



# HOW TO ATTRACT & RETAIN GOOD EMPLOYEES

Unlock success in your farm by mastering the strategies on how to attract and retain good employees. From employee incentives to fostering a positive work culture, our guide offers essential tips for a thriving agricultural workforce.

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## How To Attract And Retain Good Employees for Your Farm

Are you faced with a labour shortage? Do you want to know how to attract and retain good employees?

"That's a silly question!" we hear you say, "Of course! Doesn't everyone?"

It's no secret that many rural and regional areas are struggling to fill their vacancies and this is especially so in the agricultural and horticultural industries.

It used to be the case that the next generation within farming families could be relied on to stay on the farm and continue the family tradition.

But this is no longer true as young people are attracted to the big cities and other professions or career choices.

Plus, careers in farming only attract a limited number of people who are drawn to the country lifestyle. According to a report published by [Agricultural Appointments in 2022](#), there are 6 available job vacancies for every graduate.

This gives prospective applicants the choice of where they want to work and what kind of conditions and remuneration they're looking for.

For example, if a graduate has the choice of a position where comfortable accommodation is provided compared to one where there's no or very poor accommodation, which one do you think they'll choose?

It makes complete sense when you think about it, doesn't it?

So have you thought about what you can do or offer that will set you apart from the rest?

We've come up with some top suggestions of incentives and ideal working conditions that are sure to have those graduates flocking to your door. But first, why is it important to retain your staff?

## Why It's Important To Retain Your Staff As Much As Possible

Undoubtedly, you'd be aware that it's far more cost effective to invest in your current workforce rather than having to constantly engage new staff.

Firstly, finding new workers costs you both time and money. You have to pay a fee to the recruitment agency and then spend time interviewing possible candidates.

On top of that, you have to ensure that all your farm work gets done. And here's where many farmers may face enormous challenges.

Have you ever faced the situation where you've lost a good portion of your harvest because you just didn't have enough manpower to complete it?

While this thought can drive fear into the mind of any farm owner or manager, it's something that you need to be aware of as it's definitely happened before.

So how can you avoid this? What are some actionable steps that you can take to ensure that you retain your current staff?

Essentially, if you want to retain the workers that you've spent countless hours training up, you have to look after their welfare. In other words, you have to ensure that they're perfectly happy in their current position that they wouldn't think of working anywhere else.

Now that you understand the importance of keeping your staff happy and ensuring that they want to stay with you for the long run, here are our top suggestions on what will make employees want to work for you.

## Provide Ongoing Training And/Or Education Support

It's no secret that variety during the working day helps to keep your staff interested and enthusiastic. So don't just slot your staff into one role and expect them to do the same thing day in and day out.

Everyone thrives when they get to learn new things that they haven't done before. And you get the advantage of a versatile workforce where someone can just easily step in to help out when needed.

So, as part of your employment offer, include the option for ongoing training in various tasks that are carried out on your farm.

Similarly, you might find applicants who are wanting to further their education. This is something you should encourage. You might like to offer support by paying for tuition or giving them time off for their studies.

At the end of the day, you're going to benefit from what your employees are learning and putting into practice on the farm.

### **Incentivise Your Workers With Bonus Schemes**

While it's important to pay your staff a decent wage to begin with, bonus schemes can help to increase their productivity. This, in turn, helps to improve your bottom line because increased productivity results in increased return on your investment in your workers.

For this, you're going to have to sit down and work on some key performance indicators that you're willing to reward.

For example, you could offer a bonus if your harvest is completed within a certain time frame.

Or you could offer a lump sum bonus payment if your staff complete a pre-determined term of employment. This is actually a great way to retain your workers as well.

### **Offer Flexible Working Arrangements**

These days, having a decent work-life balance is becoming more and more important. Especially if you're enticing prospective employees from urban areas to come and live in more rural and remote regions.

This could be as simple as flexible start and finish times or initiating some type of job-share agreement. Compressed working schedules are also becoming quite popular.

These involve individuals working longer days but a shorter week. It'll take some planning on your behalf to ensure that everything gets done, but all you'll need to do is set up a roster and revise it when needed.

### **Provide Free On-Farm Accommodation**

Having accommodation available right there on your farm is likely to be a pretty good drawcard for any prospective employee.

And we're not talking about an old farmhouse that's poorly insulated, has loose floorboards, hundred-year-old plumbing that doesn't work and furnishings that were

popular in the sixties.

That's not going to be enticing to someone who's just graduated from agricultural college. Especially if they also have a young family in tow.

On the other hand, if you have a **nice two or three-bedroom accommodation unit** with quality fixtures and fittings available, you might have a few candidates fighting over your available vacancy.

Plus, if your workers have the convenience of living right there on the farm, it's likely that they'll be available when you need some help when a crisis pops up.

And of course, they'll be nice and refreshed in the morning because they haven't had to drive 100 km – or even 200kms – to get to work.

Granted, this means you'll have to invest some money, but look at it this way – if you purchase a modular unit brand new from the factory, it can be delivered to your farm and positioned without you having to do a thing.

And because the unit's brand new, there will be no ongoing maintenance costs for quite a few years to come. Don't you think that this kind of investment would be worthwhile?

### **Include The Cost Of Utilities**

To sweeten the deal even further, you can include the cost of utilities such as water, electricity and internet. This can be easily achieved by having the unit connected to the services you already have for your main residence.

Or you could have some solar panels attached to the unit with backup battery storage, if you're worried about how this will affect your own utility bills.

### **What Factors Can Affect Farm Labour Productivity?**

There are a number of factors that can affect the productivity of your staff or the workers you engage. Some of these will be out of your control, but others are factors that you can do something about.

Let's look at these individually.

### **Weather Conditions**

Unfortunately, none of us have any control over the weather. But, it can have a huge impact on productivity.

Sometimes, it's just too wet to put the machinery out into the field while at other times, when it's hot, your workers will need more breaks to stay hydrated and work at their best.

So, the weather is just something you have to contend with and our Aussie farmers are pretty good at this. Where

do you think the phrase “make hay while the sun shines” comes from?

## Farm Infrastructure

The infrastructure that you provide for your farm workers can make a difference in how productive they are.

For example, do you provide on-site accommodation? Do you have decent facilities for breaks that are shaded and cool for those hot summer days?

What about sanitation? Are there toilets for both male and female staff and do you have shower facilities for when the work gets dirty or your workers just need to cool off?

It's no secret that workers who have access to the right facilities without having to go too far, will be happier in their work and thus, more productive.

## Training Or Lack Of

While not all your workers will be good at everything, you might be surprised at what each one can do if you give them the chance. Some will have a knack for certain tasks but you won't know this unless you give them the opportunity.

So, do you have a training plan in place?

Have you asked your workers whether there are other tasks that they're interested in learning that you could teach them?

Being asked whether they want to learn additional tasks is a great performance booster for your employees. It shows that you care about the work that they do and want them to excel.

You might even be surprised that your bookkeeper has an aptitude for driving your harvester if given the chance.

Who would've thought!

We'll talk more about the importance of training later on.



## Create A Community Vegetable Garden

You could even take this whole thing one step further.

Enlist the help of your workers to create a community vegetable garden where everyone can be involved in growing fresh produce to share. You don't need to dedicate a lot of space to this.

Instead, use bits and pieces laying around the farm to construct raised beds, add an irrigation system, and fill the beds with manure and compost. Ask your workers what they like to eat and purchase some cheap seeds so that they can start growing.

With this type of setup, everyone can be involved with maintaining the veggie patch and share in the fresh produce that they're growing.

This is also a great way to get your workers' families involved including the kids, if they have any.

## Have An Open Communication Channel

To make your staff feel valued, make sure that you have an open-door policy. If something's troubling them, let them know that they can come and talk to you.

If someone has a new idea, listen with interest, and take their suggestions on board. Don't just dismiss their ideas and say "But we've always done it this way".

In fact, you might want to have weekly meetings and give everyone the floor to have their say. Being heard is one of the greatest gifts that you can give anyone.

Just knowing that they can talk to you without being dismissed will not only earn their loyalty but also their respect. And who would want to leave a job where they're valued and appreciated?

## Allow Some Time For Fun And Camaraderie

Life shouldn't just be about work.

The most successful operations that are known for retaining their staff, ensure that there's always time for a bit of social interaction.

Consider holding regular Friday night barbecues or other types of get-togethers where your staff can mingle and enjoy some downtime.

Keep it simple and informal where everyone can chat and enjoy some grub. Perhaps limit the alcohol though – you don't want everyone coming to work with a sore head the next day!

And don't forget special occasions like birthdays and Christmas. It doesn't take much to make your workers feel like they're part of an extended family rather than just an employee.

Building trust and loyalty is not that difficult and can go a long way in ensuring that your staff are happy and satisfied right where they are.

Now that you know what type of things you should offer to actually entice staff to fill your farm vacancies and make them want to stay, how do you go about finding them?

### What Should You Do When You Need New Staff?

There are many recruitment agencies that you can enlist to help you find farm workers. These agencies can do most of the heavy lifting for you.

They'll post your ad and handle all the applications. Then they'll vet suitable applicants and send you a shortlist. It's then up to you to arrange interviews and meet the shortlisted applicants to see which ones you'd like to employ.

**Agricultural Appointments** is one such agency that you might like to consider. Here are a few others:

- [Staff360](#)
- [Acclaimed Workforce](#)
- [Agri Talent](#)
- [Workforce Extensions](#)
- [Agri Labour](#)
- [Agri Crew](#)
- [AG Workforce](#)

As you can see, there are plenty of choices of recruitment agencies that you can work with. By the way, we don't endorse or not endorse any of them – these are just some examples that out there on the big wide world of the internet.

But, before you contact them, make sure that you have some good content for them to use in the ad copy. You might even want to engage a freelance writer to put this together for you. Many freelance writers are really good at presenting your available vacancy in a positive

light. They can highlight all the aspects of the position that will make it attractive to prospective candidates. For just a nominal fee, this is definitely something that you want to consider to attract plenty of candidates.

So, what should your ad copy contain?

### Checklist For What To Put In Your Ad Copy

- ✓ Once you're ready to have your ad copy created, here's a checklist of what you should include:
- ✓ Job Title
- ✓ Job Description and Duties Required
- ✓ Location and a brief description of your farm. Don't forget to 'sell' the benefits of working out in the country.
- ✓ Any qualifications, skills or educational requirements
- ✓ Base remuneration
- ✓ Whether you have onsite accommodation and any other inclusions
- ✓ Whether you offer ongoing training and/or educational support
- ✓ Bonus schemes
- ✓ Your contact details
- ✓ Whether you offer flexible working arrangements



📞 1300 59 59 31

✉ info@aruva.au

📍 5 Sunny Bank Road, Lisarow NSW 2250

🏢 Futurebuild Group Pty Ltd. ABN: 98 150 296 558

