

FARM LABOUR FACT SHEET

SOUTHERN REGION

ARE YOU A GOOD LABOUR MANAGER?

Employing and managing staff can be a daunting prospect. Many farmers end up as labour managers by default. However, there are some key practices that can be followed to ensure positive outcomes for all involved.

KEY POINTS

- Consider whether you want to be a boss before employing new staff.
- Be aware of your own personality traits and management style.
- Good communication is one of the most important aspects of being a good boss.

The foundations for labour management in agriculture may have originated from the master-servant model in a time where there was a significantly different social structure. This was followed by a period where additional labour requirements were

often met by family members or neighbours working together. In more recent times, farms have had to employ and manage staff, requiring a more professional approach.

Managing the labour resource is more than just employing someone, setting tasks and paying wages. It involves people and their individual personalities, emotions, needs, wants, flaws and strengths. For some people this can be personally challenging, particularly when they are used to working alone or only with family members.

Have a think about your situation and consider your responses to the questions in the following labour health check.

Labour health check

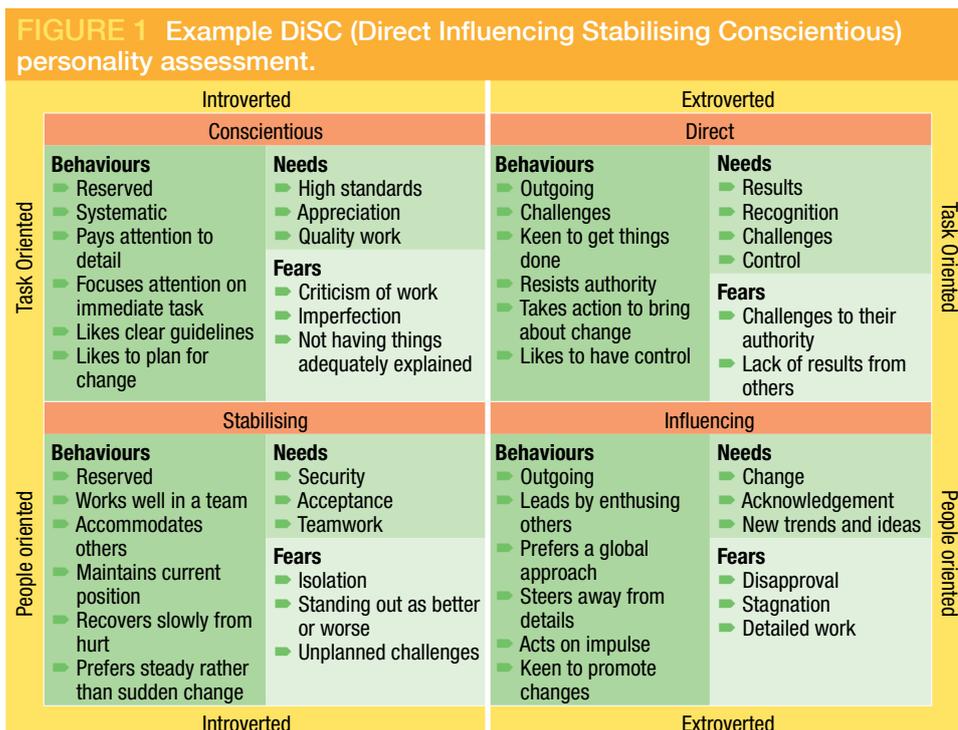
- **Is there a cooperative, positive and dynamic working environment between the people in your business?**
- **Would your staff say they are recognised and appreciated for the work they do?**
- **Are your staff provided with opportunities to attend relevant training and professional development?**
- **Are the people working in your business clear about their roles and responsibilities?**
- **Do you believe there is effective teamwork and communications in your business?**

Do I want to be a boss?

Before you begin the process of employing staff, it is important to reflect whether you actually want to be a boss or not. It is also important to be aware of and understand your own personality, working and communication styles and how they might relate to managing labour. Think about whether you, or someone else in the farm business, have the skills required to get the desired outcomes and ensure that employing additional staff will be beneficial to your business.

Understand your own personality type first and reflect how it might impact on managing staff.

There are a number of tools and resources available to help you gain a better understanding of your preferred or typical personality style. One such tool is the DiSC personality assessment (See Figure 1).



SOURCE: THE GRDC'S A GUIDE TO COMMUNICATION FOR FARM FAMILIES

Have a think about the area that reflects your natural personality style the most. You may like to ask a family member, partner or close friend to indicate the area they think relates to you.

What makes a good boss?

There are many elements that make someone a good boss. Some come naturally, while others can be learned or adapted from existing skills. Some important elements are outlined in this Fact Sheet. Take the time to consider how they apply to your farming business.

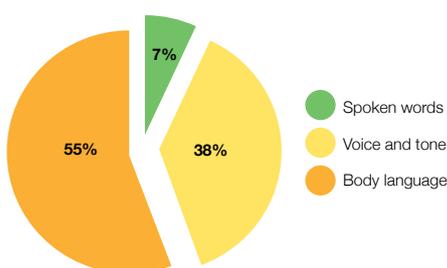
Communication

Good communication skills can be a challenge for managers in any business. As an employer or manager, you need to communicate effectively with different generations and different personality types. In the rural sector you often need to overcome distance, staff working remotely and other barriers such as mobile phone coverage.

Communication involves listening, speaking and non-verbal communication such as body language. People send and receive information by interpreting a mixture of verbal and non-verbal communication. Therefore, it is important to understand your own communication style first. You will then be in a better position to ensure all parties are on the same level at the beginning of any communication, to increase effectiveness and to reduce the likelihood of being misunderstood.

Supportive communication boosts confidence and builds self-esteem. As a result people are better able to perform their jobs. A positive communication environment encourages people to build strong work and social relationships with good listening, speaking and non-verbal communication skills.

FIGURE 2 The three elements of face-to-face personal communication.



SOURCE: MEHRABIAN, ALBERT (1971), SILENT MESSAGES



Manager:

I reeled off a list of jobs for the young fella to get done by the end of the week. I went back to the office and started working out the harvest logistics and then I see the tractor heading off down the lane. There he was getting ready to plough fire breaks! He should have been fixing the trough in the paddock where the ewes were being joined.

Employee:

I got this list of jobs from the boss, so I went out and set-up to start ploughing firebreaks. Next thing I know he's flagging me down telling me all I want to do is burn diesel and why wasn't I fixing the trough in the sheep paddock? I wish he'd just told me which jobs he wanted done first.

Manager:

At first I couldn't understand why he didn't do what I'd asked. We had a chat about it and decided that the list of jobs should be prioritised. That way we will both know what is going to be done and what the most important jobs are.



PHOTO: PAUL JONES



Good communication:

- ▶ is regular and effective;
- ▶ is open and honest;
- ▶ is two-way;
- ▶ involves words, tone and body language;
- ▶ considers others personality and communication styles; and
- ▶ results in staff who know what is expected of them.

Leadership

There are many different styles of leadership. Some traits of a good leader include planning, allocating, delegating, motivating and monitoring. These are skills that farmers often don't have time to develop and undertake.

Don't underestimate the impact of the example you set as the employer or manager, and the powerful signals this sends to staff.

Good leadership in the workplace:

- ▶ is inclusive and collaborative;
- ▶ provides employees with a role model;
- ▶ includes staff in the decision-making process;
- ▶ encourages respect and acceptance of decisions that are made; and
- ▶ takes into account the work style and preferences of staff.

Feedback

Providing feedback is another element that helps build productive relationships between employers and staff. Providing feedback to staff in a timely and constructive manner is a positive habit to develop. Informal feedback should be given regularly.

Staff should also be encouraged to provide feedback. It might help identify opportunities to improve farming operations, systems or safety in the workplace. Employers and managers need to be able to receive feedback without becoming defensive, taking offence or getting angry. It is important for both parties to reflect on the feedback and move forward.

Some guidelines for providing feedback include:

- ▶ provide factual information about the situation and use effective listening skills;
- ▶ withhold judgment and empathise;
- ▶ keep feedback clear, specific and tied to actual behaviour;
- ▶ keep feedback orientated on the task rather than personal characteristics;
- ▶ avoid abstract vague and sweeping statements;
- ▶ respect the other person's right to respond; and

- ▶ give feedback at an appropriate time and place.

Performance reviews

Structured performance reviews should be conducted on an annual basis as a minimum. Less formal discussions can take place on a more regular basis. Annual performance reviews ought to be a fulfilling experience for staff and the employer. They provide a forum for giving feedback and discussing how the individual and business is going.

The focus and attention should be clearly on the review and getting optimum outcomes for the employee and the business. Strict formality is not required, however it is important to allocate a specific time and appropriate place well in advance to ensure an uninterrupted, calm atmosphere.

A preliminary questionnaire completed by both parties prior to the review can help the employee and employer reflect and prepare to discuss their position and performance. There are numerous tools available on the internet that can be used as a guide or template. Notes should be taken and reported back to employees with agreed outcomes documented soon after the review.

Some employers prefer to have a third party facilitate these reviews to ensure they are independent and well balanced.

There are four key topic areas that can be used to promote discussion and interaction during an annual review:

- ▶ personal aspirations such as short and long term goals, skills training and development;
- ▶ personnel management such as relationships with other staff;
- ▶ business management such as business review and outlook, philosophy and processes; and
- ▶ employment conditions such as position descriptions, occupational health and safety, work hours, issues and work environment.

Understanding employee career goals

Taking the opportunity to understand the goals of staff members can allow a conversation to take place that might improve an employee's engagement and job satisfaction.

Do you:

- ▶ show an interest in helping an employee plan to reach their goals;
- ▶ support your staff to fulfil their career aspirations; and
- ▶ encourage or provide training or personal development that is relevant to their position?

Dealing with issues as they arise

To encourage a healthy, positive workplace it is important for issues to be dealt with as they arise. This involves identifying and working through issues or problems to achieve a positive result. Issues can vary in their complexity. Some may be quite simple while others might be more sensitive or require a strategic approach.

In some instances, when there is significant work pressure, employees may revert to drugs to sustain activity and attempt to prevent burnout. It pays to be mindful, particularly during peak work periods, of changes in behaviour and the dangerous impact that drugs, alcohol and fatigue can have in the workplace. These are prime examples when acting swiftly and decisively is imperative.

Most people are aware of the significance of workplace bullying. For example, when a new, often younger, person joins an established team, workplace bullying has the potential to be an issue. Workplace bullying can be verbal, physical, social or psychological abuse by an employer, manager, or other person or group of people at work. It can happen in any type of workplace and to all types of employees including work experience students, apprentices, casual and permanent employees.

Some other examples of issues managers may need to resolve include:

- ▶ conflicts between staff members;
- ▶ issues with staff completing tasks unsatisfactorily; and
- ▶ staff arriving to work late or not pulling their weight.

TABLE 1 An example remuneration package for farm staff including cash and non-cash components.

Commencement date	30/01/2013
Position	Property overseer
Cash component	
Salary	\$50,000
Superannuation at 9%	\$4,500
Fixed cash component	\$54,500
Bonus payment	
Farm bonus payment	\$3,000
Total cash and bonus component	\$57,500
Non-cash components	
House (estimated at \$130 per week)	\$6,760
Power, heating and cooling (estimated at \$70 per week)	\$3,640
Telephone rental, calls and internet access (estimated at \$35 per week)	\$1,820
Utility vehicle (private use component)	\$3,200
Non-cash benefits component	\$15,420
Fringe benefit tax (FBT)	
FBT on non-cash components*	\$14,805
Total non-cash component	\$30,225
Total remuneration package	\$87,725
Training and development	
Nominal cost for training	\$2,000

*FBT = Fringe benefit tax calculated on the grossed-up taxable value of the benefits x 46.5% SOURCE: ORM PTY LTD

Competitive salaries and total remuneration packages

Fierce competition for skilled staff from both inside and outside the agricultural sector requires employers to be aware of competing remuneration packages. It is also important to know the appropriate award and current rates of pay for staff to ensure you are meeting legal obligations and the expectations of your staff.

Farm staff are often provided with non-cash benefits such as accommodation and a vehicle as part of their total remuneration package. It can be useful to identify the total remuneration package, including benefits, to discuss the actual value of a staff member's package.

A young employee on the farm:

"We always hear about it when something goes wrong."

It is often easy to criticise when something goes wrong, but there is more benefit in rewarding and encouraging good behaviour.

Rewards and recognition

Providing employees with rewards or recognition for a job well done is important to give them a sense of worth. This can also be crucial in improving employee retention. You should acknowledge when a good job is done and celebrate reaching certain goals or targets with staff.

Work life balance

It is important to ensure that each member of the team has the opportunity to develop an appropriate balance between work, family and other interests and responsibilities. This results in staff that are more likely to be motivated and productive at work. Encouraging staff that are new

to the local area to get involved in the community through volunteering, sport or hobbies can help build relationships and encourage them to stay locally.

Generational differences

It is important to be aware of generational differences in the way we communicate, our motivations and our attitudes to work. As an employer, chances are you will have to work with staff from different generations. Therefore, it is important to be aware how these differences might impact on your working relationship and the expectations that you both have. An example of some differences between generations can be found in Table 2, below.

	Veterans (pre 1946)	Baby Boomer (1946–1964)	Generation X (1965–1977)	Generation Y (1978–1994)	Generation Z (post 1995)
Communication preferences	Face-to-face or written	Open and direct; like control	Email, SMS; like brief explanations and being kept in the loop	SMS, Facebook, Twitter and instant messaging	Online and social media, Facebook
Education and qualifications	Least studies, least understood generation	Shaped the youth culture of the 1960s and 1970s	Most educated generation	Very technoliterate, most ethnically diverse	This is a way of life
Business role	Firm leaders, empty nesters with decent incomes and growing leisure time	Primary leaders, looking toward retirement	Senior staff and middle management	Keen to be involved in all aspects of the business	The workforce of tomorrow
Career	First generation of women to move into the workforce at significant rates	Work long hours, children home alone, women into management roles	Committed to being available to their families and work/life balance	Thirst for knowledge; expect to change jobs frequently	Still considering options, but used to part-time work after school and having their own money
Lifestyle	Place importance on human relations: many are involved in cultural and society issues, age not a barrier	Risk takers, value creativity, adventure, independence, may be permissive	Cynical, sensitive to hype and politics; enjoy problem solving, flexibility and independence; values teamwork, friends and are not intimidated by authority	Team players, strong sense of fairness and ethics, respond to humour, direct language, easily bored; respect earned not positional	Adopting principles of Gen X, their parents, interested in the global community
Attitude to work	Work first	Live to work	Work to live	Live, then work	Live life

SOURCE: THE GRDC'S A GUIDE TO COMMUNICATION FOR FARM FAMILIES

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A Guide to Communication for Farm Families, GRDC

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