

---

# Practical Techniques to Optimize Employee Performance

Jesse Wright & Seth Wilner  
UNH Cooperative Extension

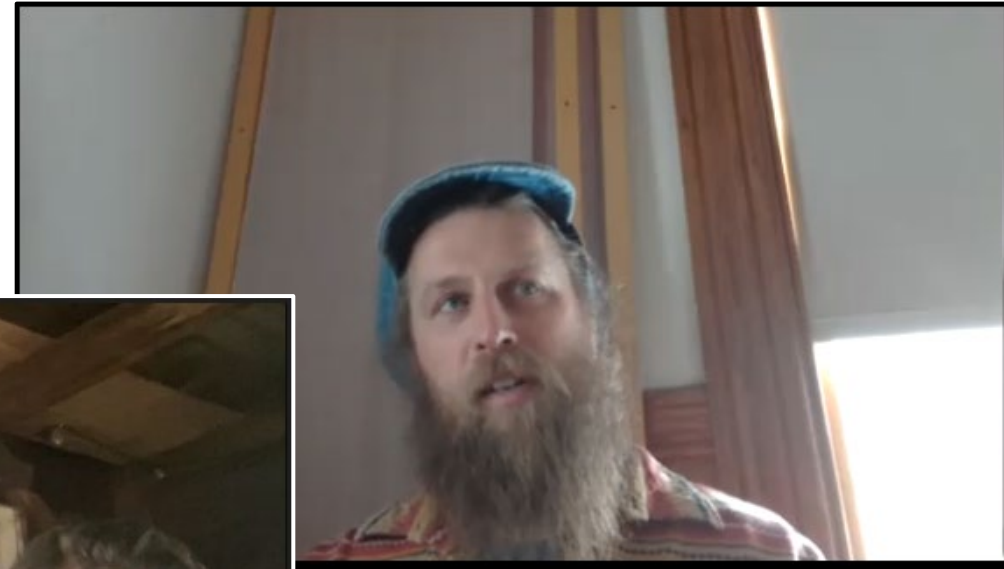
# During our time together today

1. Take care of your needs – do what you need to take care of yourself during our sessions. Step away for bathroom breaks, snacks, water, coffee, rest, etc.
2. Make space, take space – actively make room for everyone to speak. If you tend to speak more, take responsibility for stepping back; if you tend to stay quiet, challenge yourselves to speak up more often.
3. Co-learning – everyone has their own experiences and approaches, and no one is an expert in everything. Let's co-learn with each other.
4. Use “I” statements – speak from your own experience rather than generalizations.
5. Judgment Criticism Free Zone – offer ideas and suggestions; no one needs criticism or judgments when they share their ideas, approaches, or methods.
6. Assume positive intent – assume that people have good intent.
7. If you wonder, ask – please ask questions when things are unclear.

# Meet our contributing farmers

First – look around the screen – **you** are part of our panel – this is designed to be interactive + we need you to share your input and experiences!

Jeremiah –  
Owner Vernon Family Farm



Alex & Emma – Farm  
Employees at VFF



Greg—Owner Spring Ledge Farm



# Review of Staffing Up

## Your Farm Culture as Your Guide

- Whether to hire anyone
- What jobs or roles to hire
- Who fits well in your operation
- What systems you need

# Today's Session

## The Crossroads of Culture & Communication

Understanding What Matters to Your Employees

Building Successful Relationships with Farm Workers

How \*YOU\* Fit Into the Mix

Tools for Optimizing Employee Performance

# What Matters to Employees



Organization



Communication



Clearly Defined  
Roles



Farm Crew  
Composition



Opportunities for  
Growth &  
Development



Workplace Culture

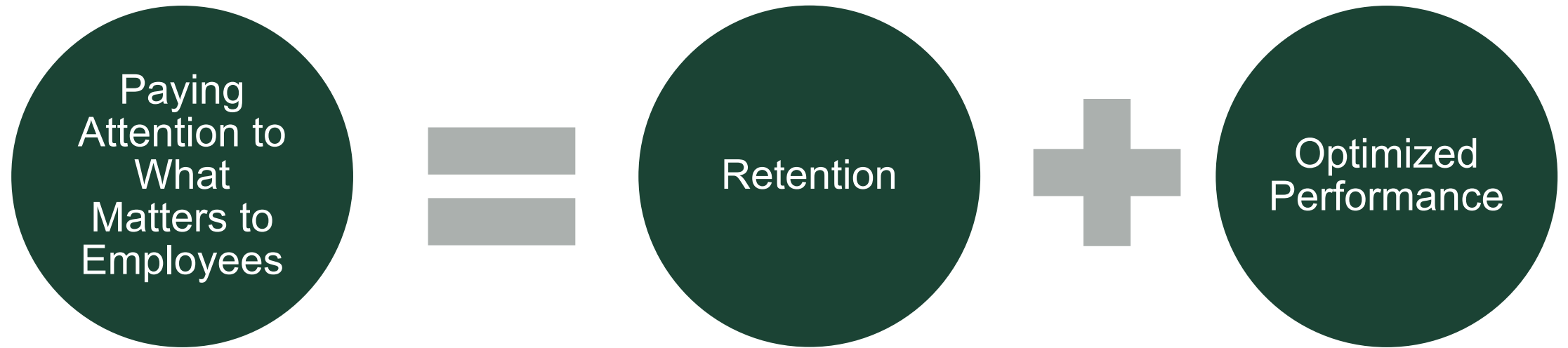


Healthy  
Management

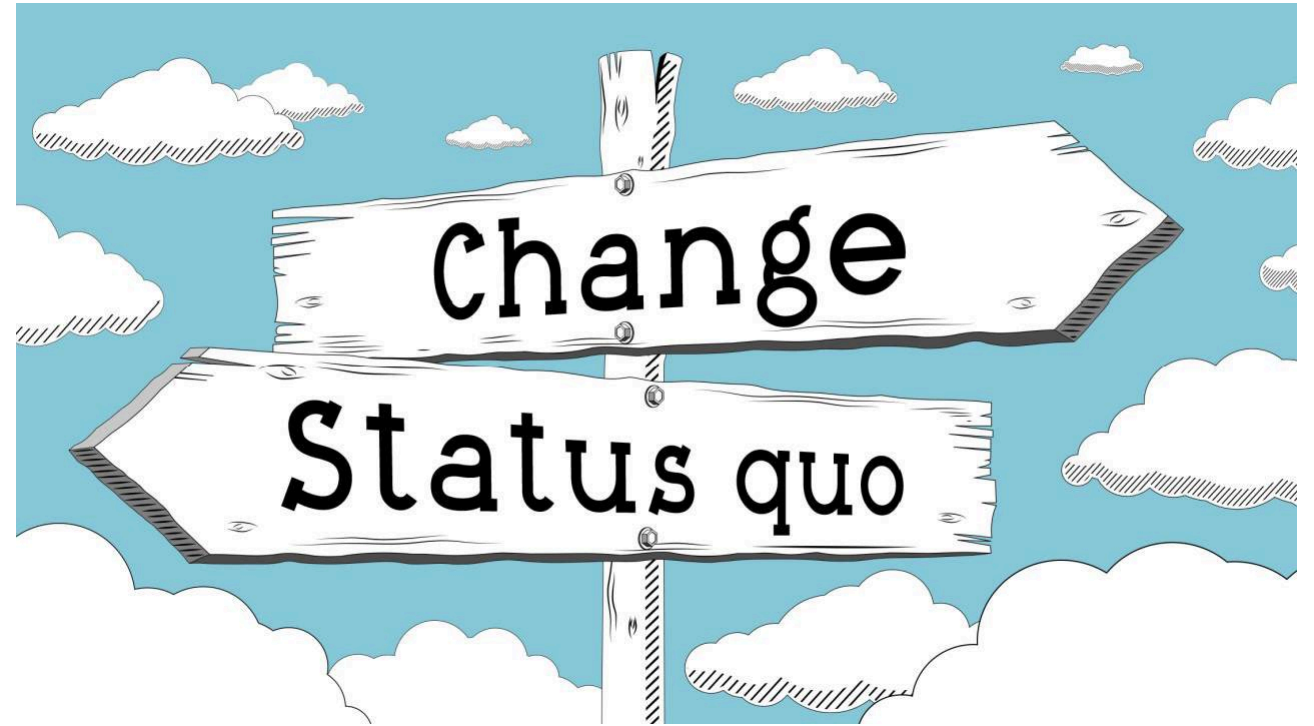


Fair Wages &  
Benefits

# What Matters







# Farming Into the Future by Centering Farmworkers

*A Deep Dive Into What Diversified Vegetable Farm Employees Value in a Workplace*

**Sarah Janes Ugoretz , Anita Adalja, Rue Policastro**

*"To be truly visionary we have to root our imagination in our concrete reality while simultaneously imagining possibilities beyond that reality." - bell hooks*

[Link](#)

## How important are each of these factors to you in a farm job?

Factors	Avg.	Factors	Avg.
Respectful treatment	4.91	Farm's mission and vision	4.13
Effective communication	4.80	On-farm education/mentorship	4.08
Safe working conditions	4.75	Full-time employment	4.07
Clear expectations	4.71	Opportunities for advancement	4.02
Workplace culture	4.68	Professional work environment	4.01
Equality of task assignments	4.47	Farm location	3.87
Wages	4.40	Paid time off	3.71
Working outside	4.40	Health insurance/stipend	3.71
Growing practices	4.40	Year-round employment	3.67
Access to food	4.39	Opportunities for profit-sharing	3.36
Proper sanitation in staff areas	4.33	Bonuses	2.71
Diversity among co-workers	4.14	Housing	2.25





# **Workplace Culture**

**(5th on the list)**

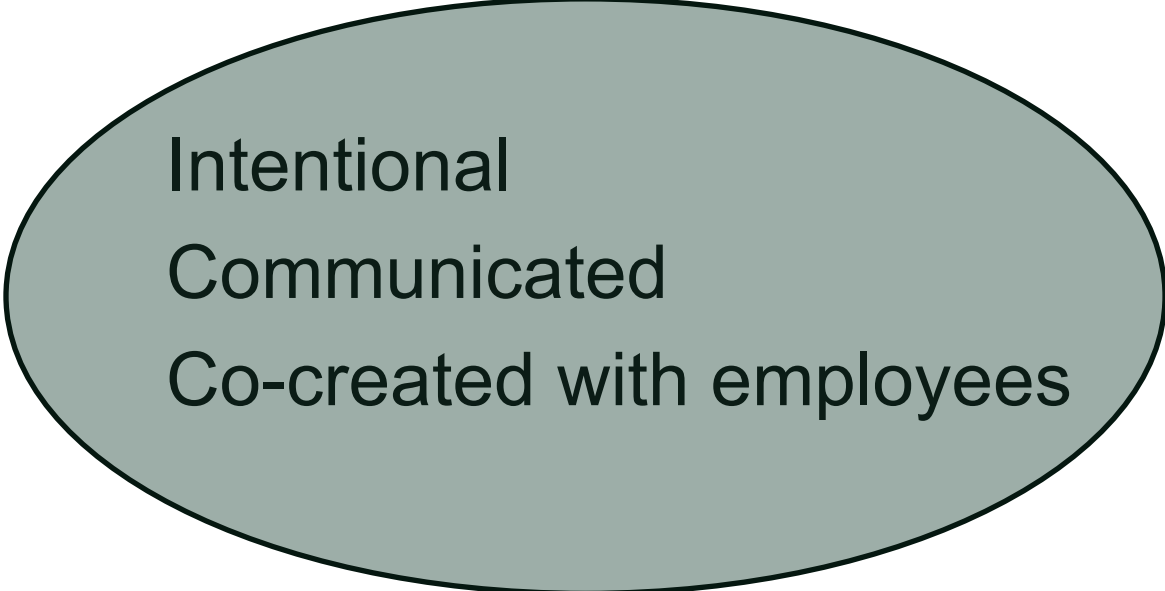


Alex Chase



Alex Chase

# Workplace Culture



Intentional  
Communicated  
Co-created with employees

- Recognition system
- Organization
- Preventative conflict resolution
- Policies to foster respectful environment
- Set example – owners & managers
- Two-way communication





# Organization



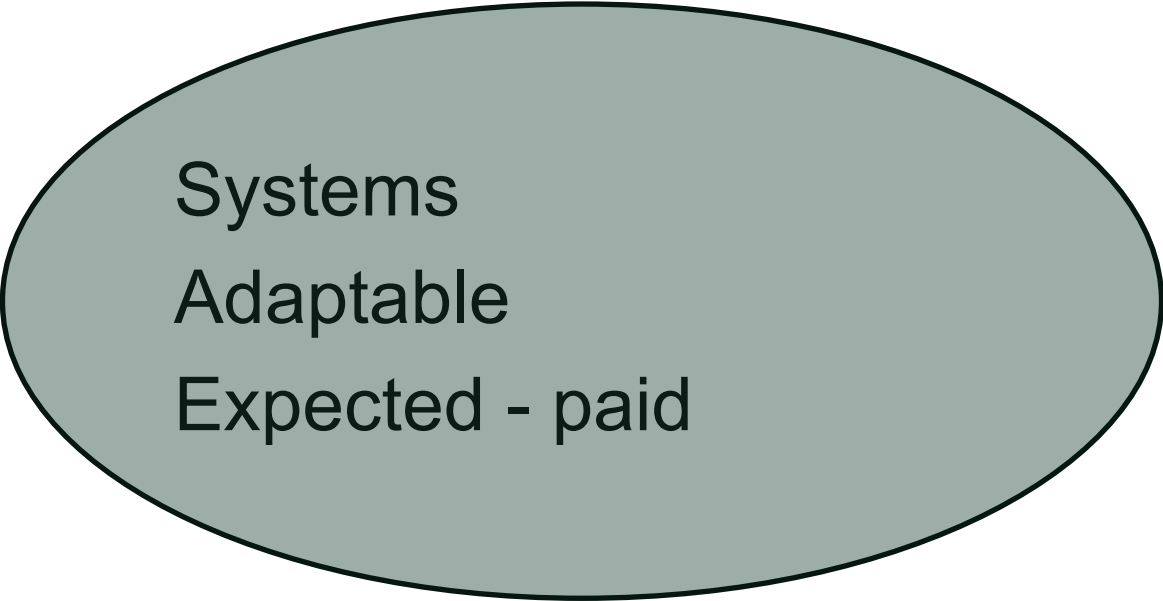




greg - spring ledge farm - nh

Jesse Wright

# Organization



Systems  
Adaptable  
Expected - paid

- Employee Manual
- Onboarding process
- SOPs
- Culture/expectations
- Setting example
- Lean Farm concepts
- Employees get their own set of tools



# **Fair Wages & Benefits**

**(tied for 7th)**





greg - spring ledge farm - nh



Seth Wilner



Jesse Wright



# Fair Wages and Benefits

## Employee Cost Estimator

<https://www.uvm.edu/aglabor/dashboard/node/add/cost-calculator>

## Employee Cost Estimator

View

Edit

Manage display

This tool is designed to help farmers estimate the total cost of employees. It is intended to assist first time employers with understanding and calculating the complete cost of employees, including federal and state payroll taxes, workers compensation, unemployment taxes, as well as any benefits a grower offers to employees beyond their regular hourly wage.

+ [First time using this tool? Read this before you begin.](#)

Proceed to Tool >

# Fair Wages + Benefits

Salary

Bonuses

Incentives (raises if meet certain criteria)

- Formal policies (equitable)
- Stipends
- Retirement Contribution (tax offset for qualified retirement plans instead of pre-buys or equipment purchases)
- Employees get their own set of tools





# **Clearly Defined Roles**



Alex Chase



# **Clearly Defined Polls**



greg - spring ledge farm - nh

# Clearly Defined Roles + Titles



Structure  
Boundaries  
Agency  
Autonomy  
Innovation

- Position descriptions
- Training plan
- Two-way communication





# **Growth & Development**



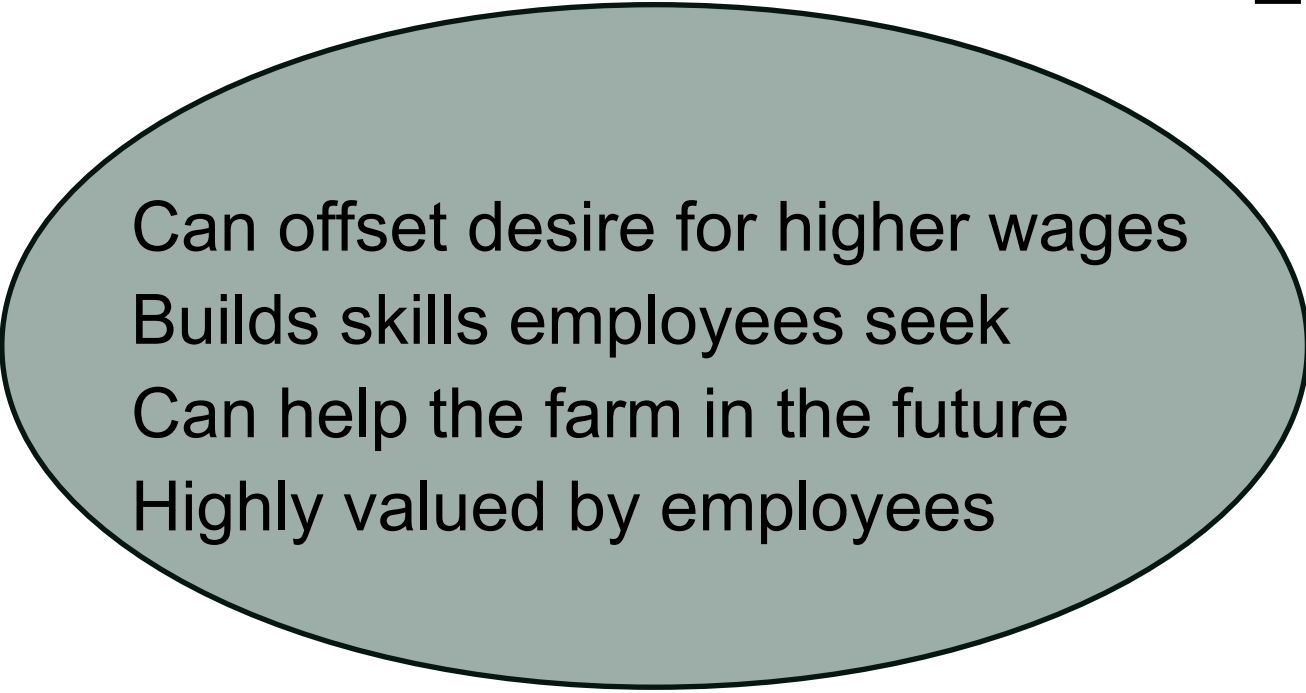
Alex Chase



Alex Chase



# Opportunities for Growth & Development



Can offset desire for higher wages  
Builds skills employees seek  
Can help the farm in the future  
Highly valued by employees

- Employee evaluations
- Informal check-ins
- Mentorship
- Professional Development stipend/support
- Training plan



# **Farm Crew Composition**

# Reflection

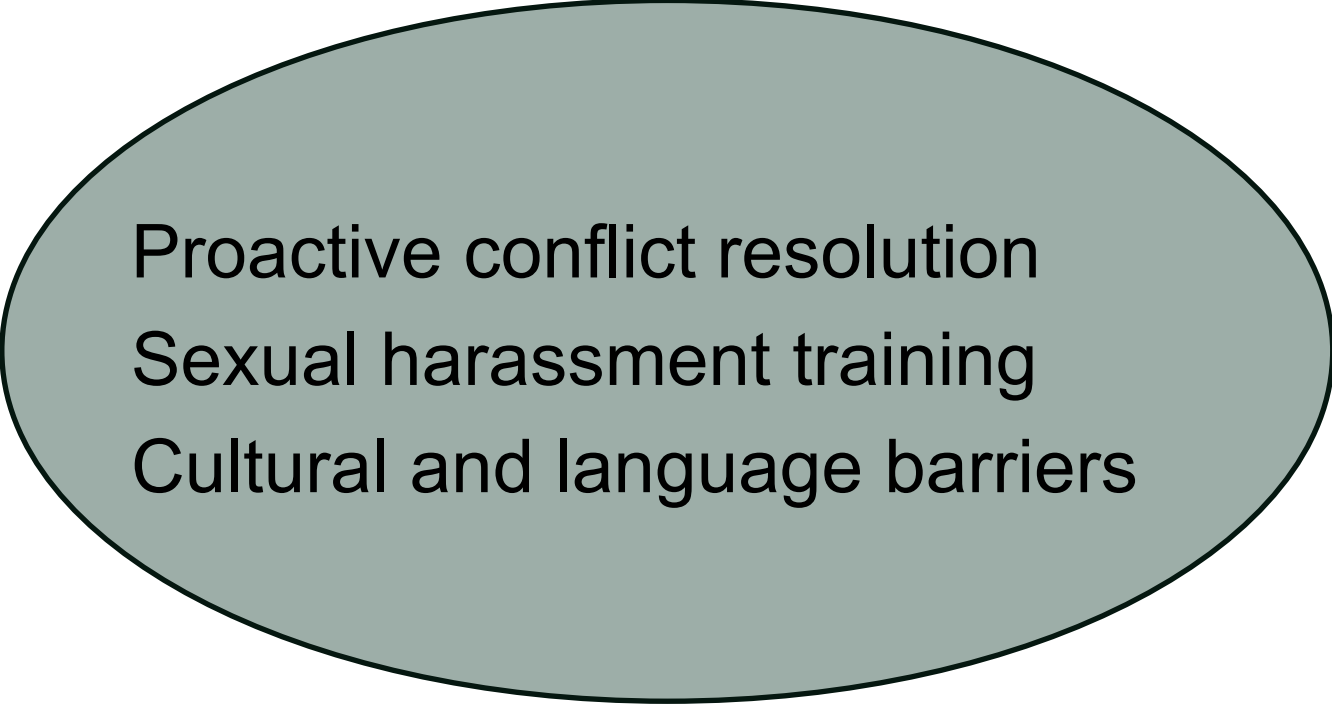
**Take a moment and think of positive and negative team experiences on farms.**

What was positive ?

What was negative?

How could it have been different?

# Farm Crew Composition



Proactive conflict resolution  
Sexual harassment training  
Cultural and language barriers

- Proactive approach to conflict resolution
- Two-way communication
- Intention gathering of employee feedback
- Training plan
- DiSC and other such processes



# Communication



greg - spring ledge farm - nh

# Spring Ledge Newsletter



## SPLEDGER

The week of October 24th



### Oct 28th Crew News from the farm -

*What's happening on different parts of the farm, some helpful reminders about everyday chores, and some useless trivia.*

#### *-October and November hours*

*The farmstand is open through Monday, Oct. 31st - same hours as usual (closed Tuesdays). Farmstand is closed to the public from Nov. 1st - Nov. 8th. Back open on Nov. 9th. We'll still be closed on Tuesdays all through the months of November and December. We'll be closed on Sunday Nov. 13th and Sunday Nov. 20th. After that, we'll be open each Sunday until Christmas.*

#### *-Halloween update*

*The town of New London is having a trick or treat evening on Sunday, Oct. 30th from 4pm-6pm. Part of Main St. will be closed to vehicles (from the Barn Playhouse to Tracy Library). The farmstand is open for business until 4pm on Sundays and on the 30th, we will set up a little trick or treat farmstand with warm cider and candy to hand out. If we have time, we'll make up some jack-o-lanterns as well. Maybe a fountain with red food*





Alex Chase



# Communication

Spoken, written, pictural, actions, training, policies

Big picture – how small acts fit into larger pictures

Short term and long term

Respectful

Multi-modal, Multi-lingual, Multi-cultural

Personal Issues

- Proactive approach to conflict resolution
- Two-way communication
- Intention gathering of employee feedback
- Policy generator handbook (dashboard)
- Employee handbook
- Job descriptions
- Respectful communication
- Informal check-ins
- Tools – white boards, radios, etc



greg - spring ledge farm - nh



# Healthy Management

# Healthy Management

Creates respectful workplace

Actions and Words – show by doing

Transparency – having a bad day?

Intentionality – healthy doesn't happen by accident often

Policies

- Proactive approach to conflict resolution
- Two-way communication
- Intention gathering of employee feedback
- Policy generator handbook (dashboard)
- Work/life balance
- Respectful communication
- Building leadership capacity throughout

# Small Group Work

In a breakout group discuss:

What are some actionable steps that you can take in the **next few months** to create an environment that optimizes employee performance/success.

If you have long term actions, write these down for next year.





# How *\*You\** Fit Into the Mix

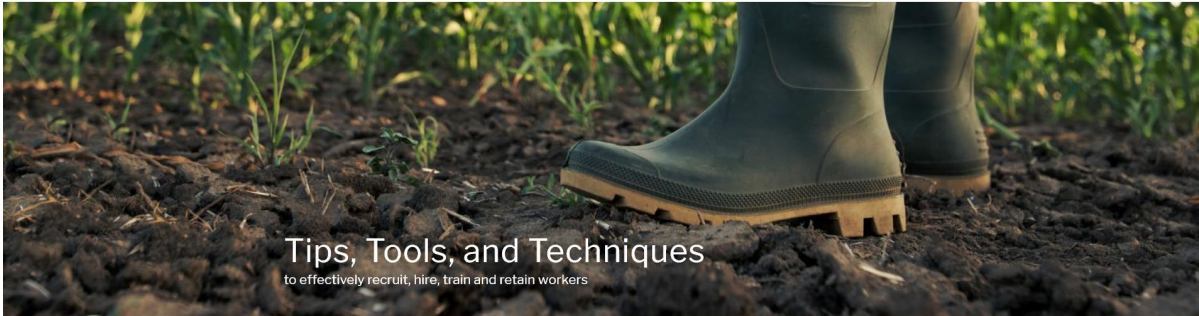


Alex Chase



Alex Chase

# Resources



## Tips, Tools, and Techniques

to effectively recruit, hire, train and retain workers

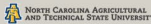
Good decision-making around the type and amount of labor needed on a farm enhances the farm household's quality of life and increases the likelihood farmers will successfully meet their financial goals. This site provides tools and strategies to help small and medium-sized produce and diversified livestock farms make informed labor decisions.

 <b>Are You Ready to Hire? Self Assessment</b>	 <b>Employee Cost Estimator</b>	 <b>Job Description Generator</b>	 <b>Personnel Policy Generator</b>	 <b>Resources</b>
--	---	---	--	---

THE FARM LABOR DASHBOARD IS HOSTED BY:

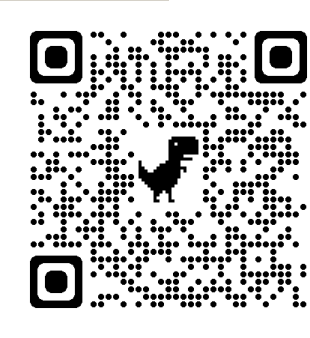


COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS:



National Institute of Food and Agriculture  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

This material is based upon work supported by USDA/NIFA under awards 2021-49400-35641, 2018-70027-28588, 2014-69006-21873 and 2018-69006-28096.





# Farm Labor Dashboard Tools



Are You Ready to Hire?  
Self Assessment



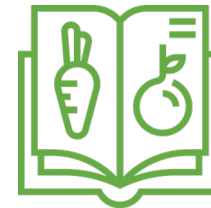
Employee Cost Estimator



Job Description  
Generator




Personnel Policy  
Generator



Resources



# Resources




EN ▾

WorkshopsLibraryCommunityFellowsPartnersLegal Services

## Library


Find answers to your farm law questions in our library. Browse our many pathways for guidance to the exact resource you need to move forward. Or use the search bar to find pathways that mention your key words.



Institutional and Legal Professional members can now download our resources as PDFs for easy sharing with their agricultural community! [Learn more here.](#)

Search


Relevance ▾



Business Structures

I'm not sure which business structure is the right one for my farm/ranch. Where do I start?


I want to run my farm



Insurance and Liability

What types of insurance do I need on my farm or ranch?

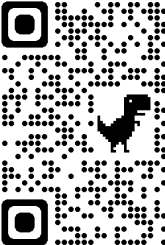
How do I find a good insurance agent?



Workers and Employees

I'm thinking about hiring help. What should I know during the planning stages?

Does my farm or ranch have to pay overtime to



The Farm Labor Dashboard is hosted by



---

collaborative partners



Extension



CENTER *for* INTEGRATED  
AGRICULTURAL SYSTEMS



National Institute of Food and Agriculture  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

*This material is based upon work supported by USDA/NIFA under awards 2021-49400-35641, 2018-70027-28588, 2018-69006-28096 and 2014-69006-21873.*

---

Learn more at [uvm.edu/aglabor/dashboard](https://uvm.edu/aglabor/dashboard)