

**Workshop Title: Labour: Apprentices, Journey-persons, Employees, Non-English-Speaking Workers... Creating a Team**

**Speaker(s) & their titles:** Stacy Brenner & John Bliss, Broadturn Farm (Maine)

**Executive Summary:**

There are various types of labour on the farm outlined by this successful farm in Maine. Organization, communication, and gratitude are key aspects in making their farm a successful business. Being able to delegate, train various types of employees, and let others lead when necessary have given them space to evolve as a farming business.

**About Broadturn Farm:**

- 13 Acre Farm located in Maine
- 12 years in business
- Vegetable CSA with 165 shares (8 acres), Flower CSA with 50 shares, restaurants, retailers, host weddings at the farm (14 in 2014)
- produce to the caterer and flowers to the bride is a great sales technique
- education: they also run a summer day camp
- hobby farm part to their farm: pork, beef, and chickens (to feed the family)
- started with 1-2 apprentices and worked up to 19 people
- currently experimenting with having an employee on salary in order to employ someone year-round

**Philosophy on the farm with regards to employees:**

- Appreciate the employees throughout the season, which isn't their strong point
- Look back on the season and be grateful because they did a bulk of the work
- Feel successful as a business due to the fact that they are creating jobs in the community
- Employees give them an opportunity to step back and dream about where they want the farm to go next
- Employees give them time to advance the business: bookkeeping, equipment repairs, infrastructure construction, etc.

**Staff Overview:**

- interns: 3
- hourly field crew: 3-4
- management and crew leaders: 1-2
- pickers: 3-4 (pick flowers in the morning)
- designers: 3-4 (hire individuals with art backgrounds to design bouquets)
- CSA work exchange harvesters: 15-20 working 4 hours/week

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- contractors (Things that will take too much time to do yourself. Value your time!)
1. Interns
    - \$600/month. All food provided, separate cabin for living space, shared cooking space with other employees.
    - 1 week of paid vacation: just when their interns are about to burn out from a hard spring/start to summer they send them on a paid vacation (saves the individual from quitting halfway through the season)
    - Education: once a week class for 8 weeks with a set curriculum (dinner cooked by Stacy, makes them feel appreciated), MOFGA's Farm Training Workshops, access to learn all parts of the farm (including animals)
    - advertise through MOFGA's apprenticeship program and GoodJobs.com,
    - no couples, no vegans, no pets (They have had trouble in the past dealing with all of these scenarios. Tends to disrupt the balance of the farm. Couples split up. Power struggles.)
    - Interns have changed their approach to career, to life, and to each other. Interns require more attention, a variety of jobs, and more concern as to whether they are happy.
  2. Employees
    - pay is based on experience (paid minimum wage with the possibility of bonuses and raises); this give incentive for the employees to keep improving.
    - produce seconds are freely available to employees
    - live off-farm
    - unpaid vacation time of 1 week in the season
    - expectation of leadership and communication skills: they are expected to assist in CSA workshare member quality control
    - best type of employee for field work because you don't feel bad giving them monotonous work
  3. Crew Leaders
    - raised from the ranks, usually a past employee or intern that has proven to be an asset to the farm
    - salary paid once per year (the owners pay themselves once per year on a salary basis as well)
    - essentially partners in directing the business, more responsibility but not allowed to make all of the decisions; an understanding of strengths and weaknesses (e.g. owner gives the bride her bouquet and meets with her, not usually a crew leader)
    - delegated to do more supervising, but not all
  4. Floral Design Crew
    - very part-time, former interns, artists, architects, assembly-line fashion

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- some employees are stay-at-home mothers that like the part-time hours
  - live off-farm and come early in the morning to pick or design then leave by noon
5. Educators
- Program Manager, two support counselors and junior counselors
  - she works in the field when the camps aren't running
  - the program manager takes on the majority of the workload when organizing the camps and running them
6. Work Exchange
- harvesting is very labourious; 10 individuals per morning
  - the agreement is 4 hours per week for 21 weeks and in turn a full CSA share as compensation
  - works out to be \$6.25/hr and they have more of a connection with the farm
  - this model has really worked for them, although it seems difficult to constantly correct/give feedback
  - some come back year after year and gain a relationship with the farm and the owners

Contractors

- give them lunch and coffee (lots of coffee)
- invaluable to the farm; they complete tasks that cannot be done by the owners

A happy crew is a good manager

- a big team isn't scary
- become the facilitator: make sure that everyone has what they need to do their job correctly and efficiently by supplying tools, bringing baskets to the truck, make sure machinery is working, etc.

Specifics:

1. Develop Systems and streamline: Identify and compartmentalize processes which should be easily accomplished by your crew. Your employee needs to be able to do a task without thinking; it needs to be easily taught by other employees.
2. Staying Organized: Hard to keep up with, but record-keeping can be delegated. People do a better job when delegated to because the trust makes them do a good job. Let go of perfection in order to delegate.
3. Communication: Large whiteboard, receipts of what things cost so employees know the value of a piece of equipment/tool, map of farm with crops listed as to where they are, texting to someone on the field what the harvest list is (use your cell phone wisely)
4. Pleasant Work Environment: Focused education in the spring, no micro-management (people hate it; if they adopt the task they will do it better)

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5. Change it Up Whenever Possible: Valuable to break up routine, but some people like predictability, so read the individual and what their strengths and weaknesses are
6. Effective Working Dynamics: Build work teams, delegate whenever you can, develop healthy and quick feedback protocol (Ask everyone: How it's going? What are your learning styles? What are your plans? Do you want more hours?). Communicate.

Delegate whenever you can

- the default shouldn't be you, but your staff
- support that person, respect their effort, and focus on the thing that you and ONLY you can do (financials, marketing, skilled mechanical work, visioning of the future).

What is the plan?

- The Fieldwalk - once per week
- The Agenda - what has to be done that week
- The mental space - take time off to yourself

Write down the farm's protocols

- employee expectations
- code of conduct: no drinking, no drugs, no bare feet in the field, clothing necessities
- standards: uses a stop watch in the spring to see how long something should take, how big is a bunch? how clean should the carrots be? (communicate on the whiteboard)
- detailed work plan: what does a day look like on the farm?
- the employee handbook: important for orientation and farm vision (and legally as well)

When things go wrong...

- retreat and process with your business partner, not other interns/employees
- take a deep breath
- deal with it quickly, respectfully, and conclusively together

When things go right...

- celebrate with a dinner out (late spring)
- bonuses/raises
- long-term professional relationships vs. creating your competition (Your interns/employees will go on to be farmers just down the road. Embrace the movement and the relationships. Makes you be a better farmer.)

Conclusion

- the owners have adjusted their farm to the available labour pool just as much as they have adjusted to their markets

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