically, research shows that casual interviewers tend to: (1) make premature summary judgments in the first two to three minutes of the interview; (2) search more for negative than positive information as the interview progresses (thus, an initial good impression is more likely to change for the worse than an initial bad one for the better); (3) possess an understanding of job duties insufficient to adequately judge applicants; (4) assess applicants very leniently when under time pressure to fill a job; (5) contrast interviewees against previous applicants rather than a consistent standard; (6) hold stereotyped notions of “ideal applicants,” more consistent with characteristics of the interviewer than successful job incumbents; (7) attribute “halos” to applicants who have one key quality that the interviewer particularly values; and (8) vary questions, opportunities to respond, and other interview conditions from applicant to applicant (discussion of rater biases in performance evaluation is in Chapter 5).

These problems not only reduce the objectivity of the information but also put the employer at some legal jeopardy. The interview, like other assessment tools, is legally a *type of test*, subject to the same scrutiny given to hands-on or written tests. Interview results are vulnerable to legal challenge, and litigation brought by applicants who feel unjustly treated after interviews has been on the increase.

### Structuring Interviews

Practical and legal problems can be avoided by structuring interviews. The following suggestions for structuring selection interviews will help in planning and preparation:

1. Develop a set of core questions in advance. While completely scripting the interview would obviously reduce spontaneity and valuable individualized discussion, having some questions to ask of all applicants makes comparative evaluations easier and more meaningful, especially when more than one interviewer is involved.
2. Have most of the questions relate directly to job duties and performance requirements. Use different types of questions to find out about the various qualifications you want in the new hire. *Situational questions* usually begin, "What would you do if...", and continue with a description of some problem situation likely to occur on the job. *Knowledge questions* are direct requests for information that an applicant ought to already have if qualified for the job. In *role-plays*, the applicant is asked to contend, as if holding the job, with the interviewer playing the part of coworker, subordinate, customer, etc. *Worker requirement questions* explore the applicant's willingness to go along with such job demands such as overtime work, travel, relocation, and infrequent supervision.
3. Use a consistent interview format and context (as well as core content) for all applicants. Unless each candidate gets about the same amount of time under the same conditions, interview responses are not likely to be comparable.
4. Note important responses during the interview and document your impressions as soon as possible afterward. Documentation and comparison are easier when some classification or numerical scoring scheme is used to evaluate responses to key inquiries and to summarize ratings of each applicant. The scheme can be quite simple such as a 1=lowest to 5=highest scale. If candidates are rated according to certain attributes, those dimensions ought to correspond to qualifications specified on the job description.
5. Understand the common rater biases and consciously fight them. Careful listening to what the applicant says goes hand in hand with waiting to make overall judgments until the interview is over. Having multiple interviewer/raters in a single or sequential set of interviews for each applicant is a good way of reducing the impact of any individual's bias.



### Sample flow of interview at a ranch

**Greeting:**

A friendly welcome. (1 min.)

**Small talk:**

Putting the applicant at ease, showing personal interest, offering coffee. (2 min.)

**Job description:**

Clarifying what the job entails and how it fits into the organization. (5 min.)

**Housekeeping details:**

Covering basic terms of employment — wages, hours, housing, or other special conditions. (2 min.)

**Applicant questions:**

Fielding the candidate's questions. What does he or she want to know about the organization and the position? The questions themselves may reveal important information. (5 - 10 min.)

**Questions for the applicant:**

Getting to know the applicant's qualifications for the job, with guidance of a prepared question list. (5 - 20 min.)

**Continuation or cut-off:**

Further selling of the job if the applicant is of interest, or a dignified close if not. Informing about expected decision time or next steps in the process. (5 - 10 min.)



### Interview Context and Conduct

Some managers feel uncomfortable when it comes time to conduct an interview. By taking the experience out of “uncharted territory,” structuring usually raises their comfort level and ability to obtain, as well as provide, useful information. The interviewer is in a position to take control of the conversation to benefit both the applicant and the ranch. Even so, the applicant is also interviewing the interviewer. Part of management's task may be to present the business well and sell the job so that the first-choice applicant will accept an offer.

Consider these guidelines for successful communication during the interview:

- Pre-test your interview questions and techniques with a trusted employee or a family member, especially if this is your first interview.
- Choose a quiet, comfortable place in which to conduct the interview.

- Put the applicant at ease. The lower the tension, the more meaningful most of the communication will be. A handshake and friendly smile are a good start.
- Stick to your plan. Follow your list of interview questions and have a time limit for the session. Make sure to ask the prepared core questions of all candidates.
- Listen. Encourage the applicant to do most of the talking, and resist the urge to elaborate on your point of view.
- Complete all of the interviews before evaluating. Avoid indicating how you feel about any responses or other candidates.
- Provide the applicant opportunities to ask questions.
- Disclose basic information that the applicant is sure to weigh if offered the job such as work schedule and location, fringe benefits, responsibility for tools, and when you will be making your decision.
- Rather than committing to a specific wage during the interview, retain flexibility by telling a range of possible pay for the position.
- Take the applicant on a tour of the operation, either before or after the sit-down discussion.

No interview agenda would fit all circumstances, but below is an example of the flow and time frame for interviews at one ranch. Total time for the session is 35 to 50 minutes.

Although job-specific inquiries are the core of a structured interview, some generic questions may fit well into the flow of the conversation and bring out valuable information about the applicant. A list of 20 questions is offered on page 98.

### Checking References

Asking former employers or supervisors about applicants can be of some use, though it is usually limited unless capitalizing on trust within an existing relationship. References have gotten more and more bland, as potential informants become sensitive to the increasing frequency of libel and slander suits brought by former employees. Even when a reference holds nothing back, the information provided may not be relevant to an applicant's prospects as an employee in a different job under different conditions.

Information provided by a reference may not be entirely accurate for various reasons besides fear of lawsuit. Friends of an applicant are likely to speak well of him, foes ill. People reached at a former place of employment simply may not have known the applicant or even have access to records that would confirm items like job title and duration. And previous employers have been known to give inferior employees a good reference just to get them to leave.



## Twenty questions that could add to any job interview

### Getting started

1. Your application (or resumé) looks interesting. Would you bring me up-to-date on your background relevant to possible employment here?

### Applicant's view of how job and self fit

2. What is your understanding about the nature of this job?
3. What abilities do you feel are most crucial for success in this job?
4. What parts of this job do you think would be most enjoyable for you?
5. What parts of this job would be least enjoyable?
6. How well does your background prepare you for this job?
7. Where, in what areas of this job, would you need or appreciate additional supervision, training, or patience from us?

### More about the applicant's situation and future, not specific to this job

8. What other kinds of jobs are you considering at this time?
9. What do you see as particular strong points in your character or personality?
10. What limitations or weak points may you need to overcome?
11. If someone who knew you very well wanted to describe you as accurately and completely as possible in one minute, what would he or she say?
12. At this point in your life (career), what goals are you aiming for?
13. If you could create your ideal job, what would it be? How would you spend your time?

### Previous job experience

14. What have you been particularly praised for or recognized for on other jobs?
15. And what have you been criticized for?
16. In previous jobs, what suggestions have you made that improved the way things were done?
17. What would you say is your proudest accomplishment and your greatest disappointment in your work career so far?

### In conclusion, the big picture

18. What other information that we have missed or didn't cover would you want us to know?
19. To sum up, why do you believe you should be hired for this job?
20. And why should you not be hired for this job?

The best use of references is to verify “hard,” objective information first provided as written biographical data (i.e., application or resume) or in the interview. It is useful to know whether statements made or written by the applicant are true; most former employers do not hesitate to disclose the title, responsibilities, and period of employment, plus sometimes the former employee’s reason for leaving.

As in other communications, it is a good idea to listen for the tone as much as the words during a reference check. Is the person enthusiastic in speaking of the employee or is there guarded caution? What did the reference *not* say. “She gave me no problems,” means something different than “She did her job well.” It may take some clairvoyance to decode the real message of such comments as “You’ll be very lucky to get him to work for you,” and “I can recommend her with no qualifications whatsoever.”

If the reference check is by telephone, stating your identity, your purpose, and your appreciation makes for a good start:

*Hello. My name is {name}, and I operate {or work for} the {business name}. {Applicant name} has applied for a position as a {job title} in my business. He/she has told me that you know about his/her work. Would you give me a few minutes to discuss his/her employment at your place, and is this a convenient time? Thanks very much.*



## Making and Communicating the Decision

With all the planning and information gathering involved, employee selection can be quite a project. In most cases it deserves to be, but how extensive any given process should be and how many sources of information to use depend on the job and business circumstances. A decision about a ranch supervisor deserves more investment than a summer helper. No matter what level of job to be filled, however, it is wise practice to avoid relying entirely on information from a single source (e.g., an interview or personal reference).

After whatever combination of paper screening, testing, interviewing, and reference checking is used, decision time arrives. If some considerations about an applicant have not been built into the assessment process, they can be factored in at this point. For example:

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***No matter what level of job to be filled, it is wise practice to avoid relying entirely on information from a single source.***

- How might this person contribute to or detract from our operation in ways outside the scope of the job that we are filling now?
- How well will the applicant harmonize with coworkers?
- What has the person shown us that we were not even looking for?

If in the course of recruitment and selection, an applicant is discovered who does not closely meet the requirements of the position but stands head and shoulders above the competition in other respects valuable to the business, an option to ponder is to redefine the job and adjust those around it. Consultation with supervisors and other farm staff, normally a requisite part of selection decision making, is particularly crucial before going this way.



*A tomato grower learned firsthand the value of using multiple sources within a systematic overall selection process. After losing three tractor drivers consecutively in a four-month period, he asked the local extension educator for help. The two discussed the job for an hour, wrote a brief description of it, and sent the description along with a “help wanted” note to local schools, community centers, and the state employment office. Farmer and educator chose six of the 14 applicants, based on tractor driver experience claimed in written applications, for further consideration.*

*All six were interviewed and tested in the field on a single day. One individual was extremely impressive in the interview. Both farmer and educator were tempted to offer him the job on the spot, but they held fast until test results were available. The ranch manager who administered the performance test, a short series of in-field maneuvers on a wheel tractor later reported that this apparent star had no touch at all for the fine cultivation work required. Nearly eight rows of tomatoes had been taken out in this valuable learning experience.*

*Recognizing that the best talker is not always the best driver, and that this job mainly required driving, the grower hired another applicant, who had come off well in the interview and exceptionally in the work sample. That driver remained a productive, satisfied employee on the ranch for a long time.*

The following steps simply recap key points about the selection process:

1. A careful selection decision is a major investment.
2. Systematic selection begins with specifying attributes that would equip a person to perform the given job successfully.
3. Information about applicants is collected in sequential steps, depending on nature of the position, time constraints, company policies, and size of the applicant pool.

4. Four major information sources are written forms, tests, interviews, and references — best used in combination and with care.
5. The employer is a buyer in the labor market. Merely forking over the purchase price by no means guarantees satisfaction.

Pertinent to the labor market as much as any other is the old economist's adage, "*Caveat emptor*. Let the buyer beware." And let the buyer also remember that while systematic selection improves the odds of buying good performance, it cannot remove all risk.

### Offering the Job

An offer can be made by phone or in person. A reasonable opening is to state that several qualified candidates were considered and extend an offer first to this applicant at a specific rate of pay. If there are lingering questions about the job description, company expectations, and conditions of employment, this is the time to clear them, so questions should be invited. Expressing expectations that the candidate will do a good job and enjoy working in the business contributes to starting the relationship on a positive note. If the applicant wants time to think about the offer before making a commitment one way or another, a time to reconnect can be set.

Once a selected applicant accepts the verbal offer, putting its terms into a letter or other written document confirms the deal and helps avoid misunderstandings. Even if not applicable to a given hire, the first five elements of mandatory written disclosure under the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act make for a checklist of essentials to include in a written offer:

1. Place of employment
2. Wage rate
3. Crops and work activities
4. Period of employment
5. Transportation, housing, and benefits provided and their costs, if any
6. Existence of any arrangement under which the employer or contractor will receive commissions or benefits from sales to the workers
7. Existence of any strike or labor dispute at the place of employment

Disclosure of all seven items is required for all migrant and seasonal day-haul workers when they are recruited. It is required for other seasonal agricultural workers only if they request it.

### Notifying Other Applicants

Letting people know that a job they had applied for has gone to someone else is an act of good business, as well as a personal courtesy. While in certain circumstances, notice by phone call works better, doing it by letter is usually easier and has the additional virtue of allowing for careful construction of the message.

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***Expressing expectations that the candidate will do a good job and enjoy working in the business contributes to starting the relationship on a positive note.***

When should this notice be given? Some employers inform applicants as soon as they are eliminated from consideration, typically after screening of applications but sometimes even after a set of interviews. Others prefer to wait until the job is offered and firmly accepted. Of course, this approach is the only one to use with candidates who are seriously considered as back-up choices or prospects for other employment at the ranch right away.

Below is a sample letter that can be adapted to notify a seriously considered candidate that the job has gone to another applicant. May it help reduce the number of non-notices and impersonal “I regret to inform you that your application for employment with Meadowlands Farm has been rejected” letters in this world.



**Sample rejection letter for applicant to  
whom job is not offered**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for your interest in working for {business name} and letting us get acquainted with you.

You were one of a few applicants who were carefully considered for the open {job title} job. I am sorry to let you know, however, that we decided to offer the position to another candidate, and he has accepted. I enjoyed talking with you and will retain your application in our active file for six months. If another suitable opening occurs, I will consider you as a potential applicant for it and notify you.

All of us here appreciate the time you spent with us. Best of luck, and perhaps our paths will cross again in the future.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_

## Orienting New Employees

The recruitment and selection processes are the beginnings of worker orientation. Through the procedural steps applicants undergo on the way to getting hired, they acquire information and form impressions that affect their decisions about how to perform on the job, beyond whether to accept an employment offer in the first place. Unfortunately, not many farm business managers take full advantage of either pre-hire or the less time-constrained post-hire opportunities to orient employees.

How does the new milker, picker, or mechanic feel when arriving to work the first day? He or she probably has a strong desire to succeed and is anxious about fitting into the new environment, as both a productive worker and part of a social group. If the employer provides for both, the new employee becomes more certain that it was the right decision to accept the job offer, and everybody wins. During the initial days on a job, employees are probably as receptive as they will ever be to signals about what is expected and offered in their new work environment. This period is a critical time that shapes new hires' impressions and understanding about how to get along.

The work environment experienced and the performance pattern an employee establishes during the first few days will have a strong influence on that person's attitude, productivity, and team spirit for weeks, months, and even years to come. This holds true even for seasonal workers, as many return to the same employer year after year.

There is much for the employer to get across about administrative matters in addition to job tasks, tools, and functional relationships. A well-planned orientation accelerates the new hire's development and shortens the time to reach the productivity level desired. At best a weak one wastes opportunity and at worst, it figuratively throws cold water in the face of a worker who was excited to be starting a new job in a new place. At harvest time, when many agricultural managers are particularly busy and face a sudden influx of employees, a well-planned employee orientation can do much to help make transitions as painless as possible and get new employees off on the right foot.

Orientation to farm jobs traditionally has been handled in casual style, often by crew supervisors who merely introduce a new hire to crew members and the flow of work. Workers entering farm businesses through kinship and friendship networks arrive somewhat oriented to their jobs and working conditions. For these newcomers especially, continuing orientation and integration into the workforce tend to center on social and familial relationships.

New employees often are reluctant to ask many questions for fear they will appear ignorant. By anticipating what they will want to know and providing it



***“There were a heckuva lot of things they didn’t tell me when I hired on with this outfit.”***

through experiences and documents, growers can reduce more uncertainties than are expressed. An orientation handout (in the language workers use most) serves as a continuing reference that will help employees recall what they may not have been interested in or able to digest when initially told.

What does a complete orientation cover? The process involves the new hire in filling out personnel forms, learning about job duties from a supervisor and coworkers, reviewing the company handbook if there is one, taking a tour of the new surroundings, meeting coworkers, and starting work activity. In designing an orientation process that fits a given operation, it is wise to get opinions from those who have recently joined the firm.

Suggested elements of an orientation for new employers are listed below:

**Initial welcome**

- Introduction to department manager
- Clarification of the name the employee prefers to be known as
- Brief history of the company
- Lunch with a coworker the first few days (arranged in advance)

**General information and procedures**

- Reference document stating terms of employment, including nature of the contract (such as fixed-term or at-will) and other company information
- Location of restrooms, personal storage areas, bulletin board, emergency supplies, and phones
- Policy on personal use of telephones, company equipment, and facilities
- Disciplinary, suggestion, and complaint procedures
- Special policies or procedures that are unique to working with a given unit or supervisor

**Work time and pay**

- Work days and hours and variability of the schedule
- Lunch and break periods
- Overtime requirements or options
- Means of notification in case of changes
- Call-in procedure when unable to show up when expected
- Tardiness and absenteeism policies
- Time card or other time-keeping procedures
- Paycheck distribution — when, where, how
- What to do and whom to ask about any pay discrepancies
- Starting pay rate, including incentive wages or bonuses, and any normal progression
- Relation of future pay increases to merit, longevity in job, or cost of living
- Fringe benefits available

- Procedures for use of vacation credit, sick/personal leave, and holidays
- Performance review and appraisal procedures

### The job

- Tour of the specific area(s) in which the employee will work
- Introduction to the lead person and others in the work unit
- Organizational structure and chain of command beyond the work unit
- Systems, tools, and procedures in the entire work unit
- Job duties and scope
- Relation of the employee's job to the end product and consumers
- Specific performance expectations and work standards
- Product quality requirements
- Any promotional opportunities and anticipated time to achieve them

### Safety

- All elements of the company injury and illness prevention program
- Pesticide safety training as required under the Worker Protection Standard
- Use and care of work equipment
- Identification and location of workplace hazards
- Use, storage, and disposal of solvents and hazardous chemicals
- Use of personal protective equipment (PPE), including clothes, footwear, respiratory, and eye protection
- Symptoms of pesticide illness and heat stress
- Lifting techniques and avoidance of ergonomic hazards
- Use of fire extinguishers and emergency procedures in case of fire
- Location of first-aid/medical care
- How to report and deal with accidents and illnesses

An effective orientation pays off in employee performance, retention, and workforce harmony. In this example, a manager recalled what a new orientation effort did for his firm:

*Years back, we had a new employee orientation program we called Operation Indoctrination (OPDOC). We had OPDOC welcome letters for new employees, OPDOC welcome packages, OPDOC name tags for the new hires, and a buddy in their department that we called an OPDOCER. We also had top and mid-level managers stop by to introduce themselves to any new hires and to welcome them the first week. The program didn't just belong to the personnel guy. The whole company was part of it, and we all had a lot of fun with it. . . . oh, and we reduced turnover by 64 percent.*



