



Hiring a Farm Manager

By assessing your farm goals and needs, you can determine the best method of managing your farm.

Courtesy Stock.XCHNG

Before hiring a farm manager, figure out the needs and goals of your farm.

Farm managers oversee and run the day-to-day operations on the farm. They're often associated with large farm operations, but just like the larger operations, a busy small-scale farm requires daily attention and time that you may not have, especially if you hold a full-time off-farm job. Even as a small-farm owner, you, too, can benefit from the experience and know-how of a farm manager.

Deciding You Need a Farm Manager

When determining if you need to hire a farm manager, consider the goals you have for your farm and property. Consider the size of your farm, location, and how monetizing will affect the farm and your enjoyment of it.

Next, decide if you have the time, knowledge and skills to achieve your goals. This understanding will allow you to select the kind of farm-management arrangement that best suits you. You may choose to use a farm-management company, directly hire a farm manager or continue to manage the farm yourself.

For Michelle Dietzler of Dietzler Farms, hiring a farm manager was an integral part of taking what had started out as a hobby farm and developing it into a full-fledged farm business. Her father had purchased the farm in rural southern Wisconsin in the 1990s as a place for the family to spend the summer. The family worked together to bring the farm's physical features back to life, but her father remained at his full-time job in Chicago. Farm Management Material Hiring a farm manager or farmhand requires careful thought and planning. Legal, physical, employment, training and working conditions need to be considered.

The University of Missouri Extension report "Hiring and Managing Farm Labor" by Joe Parcell offers advice on hiring and managing farm labor. Information in the report includes a chart listing laws or regulations as set by the state of Missouri and the federal government. Tax forms, advice for finding the right employee, compensation and incentives, employee training, working conditions, employer-employee relations and more are covered.

Your local cooperative extension office and the Small Business Association can help you cover all your bases, as well.

Also consider these sources:

American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers
303-758-3513

Hertz Farm Management, Inc.
515-382-1500

At first, raising cattle and getting them to market was a hobby and done for the enjoyment of providing meat to family and friends. Then Dietzler left her city job three years ago to see if she could make something more of the farm.

Dietzler's goals were larger than many hobby farmers'. The relationship she's developed with her farm manager is one of teamwork. Her farm manager oversees all of the day-to-day operations of the farm, from feeding the animals to managing artificial insemination to determining cattles' market-readiness, while Dietzler handles the sales and marketing side of the farm business. She says hiring a farm manager was absolutely necessary:

"There is just too much work to do to run a farm. I needed a partner," she said.

She looked for someone who is skilled, not only in the traditional methods of farm operations, but in the ever-changing world of technology, as well.

Direct-hire Farm Managers

One farm-management option you may consider is direct-hiring a farm manager, though this may come with obstacles, according to Ed Kiefer of Hertz Farm Management.



Kiefer says one thing a hobby farmer should keep in mind is the value of their land and crop. He also points out that other types of farm ventures, such as livestock or agritourism, have potential to bring in revenue that could support a farm manager.

“Depending on [the location], the size of [the farm] may be so small that the overall profit is not going to be that great. They might not be willing to pay the cost to have something that small managed,” he says. “To get the maximum out of a real-estate investment, someone has to put in the hours and take the time and evaluate the alternatives. There are lots of things that can be done. The only limit is probably your imagination.”

When hiring a farm manager directly, know what tasks you want to accomplish. Evaluate the responsibilities he will have on the farm and identify what skills he should possess before joining your operation. Gather this info during the interview process.

Farm-management Companies

Today’s farm managers come with an ever-increasing knowledge of farming, including the necessary business, marketing and day-to-day operation skills. Farming techniques and practices have evolved with the changing technology and culture that they support. It’s important that your farm manager understands it all.

“A farm manager—and the role of a farm manager—has changed quiet a bit over the last few years,” says Brian Stockman, executive vice president for the American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers. “A few years ago, they worked with a few-thousand acres—2,000 to 5,000 acres—and now the average farm manager might manage 15,000 acres—some of them a whole lot more than that. So what they’re really doing ... is they’re asset managers.”

Although your hobby farm has considerably fewer acres than large-scale farms, you may want to consider using a farm-management company to hire a farm manager. However, a large farm-management company might only be interested in doing business with you if your property is located next to another larger farm they’re already managing.

Manage Your Own Farm

If your hobby farm and the goals you have for it are not as large as Dietzler’s, you may be able to handle farm-management responsibilities on your own. Serving as your own farm manager is a realistic option, especially in the beginning. Without skills and experience, though, you may find you don’t have the knowledge you need to take your hobby and turn it into a revenue-positive operation.

Taking business classes and working with your local cooperative extension office are two excellent routes for learning the skills you need to meet your farm’s business goals.

You may find you can serve as your own farm manager to oversee the big picture and hire a part-time farmhand to do the day-to-day tending.

By understanding your financial needs, determining your goals and opportunities, and then ascertaining the most cost-effective means of managing all of these, you can decide what type of farm manager your hobby farm can afford.

About the Author: Rori Paul proudly comes from an Illinois farm family. She is a writer currently based in Florida, and can be found on Twitter @RoriTravel.