

Creating an Employee Handbook



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The idea of an employee handbook is to give a new employee some orientation about what his/her new place of work is like. It lays out policies and rules. It allows you to share basic information that may or may not come up in an orientation and things that you and your employee may want to refer back to in the future. Some things are also easier to lay out in the beginning – later, if an unwanted behavior surfaces, it is much harder/awkward to make corrections. The handbook sets the right tone from the beginning and will make it easier and more neutral to resolve any potential issues with your employees. The handbook is NOT meant to replace good communication, nor is it an employment contract, but it helps to set clear expectations.

Include what is important to you and relevant to your farm

Not all the following points might be applicable to your operation, nor are they meant to be a complete list of subjects to include in your handbook. Decide what makes the most sense to your operation. In the left hand column below you see wording for an example manual. In the right hand column are key points listed that might help you to adapt the language to your own farm/situation.

	Sample wording	Explanation
1	<p>Welcome Welcome to our farm. We are looking forward to a long and positive working relationship for everyone. This manual is designed to give you an orientation, but is not an employment contract – you are employed “at will”. We are happy you have joined us.</p>	<p><i>This section sets the tone for the relationship. Specify if an additional employee contract exists.</i></p>
2	<p>History of the farm We began farming 25 years ago with 40 cows and 240 acres. Today the farm encompasses 470 acres, we milk 140 cows calved seasonally in the spring, raise all our youngstock and also raise 40 steers a year, marketed directly to the end consumer. We are a proud member of our cooperative, which helps us market our main product, milk. Grazing is at the heart of all our enterprises.</p>	<p><i>Give a summary of your farm. Include how it started and where it is today, what products you produce, etc. Help your employee to understand your farm and its enterprises.</i></p>
3	<p>Farming Philosophy Our vision is to create a farm where ecological, social and economic needs find fulfillment in harmony with each other and which can serve as a model for others. Our mission is to create a farm organism that is thriving ecologically socially and economically, a place for people to learn, grow and enjoy. Our goal is to provide a working environment that allows for personal growth and job satisfaction.</p>	<p><i>The Philosophy section is an opportunity to share your approach to farming and why you do what you do. You can include a vision and/or mission statement. This is a place to help your employee understand your larger mission and how they can help to achieve it. This is a place where you can share why it’s important to you to train beginning farmers.</i></p>

	Sample wording	Explanation
4	<p>Employment policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You will be reporting to _____ when you are working on this farm. You may sometimes be assigned to do _____ work and will take instruction from _____. • Please keep track of your own hours; round up to the next quarter hour and hand in on the last work day of the week. You will receive your check on your next work day. • Be at the farm and ready to work at the agreed upon time. Unexcused tardiness will receive a warning. At the third occurrence your employment will be terminated. • All employees receive at least one day a week off. Which day will be identified by mutual agreement of the owner and employee. • Unexcused absence on a scheduled shift will not be tolerated and results in termination. Contact _____ if you are unable to work your scheduled shift. • Please adhere to all safety guidelines (see separate safety sheet). • Return all tools to where they reside. Help in keeping our farm’s neat appearance by disposing of trash in the dumpster or recycle bin. • Outside direct animal contact times (i.e. milking) we ask that you not wear manure-laden clothing. We recommend a coverall for direct animal contact. • Mistreatment of animals leads to immediate termination unless for self-defense. Please review stockmanship tip sheet or ask for advice or assistance if you’re unsure about animal handling practices. • Please respect our property (land, animals, machinery, buildings) and follow the “least impact rule”: How can I get the job accomplished with the least negative impact on the property and myself? • We encourage open communication. Please address the farm owner with any questions or concerns. • You are allowed to consume milk from our tank at your own risk. Milk is to be taken only from the outlet, NOT from the top opening of the tank. 	<p><i>The Employment policy section is the meat of the Employee handbook. Here you address the basic rules of employment as well as “housekeeping rules” such as:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Safe working environment</i> • <i>Orderly operation, where to put tools, garbage, recycling, etc.</i> • <i>Time cards or time clock, pay schedule</i> • <i>Attendance policy</i> • <i>Benefits</i> • <i>Holidays, vacation</i> • <i>Encourage open communication, and identify who an employee reports to (who can give them instruction).</i>
5	<p>Outside employment If you hold another job on another farm, for biosecurity reasons you must have separate coveralls & boots for our farm.</p>	<p><i>If employees have outside employment you may want to detail your policy to prevent disease transfer, i.e. keep separate boots, come with laundered cloths, etc.</i></p>

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6	<p>Visitors and guests Visitors are to be greeted courteously and should be referred to the farm owners. If that is not possible, ask them to call our office, but do not hand out our cell number without permission. We have many visitors, customers and farm tours during the course of the year – please exhibit a professional demeanor at all times and help us keep facilities and the farm clean.</p>	<p><i>Explain what is expected if employees encounter visitors and guests (greeting, whom to direct them to), including deliveries and sales people.</i></p>
7	<p>Policies on Alcohol, Drug and Tobacco use Drug and alcohol use on the farm during work hours is strictly prohibited. So is smoking in all buildings or farm vehicles. If you need to smoke outside, please collect your extinguished butts and dispose in the trash receptacles.</p>	<p><i>A policy on substance use will help provide a safe and healthy workplace. A general prohibition of the use of alcohol and drugs in the workplace will promote an unimpaired workforce and safe work environment. If smoking is permitted, define when and where.</i></p>
8	<p>Phone/computer/vehicle use</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can use your phone only for work related communications during working hours. Refrain from personal use of your phone except during breaks or after your shift. • Any social media postings that contain pictures of our operation require prior use of the farm owner. • Farm truck and office computer use require prior authorization by the farm owner. 	<p><i>Cell phones have allowed us to have 24-7 access to our friends. A policy guiding cell phone use will help avoid problems in the workplace. If employees are allowed to use their phone to talk, text, email or browse specify when and where and for what purposes. If employees have access to farm computers, specify circumstances. Use of farm vehicles should be defined.</i></p>
9	<p>Harassment policies No Tolerance of Harassment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Farm strives to provide a work environment free of tensions from matters that do not relate to the Farm’s operation. The Farm strongly disapproves of any form of harassment including but not limited to ethnic, racial, or sexual harassment. Actions, overtures, or remarks involving ethnic or religious animosity, or conduct of a sexual nature will not be tolerated. • Employees have the responsibility to bring any form of harassment to the supervisor’s attention. In the case that the person alleged of harassment is the supervisor, the complaint should be taken to the Farm owner. Reporting employees will not be subject to reprisal and all reports will be kept confidential. 	<p><i>Handling of harassment in the workplace is strictly governed by federal law. Note that an employee manual does not establish a legal definition of harassment. Use this section to provide a clear, safe pathway for handling complaints before they escalate. It is not meant to be a substitute for legal recourse.</i></p>

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10	<p>Discretion and confidentiality We expect confidentiality and discretion from our employees. Please don't harm our relations and reputation within our community through gossiping.</p>	<p><i>Your employees might learn proprietary details about your farm or other information you wish to keep confidential. Set out clear expectations for a culture of confidentiality and discretion.</i></p>
11	<p>Solicitation policy No solicitation or distribution of literature on the farm property is allowed. We do not tolerate unsolicited distribution of printed materials of any kind to other employees or visitors, including political fliers.</p>	<p><i>Politics is always a touchy subject. It may be a good idea to keep politics and other controversial topics out of the work environment as much as possible.</i> <i>You may also want to prohibit distribution of any fliers or literature, of any potentially controversial or commercial nature.</i></p>
12	<p>Discipline Procedure If an employee violates any obligation described in this manual, an initial discussion is held allowing the employee to explain his or her side of the issue. If the response is unsatisfactory, they will be subject to a warning. The third occurrence results in termination. The following violations are so egregious that immediate termination might result: animal mistreatment, alcohol and drug use, and health endangering violations of safety procedures.</p>	<p><i>Outline what happens if the guidelines in the manual are not followed, but be sure to commit to consistency.</i> <i>It is appropriate to include in your disciplinary process a way for an employees to voice his/her side of the story.</i></p>