

Let's imagine....

A business is launched in your area by people you know. The business offers to solve problems for you by doing these things:

- Recruit and screen potential workers, providing a ready supply of reasonably skilled farm workers willing and able to perform the basic functions of farm work including specialty crop production and livestock production
- Do the paperwork necessary to hire and pay them in accordance with the law, including handling all aspects of payroll and associated costs and all tax related filings
- Handle routine administrative issues like scheduling, requests for time off, timecard maintenance
- Support managerial functioning in terms of resolving disputes between workers, letting poor performing employees go, and documenting such interactions
- Manage legal compliance issues like securing workers' compensation and handling unemployment benefit claims

You would still need to provide training in the specific operations of your farm. Your receipt of workers would be subject to availability, and to rules about when and how you request workers.

Take a moment to reflect.

Now, to offer this service, the business charges you the farmer a per-hour fee for each hour worked by the employees you utilize. With those revenues, they pay the worker wages and all other associated costs with the business. The business charges you, the farmer, more than you would otherwise pay the worker per hour to cover the tax, legal, insurance, and overhead costs.

That's the basic solution. It's a business that provides value, for which they charge a fee to provide, above and beyond the worker's hourly wage.

Take another moment to reflect on whether and how this may meet your needs. Then, browse some additional values this business could provide.

Overtime and Unemployment Benefits

Let's say that the business offered overtime and unemployment benefits to workers. When the season ended, they could potentially receive supplemental income from the state and federal government until work picked up again, helping the business to retain them for subsequent seasons.

Let's say that if you used this business solution, you would not have to carry your own insurance for worker injuries, either workers' compensation or liability insurance. In addition, a worker who was injured in the course of working on your farm would not be able to initiate a lawsuit claiming your negligence caused that injury.

Social Values

Let's say that the business solution proposed provided strong social values such as worker-established labor standards and democratic control. If the business solution were organized as a worker-owned cooperative, it could provide some assurance of social values. Let's talk about whether this would be of value to your operation.

Ownership and Control

Let's say that you had the opportunity to influence the organization and start-up of this entity. For example, you could assist in setting the rules for when a farm business requests workers, how those workers are allocated, the extent of training provided, etc. Of course, you'd do that in cooperation with other participating farmers and farm workers, the benefit being that you'd be more likely to get your needs met.

Last, let's say that the business model was profitable- that it took in more money with hourly fees to producers than it spent on wages and overhead. This could be possible in a few different scenarios such as achieving economy of scale or serving a related market like landscaping businesses. Producers may have the opportunity to benefit from that profitability in two ways.

At the same time, there are costs...

In order to take advantage of that solution, you might need to comply with federal and state OSHA requirements that might include:

- Identifying safety hazards specific to your farming operations and training workers in health and safety practices to address those hazards
- Establishing a system for recording and reporting worker injuries and illness
- Establishing a system for providing personal protective equipment and training workers in the proper use of protective equipment
- Providing field sanitation facilities on your farm

Your business might need to register with the federal government as a farm labor contractor and you might have to comply with certain federal rules for the protection of seasonal farm workers including, for example:

- Verifying that the business maintains current registration as a farm labor contractor
- Verifying that employees have been provided with written information about workers compensation insurance and the specific conditions of the work they will perform on your farm
- Posting information on your farm about worker rights and legal protections
- Ensuring that the business is properly paying workers on time and paying overtime if you become aware that a worker is not being properly paid

Take a few more moments to reflect. We look forward to hearing your detailed thoughts in our focus group!