

**Workshop Title:** Managing Staff on the Farm Part 1 and 2

**Speakers:**

Tim Livingstone, Strawberry Hill Farm  
Patricia Oulton, Taproot Farm  
Shane Martínez, Martínez Law

**Executive Summary:** This session took the form of a discussion about managing staff on the farm. The discussion began with a long list of points brought up by the attendees and the presenters.

**Speaker Introductions:** Tim Livingstone has a farm with a 350-person summer CSA and a 225-person winter CSA. Tim keeps 3 employees over the winter and 8-9 in the summer months. Patricia Oulton has a year-round 350 person CSA, one needing 40 full-time employees in summer time and 20 full-time employees in winter. Shane Martínez is a human rights lawyer in Toronto ON working on behalf of migrant workers who have grievances with their employers. He knows the Seasonal Agriculture Work Program shortcomings and inequities.

**Detailed Notes from Part 1:**

Employee retention was listed as a prominent concern:

- Commuting to a rural location
- Quitting before the full harvest season is complete
- Engaging employees instead of them just putting in hours

Demographic of farm employees:

- Seasonal Agriculture Program workers
- University or High school students returning to school in the fall
- Temporary Foreign workers/ Migrant workers

Identified employment issues unique to farms:

- Rural or remote location
- Minimum wage is the going rate for most farms
- Long work hours (60-80 hour work week)
- Physically demanding work/conditions or repetitive mundane tasks
- Main harvesting happens in mid to late fall
- Unable to offer full-time year round employment to all employees

Solutions sought to address these issues:

- Migrant workers are supplied mandatory housing and board for the time they are on farm working
- Piecework payment favors the faster more efficient worker

- Profit sharing gives a personal stake in the farm also promoting quality as equally important as quantity
- Offering bonuses after a full season, such as a CSA share or a piece of land the following year for a good employee to grow their own crops
- Migrant workers work to a contract set before they arrive in Canada
- Interns are a possibility but reservations were stated about a farm being sued by an intern for wages owed
- Intrinsic qualities of an on-farm job: eating lunch together by providing on-site cooking facilities
- E.I rules make it difficult to hire part-time
- Control Trust and Transparency Contract consultation about changes with employees
- Temporary Foreign workers will work 60-80 hours per week and they can get overtime after 44 hours, depending on the province

## **Detailed Notes from Part 2:**

**Speakers:** Tim Livingston, Strawberry Hill Farm

### **Payroll Methods:**

- Tim and his wife started doing their own payroll but found timelines and deadlines made it difficult. As a member of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB), Tim was able to access Payworks.ca as a payroll option. All workers have to have a bank account as all payments are via e-transfer. He can access the site from anywhere there is internet. All remittances are done online and you can access Records of Employment online as well.
- Kent Coates of Nature's Route Farm uses ADP payroll. Having to meet a remittance deadline of Tuesday 6 pm or face extra charges he says it has worked well.
- Other options mentioned were Pay Acadie and Zero Program accessed through the Cloud.

### **WCB Worker safety:**

- Tim pays \$ 3000 upfront as a percentage of his overall for worker safety. In New Brunswick, if you have 3+ employees for a significant part of the year, you are required to pay WCB.
- Patricia pays a voluntary \$2000 per month for WCB that is based on 3%. On-farm Occupational Health and Safety Policies are set up as a structure to protect the employer and employees in the event of an accident. First Aid kits and write-ups on safe use of equipment, such as ladders, are complete with a checkmark system to show that an employee has been made aware. There are more written explanations of safe use and if an employee has misused a piece of equipment and sustained injury or

caused injury, a form is signed to state they had gone outside of guidelines.

### **Conflict Resolution:**

- Tim states he uses a work alongside method to open a discussion with an employee when there is a problem.
- Patricia has a 3-month probationary period for new hires. She provides a contract that explicitly states expectations. She does check-ins if there is a problem to discuss and then will have the employee sign a plan of action that has come out of the meeting. She has a folder for every employee.
- To solve issues of low moral, Patricia hired a consultant to conduct sensitivity training on farm to combat racism. A month afterwards, she mandated a once a month staff lunch paying them to attend for the first 5-6 months. After this period, she made the lunch attendance voluntary. Farm food was used in these lunches.
- Kent Coates stated low moral on his farm has 2 reasons: 1) Employees don't know where they are with all the work that has been done 2) Where is all the work leading?
- Personality conflicts can be diffused in a group meeting or a one on one conversation about why people are feeling the way they are. Kent feels moderating these discussions leads to better outcomes.
- Tim meets with his team every morning at 8 AM and joins the team in times of trouble. He says the boss being there changes the dynamic. Two valuable qualities agreed by all that make managing farm staff easier are having a sense of humor and saying thank you.

Headings important to this overall topic but not fully discussed were accessing healthcare for temporary foreign workers and the impossibility of ever becoming citizens of Canada despite working here year after year. Shane Martínez mentioned cases in Ontario where the labour laws do not set minimum wage as mandatory on farms. He thought Nova Scotia was doing better on this front.

<https://novascotia.ca/lae/employmentrights/farming.asp>

No holidays or holiday pay. No overtime. Piecework pay for fruit vegetable tobacco harvest. No minimum wage for under 16. No required day of rest. No minimum number of hours for a call in such as the 3 hour minimum for other labour sectors.

All people participating in this discussion appeared to be Caucasian despite there being a number of New Canadian attendees in the room. I had a conversation on the break with a Post Doctoral Applied Nutrition researcher from Cameroon. His position on the discussion was one that would have shocked those speaking up in the room. He was surprised these people of such an age had very little to offer

up as Fairness in Organic farming. A representation of migrant workers is essential to this topic in the future.