

Feasibility of Collaborative Labor Solutions: Second Round Focus Group Analysis DRAFT

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Introduction

Meet entity X

What if a company could help small farmers across an entire region of the country meet their staffing needs, while at the same time covering administrative tasks from payroll to handling workers' compensation claims? What if this company could also guarantee farm workers year-round stability, either by connecting them with off-season jobs or providing them access to unemployment insurance? Further, what if this company gave both farm workers and farm owners the opportunity to take on leadership roles, or even invest and earn dividends? What if it helped farm owners capture social values that made them more enticing to workers and consumers alike?

This is the basic pitch behind a company simply called "entity X." During the early months of 2021, Farm Commons and a group of partners in agriculture and academia surveyed several groups of small farm owners and farm workers to gauge whether they would value the services of entity X and whether, given the opportunity, they'd be likely to participate. Separate groups of workers and farm owners completed online surveys to register their quantitative responses to various aspects of entity X's value proposition. They also participated in focus group conversations via Zoom to take part in more detailed and qualitative discussions about entity X and how the idea aligns with their experiences and needs. Participants were spread across Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont.

This report will detail the highly nuanced responses farm workers and farm owners offered to the overall notion of entity X and to various specific questions about how it might operate. "This sounds like a temp agency for ag workers," said one farm owner, echoing the way many owners and workers summed up the idea. "That has a lot of appeal to me because the amount of work that I would have would be part-time and it would be sporadic, seasonal... one of the things that has definitely held me back from that is all the legal and technical aspects of hiring someone." Farm owners in focus-group conversations often ended up weighing whether entity X's legal and technical help would be worth ceding some control over certain parts of their operation. Farm workers also simultaneously saw the value of an agency that could help them secure work, while questioning whether it makes sense for their career paths: "I could imagine it being more helpful for others than myself," said one worker, capturing a common sentiment. These comments hardly sum up the whole conversation, though—workers and owners alike really held up entity X to the light of their own varied experiences, and came away with a range of thoughts about its strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for elaboration.

Farm Commons prepared two different surveys, one for farm workers and one for farm owners. Both were asked to assess how valuable they thought entity X would be, both for their own careers and for their peer workers or owners. Farm owners were asked how much they'd be

willing to pay per hour per worker for entity X's services, and how much they'd be willing to pay in order to secure benefits like unemployment insurance, workers' compensation coverage, and overtime for their workers. Farm owners were also asked whether the potential to capture social values through entity X would influence their willingness to participate. Farm workers were asked what trade-offs they'd be willing to make in their hourly wages in order to secure overtime, unemployment insurance, and workers' compensation coverage. Both groups were asked about how willing they'd be to spend time working in leadership roles at entity X, and about their attitudes toward potentially investing in and receiving dividends from entity X. Both groups were asked about their attitudes towards heavier OSHA involvement and requiring farms to register as farm labor contractors.

Facilitators also gave survey participants a broad overview of how entity X would work. Farmers would pay entity X a certain rate per worker per hour. These payments would cover workers' wages as well as entity X's overhead costs. Because entity X would be operating across multiple states, good risk management would require it to carry workers' compensation coverage, provide overtime pay, and provide access to unemployment benefits regardless of whether a respective state's laws required it. Farm owners and workers would have opportunities to serve in unpaid leadership roles at entity X, and would have the opportunity to invest in entity X as member-owners, in turn receiving dividends when entity X turned a profit. In order to be profitable, entity X would need to branch out beyond its core of farm labor services, possibly by providing staffing services to landscaping companies, food processors, and other non-agricultural but ag-adjacent industries.

Entity X could be structured in a variety of ways, including as a worker-owned cooperative, a farmer-owned cooperative, or a privately held company. Focus group facilitators did not provide many logistical details beyond that, aiming for a broader assessment of entity X's value rather than an in-the-weeds look at its inner workings.

The survey does have some built-in quantitative limitations. A total of 27 farm owners and 27 farm workers participated, making for robust conversation but a relatively small sample size. That breaks down to a small group of workers and owners surveyed for each state, which makes it difficult to draw many conclusions from variations in responses from one state to the next. Workers and owners in different states are also working under different laws and regulations, and some understand those laws and regulations better than others, which may have shaped their responses to questions about worker benefits and protections. The fact that entity X would be a multi-state entity further complicates that part of the discussion. Additionally, some of the responses in the online survey data were lost due to software issues, but this only impacted a couple of questions. This report treats the quantitative data as a helpful companion to the much richer qualitative responses participants shared in their focus groups.

Summary of Conclusions

Farm owners and workers alike often recognized that entity X could address at least some of their workforce problems, particularly when it comes to time-consuming HR tasks and the difficulties of finding work in the off-season. On the whole, they remained skeptical about entity X's overall business model and whether it really works with the realities of small farms' operational needs and business climate. Instead of rejecting the idea outright, participants raised an array of questions to try and flesh out the specifics of how entity X would work.

How would entity X handle housing and transportation for workers? Can a "farm temp agency" model really meet the diverse labor needs of small farmers across a given geographic area? Would it advance or undermine the career goals of farm workers who are in it for the long haul? Would different business structures for entity X give farmers enough power and reward in exchange for their investments of labor and possibly money? Can it create better support structures and social values than farmers are already creating without it? Can it maintain a diversified business model while staying true to its agricultural core? These are just a few of the questions that may help to guide the conversation about entity X going forward.

Owner Group Analysis

Value of entity X

A little over one-third of respondents said that entity X would be slightly valuable to their businesses, and only one respondent rated it not at all valuable. The respondents as a group rated it as a bit more valuable to farm-owning peers than to themselves. About 22 percent of farm owners rated it as extremely valuable, both to themselves and to peers, and almost all respondents saw at least some degree of value in the idea. Four respondents did modify their responses in different ways after some focus group discussion—some to rate it at a higher value, some to rate it at a lower value. "There are some aspects that are very attractive, others that are less attractive," wrote one in modifying their response. "I'm realizing there are so many different kinds of farms and labor models with different needs," wrote another.

Owners acknowledged the benefit of having an outside company handle time-consuming paperwork and administrative tasks. That said, some people didn't find it too burdensome to handle HR and administrative work themselves, and some questioned whether signing on with entity X would really be a better deal in the long run than simply hiring an accountant.

- "I'm at a phase in my business where I'm spending more and more time on the HR side of things, and I really miss farming."
- "For a lot of us vegetable producers, the ratio of year-round positions to seasonal is just minimal... I just don't know how much work company X would have other than the paperwork side. Payroll's quick and easy. The taxes side, staying compliant on that side is the harder part, and we've hired out a bookkeeper to do most of that. So unless this company can do it less than a contracted bookkeeper, I also just wonder if it's viable."
- "The paperwork and having to take care of all the legal requirements is a pain in the rear end, so that would be extremely valuable to me."
- "Probably our biggest thing is the few people that we need that are seasonal, but we're already doing the paperwork on a couple of people who are full-time for the whole summer, so I don't figure that those people are gonna come from this pool. We would be doing our own payroll plus then paying a little bit more for the paperwork for maybe a few fill-in people that are more and more seasonal for just a few weeks here and there, or a couple days a week for the entire summer. I would have to hear a little bit more about the model and the details about how that would be worked out. I'd hate to pay two different entities for doing the same kind of work."
- "I might not always be using it but in a way that is what makes it valuable, in that to do all the paperwork and background stuff for compliance and everything else, when I don't always need somebody, is really difficult. Having that done and just being able to pull somebody in when I needed the help would be very valuable, and maybe to add more as I need more along the way. That seems really great. I tend now not to get the help at all, because the hurdles to get over to find somebody and train somebody when maybe I

only need it for part of a season, or it's very little that I actually need, and things don't get done."

- "It would solve one of my biggest hurdles, which is recruiting and screening potential employees. That seems to be the hardest thing for us, is finding a good fit of people, and it seems like this type of organization would be tasked with finding the right candidates. I think it would be extremely valuable to a lot of farm and livestock producers, because I think over the whole spectrum, a lot of us just want to focus on the good work of producing food, and not being bogged down by managerial, HR challenges that are outside of our scope of experience or knowledge."
- "Just the paperwork, the workers' compensation paperwork, the tax paperwork, and the recruiting, just getting an accountant alone is valuable. If that's able to be handled through this business, I think that's great."
- "This sounds like a temp agency for ag workers. That has a lot of appeal to me because the amount of work that I would have would be part-time and it would be sporadic, seasonal... one of the things that has definitely held me back from that is all the legal and technical aspects of hiring someone."
- "The pool of labor to choose from is difficult...the farms out here tend to be very large row crop farms instead of the smaller scale CSA type farming that we do and our farmer friends and peers in the area do. It would be a good source of drawing from a bigger pool of talent or experience."

Almost across the board, farm owners were more skeptical about ceding control over the hiring and scheduling process to an outside company. Some farmers said they would likely use entity X to hire part of their workforce while hiring the rest directly, perhaps just drawing on entity X's labor pool during periods, like vegetable harvesting, during which they require more workers. Some seemed open to using entity X if they could still have a chance to interview potential workers and have the final say over who works on their farm.

- "If I thought that entity X were filtering potential employees and helping be a common gathering place for potential workers, then it might be easier than us trying to market that we need employees. We might have fewer places that employees might find us, versus some larger entity that is doing it for 200 employees across a bunch of farms. But I would still want to be able to interview any potential employee that they found because of the fit."
- "Teasing out the different pieces of what company X is offering is kind of important for my answer... finding the right fit for employees is critical to my farm. When I'm hiring, it's sort of this jigsaw puzzle of people's skills and their availability and their personality and how they're going to incorporate into our crew."
- "The hiring process is critical in terms of establishing the kind of one-to-one feelings that you're going to have with a potential employee. This one-on-one direct relationship is so important on a farm, maybe more important on a farm than your average business, because you're with them a lot more of the time and you're really doing a lot together. Letting somebody else do that doesn't build that."

- "I would think that scheduling is something that the farmer needs to do. It would not be helpful to have an intermediary do."
- "I would probably never be comfortable having an outside organization hire who was gonna work for me for the season. We prefer to do our own interviews and our own hiring. We have a really small crew. There's usually about five of us all working together and we work side-by-side with our employees. It's important for us to feel like, personality-wise, we have the right match, not just in terms of being proficient at tasks."
- "We have issues with people who are on the sex offender registry. We have to be aware of those things. We need to protect our customers and our own family. Where I see the greatest value in these crew concepts is [when] it's time to harvest my six-acre field of winter squash and I can't find high school kids. But on the sort of day-to-day on a highly diverse farm like mine, this is our home. We need to have some oversight over who these folks are, because they are literally working at my house."
- "Having the more direct relationship is helpful when people are going to be with us a long time."
- "For instance, picking peppers, I have a very specific way I like it done, and it actually takes people a while, sometimes seasons, to get an understanding of what it is that I'm looking for to actually extend our harvest. If I'm getting rolling people in, I feel like I'm the one who's gonna have to harvest all the peppers, which is impossible. On the flip side of that, sometimes we run into problems with people doing the same thing week after week, so then by the end of the summer they're almost burnt out on it. Getting new energy from a pool would actually help with burnout, I guess."

Their needs varied widely not just in terms of skills, but also in terms of how many workers they'd need and during what periods of the year. Much like the farm workers surveyed, farm owners found it hard to reconcile the "farm temp agency" concept with the development of specific skills and the nurturing of long-term work relationships. There was also some doubt about what kind of broader labor pool entity X could really offer in spread-out, rural areas, especially in regions where agriculture is highly diversified.

- "If a company like this were helping to pair vegetable farmers who have summer seasonal work with sauerkraut makers who have winter seasonal work, that could be a valuable asset. I'm always looking for winter work to sort of push my crew towards, which ideally has a spring end date so that they then want to come back and work for me for another season."
- "I'm oftentimes hiring one or two part-time employees, so being able to offer them another farm that they could also work with to come up with full-time work, and maybe being able to pair farms that have similar practices or are on a similar scale, I could see that being useful as well."
- "One way the summer-winter kind of hiring could be useful is if you get the same people back."
- "My biggest concern is where we are situated, away from any population density, and how would these folks get here and is housing a part of it."

- "Farm labor retention is a huge issue. I would say the majority of the people who've worked here... have been right out of college, looking for that summer-out-of-college experience, never intending to stick around, probably not local, and then we all know about the cost issue of paying enough to retain people for the long term, but how valuable it is to have people come back. This is the first year that we have someone coming back for the third season, and it's like night and day to not train up from the get-go."
- "What we are looking for in a service like this would be to have readily available workers for short bursts of time. I think we would prefer to continue to hire our regular workers on our own...it's very common for produce farms to need a lot of hands in a very short period of time, with sometimes very little notice. That can be difficult, almost impossible to arrange. I think it's a very limiting factor for what we choose to grow and how much we choose to grow. I think that's where this service would be useful, for farms like ours at least."

Cost of entity X

Farm owners expected their peers to be slightly cheaper than themselves, based on survey results. But only slightly. Just over one-third of owners said they'd be willing to pay \$17 to \$18 per hour for an entity X worker, and the same amount of respondents said their farming peers would be willing to pay the same amount. After some focus-group discussion, one farm owner said they might be willing to pay a little more than initially indicated, explaining: "The hidden costs that I already incur with employees probably equals a higher per/hour wage."

- "The vagueness makes it really hard to answer.... we are pretty close to \$15 with all our employees, partly because H2A is going to be \$14.99 this year... between insurance, payroll taxes, and whatever costs, bookkeeping costs, I'm probably paying another \$2 to \$4 an hour more, per employee."
- "We're kind of large, we've been doing it for 20 plus years. The bookkeeping side of it, the administrative side, for us larger farms doing it for so long, that part of it's just not valuable... our employees, they're a part of us, they're a part of our farm.... not having that piece of it just feels odd."
- "I was spending on the order of \$500 a year [for a payroll company]. They were of course doing far less than entity X would be doing. At that point, I had three or four employees, full time but seasonal, and the company I had hired was really just cutting checks and submitting payroll taxes and doing my end-of-season W4s. At that point, the \$500 I paid them felt like a lot, which is why I ended up deciding to take a class and learn how to do it. Now looking back, and knowing that I spend probably a half a day every two weeks doing payroll, and a significant amount of time doing hiring at this time of the season, I would absolutely be willing to spend that...but not wanting to give up control of the actual hiring process."

This section of the focus group brought out a lot of indications that farm owners were receptive to the idea of paying a little more for entity X if it would give them some peace of mind about legal compliance and effectively bundle together various administrative services. Some farmers were already used to paying relatively high rates to employ, house, and provide travel for H2A workers or workers hired out from other farms. Admittedly, some said entity X would just not be viable for them, full stop. Farm owners also mentioned a couple of times that it's common for farmers to hire workers illegally, paying them "under the table" or "off the books." In areas where this practice is widespread, it might be hard for a program like entity X to reach critical mass.

- "We're already paying \$15 an hour minimum, and with the back end of that we're already in that \$18 to \$20 range of actual cost. Maybe it's easier to write the check and have all of that taken care of by somebody else... but in terms of the sustainability and profitability, we're not in a major ag producing region where you're going to have these labor crews and workers just hanging out at the Home Depot parking lot ready to spring into action to pick your squash."
- "I put down that I would be willing to pay \$17 to \$18 an hour...\$15 per hour wage to the worker is only fair, but I also feel like the value of having somebody recruit, hire, manage payroll, do all the HR stuff, all the legal compliance, figuring out worker compensation packages, all that, is very valuable and saves me a lot of time. For other farmers I put \$14 an hour, only because a lot of farmers that I know use illegal labor, not necessarily [undocumented people] but paying under the table, part-time employees, 10, 12 bucks an hour, cash under the table sort of thing. I think it might be hard to convince somebody of the value with that extra amount per hour."
- "I'd consider paying a percentage of whatever wage I was offering the individual as a fee to this business, rather than commit to a set wage for every person, just make it a percentage of their wage above and beyond."
- "Economically it would be impossible, just not viable for us, period. The math wouldn't work. Probably not for all the growers I know, for sure, but the people we're most closely connected to, they would struggle to justify the cost."
- "We have been lucky over the years to have really amazing workers who, like us, worked for little to nothing. That's kind of the boat that we're in. Over the years, we've gone through these real ups and downs. The best time for us to find workers is probably now, seconded by the worst of the recession."
- "We have used [a neighboring farmer's crew on our farm and they charged last year \$23 an hour...there is actually a pool of under-the-table workers out there and there is a huge risk in using that. There are farmers that will use that. When we looked at the pricing, if you're paying people on the books, with H2A wages being what it is...and you add in all those other costs that are associated with being on the books, especially for H2A workers you're including housing, then you're looking at around \$20 an hour as it is. The \$3 extra an hour seemed like it was reasonable."
- "Personally our farm is pretty on the radar, so [the legal protection] is worth it to us."

Many farmers, even those receptive to entity X, still had a big hangup—it's hard to put a dollar value on a given worker up-front if you're not sure of that worker's skills or how productive they'll be, whether they'll work only in a menial capacity or whether they'll serve other functions on the farm. One farmer said it would be easier to simply pay bonuses in a profitable year, rather than pay higher wages and expenses up front. During one focus-group discussion, Farm Commons staff acknowledged that it might be hard for farms to turn entity X workers into management material. Still, several owners did acknowledge that entity X's costs could be worth it for smaller farms who need seasonal workers, or in times and areas where there aren't large farm labor pools—but as one farmer put it, even under those circumstances owners would have to ask the lingering question: "are they really skilled?"

- "Depending on who it is, a high school kid, we pay a certain amount, and if it's someone who comes back for 10 years it's a lot higher. So just kind of average them out, you think?"
- "The H2A program, by the time you fly people and provide housing and stuff, is expensive. The problem is, hiring out of a general pool—the person is only as valuable as their productivity and consistency is. Paying \$20 an hour to get a body to pick strawberries, that's a stretch for me personally. And yet if the guy was productive and the guy was here for the full season, and didn't have to duck out in the afternoon because his girlfriend was having a bad day and all the other things that go along with that, he's worth \$20 an hour....it's hard to say how much I'm willing to pay until I have some experience with that person."
- "I'm a year-round farm doing mushrooms indoors and I really only have a crew of four to five people altogether...we've got a crew that needs to mesh and hive together. I'm not hiring seasonally at all. Now granted, if I had 100 employees, I'm going to be paying somebody \$19, \$20 an hour to manage that. When I look at this, I would pay somewhere around \$15, \$16 an hour...realistically, if I was paying somebody else \$19, \$20 plus an hour to hire somebody, I'm not sure it really even applies that much. I would hire somebody to hire somebody."
- "What the job duties are gonna be is gonna determine what we're going to pay people per hour. We pay everything from [\$15 an hour] to, we have salaried people too."
- "It seems very reasonable to me to pay \$20 to \$25 an hour for a good ag worker and maybe it depends on the experience...and whether it's still possible for them to make a decent hourly wage and still get all those benefits."

Unemployment insurance

About 25 percent of respondents said that unemployment insurance was not at all valuable to their operations, and about 63 percent said they would not increase their hourly pay rate to provide unemployment. Several farmers were in states that already give farmworkers access to unemployment, so part of that response no doubt comes down to the fact that providing it wouldn't be a change for many of the respondents.

- "If we are hiring temporary workers, hopefully that temporary work service is employing people year-round so that people aren't trying to declare unemployment. It's one thing to pay unemployment because you're required to do it. It's another to have people make claims off of it that raises your rate to the point where it becomes costly. We have a pretty low claim rate....I was a farmworker for a while and I didn't care about unemployment because I felt like my skills as a worker were valuable enough that I would be able to find work fairly easily once the season ended. And I knew when the season was ending, so I was planning for it."
- "My husband was laid off when Reagan came into power. There was no fault at all. He was still a very highly skilled worker, but he got laid off and we were a young family and filed for unemployment. It made a big difference... I don't think we ever thought about needing unemployment insurance until that happened."
- "If it is very well explained to the employee, it might be worth it...I did have a lot of problems finding short-term work in the offseasons....we already pay unemployment insurance and it doesn't seem to cut into our budget very much."

Still, several farm owners made it very clear that they frown upon unemployment itself, either because of its cost to employers or because of their aversion to paying people who aren't working. One even said that workers who claim unemployment benefits are not the kind of people they're looking for, because, the farmer said, they tend not to be good workers. Some clearly felt that unemployment insurance was somehow at odds with the ethos of farming.

- "In Vermont, we do pay unemployment, whether or not they collect. If they do collect, our rates go up by the use... it's actually funded by us as businesspeople."
- "We are lucky enough to have part-time and seasonal help of folks that haven't really taken advantage of unemployment because they're students, or it's a seasonal thing where it's maybe a teacher who has a job the rest of the season. We've been lucky that way, but when I did the figures for how much I was willing to pay, because we do have that available to our workers now, I assumed that that was in the number of the max of what I would pay for hour, so I put zero."
- "I'm confused how this is going to add more on if you're already sort of tied into the unemployment system.... once you flip over to maybe three, four, five employees, you have to kind of take this stuff on anyways. I found it hard to answer."
- "I think [migrant workers are] going to go on to greener pastures and get more money. I know places that high season they are super happy and hours get cut to 40 and they're gone without notice. If you're talking about trying to pay somebody to stay happy at half of what they're used to, I think that you're only inviting them to work for another job under the table."

Many said it would be more valuable to ensure year-round employment for their farm workers, in part because of UI's cost to employers and in part because it is hard to live on unemployment. Another farm owner drew a parallel to teachers, who sometimes have their pay spread out over

12 months even when they are not technically working year-round, and suggested that something similar might be valuable or attractive to farm workers.

- "Half of farm pay would be pretty tough to live on. I just don't think it's realistic."
- "Maybe this is the Yankee Puritan in me, but I feel like it would be much more valuable to me and to my employees to have access to off-season work than to have access to just off-season payouts."
- "For me it's not applicable, because I'm looking for year-round employees, long-term employees, and not seasonal employees."
- "It's always been easy to find summer help from high school and college kids...and we're really looking at the moment for someone year-round, and maybe eventually another year-round person...I think we can probably get away with fewer summer help if we have more of these permanent folks."
- "When I was originally thinking about the value or the amount I would pay, the only thing that I saw that would save me actual money was the payroll services. Everything else was like, save me time, save me headaches, save me energy."
- "Anything that would encourage and promote returning and experienced employees would be of the utmost values to anyone who wants quality work done."

Overtime pay

About 44 percent of respondents said that overtime pay was not at all valuable to their business, and half said they would not pay a greater rate in order to provide it. As with unemployment, some of the tepid response may come down to requirements that may already exist in some states. Some owners felt that working long hours without overtime is just part of the sacrifice that farm owners and farm workers alike have to make. At least one noted a possible backfire effect: Overtime requirements incentivize employers to keep hours down, and this could drive away workers who want more hours regardless of whether they are making time and a half. At least one other farmer argued that there are good reasons to avoid overtime hours, because tired workers are not productive or safe. Several other farmers made it clear that they thought paying overtime was just the right thing to do.

- "Obviously the workers want more money. That's why they're here. That's why they have a job. There's a very fine line as to how much is acceptable and not. If you're looking at 40 hours, where the overtime starts at 40 hours, I think that's a very unrealistic place to begin. Farm work, you need more than 40 hours in a week to do your work. If the answer is more workers, then you're going to increase what you're going to have to pay per worker, because you're essentially gonna need almost double the workers to do the same work, two-thirds more. And there you get into, where are they gonna live, how are you gonna move them? How many houses are you going to build? How many houses do you want to rent?"

- "I think a lot of us want to pay our workers a lot more. But the economic reality of a cheap food system in our society makes it hard to have the income to pay what everybody deserves, including most of us as farm owners. When it comes to overtime, because wages aren't as high as they would ideally be, a lot of farmworkers want to work extra hours, but if it then becomes time and a half, there isn't the return for the work to make it worthwhile to do that. It's a conundrum for all involved. If I were to go to paying overtime hours, I would just hire more workers so that everyone could stay at 40 hours or less, because you also get tired."
- "I'd like to be able to pay overtime and pay a really high livable wage, but unfortunately, there's not markets to support what I do to provide that kind of assurance. As it is, I think my workers have generally made more than me as far as wage goes at the end of the day, at the end of the season. Granted, there are other benefits that come along with the farm."
- "For us, I pay overtime after 40 as it is right now...I wouldn't be able to have an outside company trying to drive the pace of what it takes to do certain jobs on the farm, because you're giving up safety for speed...there's a lot of overtime that I end up paying. If I didn't need that, someone's gonna end up paying it, and if it was part of the overhead of entity X, that first number would go way up, and it wouldn't have any value to me at all."
- "I also would be really hesitant...that company X would be trying to limit overtime hours. With our business, it's just not really possible. We've never worked a 40-hour week in the regular growing season... we work pretty efficiently and it just takes what it takes to get the job done. I would be hesitant to have somebody from the outside try to control our schedule."
- "I put that it has moderate value in that I would pay \$1.50 or more kind of at the extreme end. In other jobs I've had, overtime pay provides amazing incentive when you need it the most. We all know that you can plan for a good season that has a good schedule from day to day or week to week, but we are so reliant upon the weather that that can mess up schedules or the flow from day to day or growing vegetables."
- "On our farm, we are willing to take the more expensive route on every route so we can optimize real critical things that we're trying to develop on the farm. I would definitely be willing to pay more money for people have incentive to realize that this is a formal industry like any other industry [and] we actually want to be enticing and appealing to people...to retain people's attention, it's not necessarily the hourly wage, but it's also the fringe benefits and things like that. Overtime is cool, but on our farm we try to combat with a simplistic system where we're not overworking the individual because I believe that everyone deserves at least one day off to recuperate."
- "If I were to hire someone and they were working more than 40 hours, I would want them to have the same kinds of benefits that my husband gets at his job..."

One farmer brought up another possible unintended consequence: If entity X has an incentive to keep hours low in order to avoid paying overtime wages, will that give entity X power to speed up the pace of work on a given farm, possibly compromising safety and farmers' autonomy in the process? Other farmers didn't quite lay out that scenario, but pointed out that avoiding

overtime hours entirely is not practical in farming—there are too many unpredictable factors at work, and things take as long as they take.

- "My [initial] response as the owner was, nobody ever paid me overtime. But I got to thinking about it. Also if you look at the history of why farm workers aren't paid overtime, there's a lot of racist overtones to that from the '40s. I got to thinking about it, and we decided to do it...it does cost us quite a bit of money to do that, but it makes you really careful about staffing and whether you really need people to work long days or not when all the sudden they make 50 percent more."
- "We don't pay overtime. I try not to work my workers over 40 hours a week. They get too tired, they become unproductive. We try to rotate everybody out, make sure people have time off if they need it. We have paid overtime in the past. It gets too expensive. We do pay a good wage. I mean, my minimum people start at \$15 and go up from there. I just think we get more out of them by not working them past 40 hours."
- "As an employer, we can't afford to pay overtime...if you're looking at H2A workers or the migrant farmworker population, my gut feeling is most of them, instead of getting overtime, would want more hours. When I was a farmworker...I routinely worked 60 to 100 hours a week. I never even considered overtime....we already have to deal with worrying about overtime, it's just at 60 instead of 40, which is manageable, but we're not gonna let people go over 60 hours a week, because I don't want to pay that."

In one focus group session, Farm Commons staff asked farmers what they'd think if entity X simply rotated workers in and out so that no one worker would work more than 40 hours per week. "I think that might not work very well for consistency's sake," one farmer answered. "If worker A is doing something and all the sudden company X realizes worker A is gonna go over the hours on Friday at 9 a.m., and all the sudden worker B shows up and worker A is gone, but maybe you've spent time working with worker A, that might not work out." Other farmers pointed out that this might create training headaches, especially in areas with highly diversified agriculture.

- "Something I feel like this service is not clarifying for me, is what type of employee am I getting? If they're not providing enough value for the farm, it doesn't matter how cheap or expensive they are."
- "We've found that providing housing has been so critical to both finding and retaining crew. Figuring out how to communicate the value of that housing to the crew and incorporate that into what they think of as their pay rate has been a challenge. Thinking about the technicality of the legality of how do we show the value of that housing regarding their pay rate and how does that translate into workers' compensation and other takes."
- "How do you take someone that's maybe worked on a pick-your-own operation, now you drop them on a farm that's doing sprouts or some other high-food-safety issue? There's a lot of barriers to that, because we don't have this great big homogenous agriculture here."

- "I'm about six months in training, just for the basics of the aspects of the farm that need to happen. Having a different worker coming in halfway through would end up actually costing me a lot more money in the end, just because of the hours that could be made."
- "I think it's important to see our workers as people too, and they should be getting overtime for work beyond the 40 hours. I agree that it's very hard work and they're more productive when they aren't worked too hard."

Workers' compensation

An even 25 percent of respondents said that it would not be at all valuable to not have to secure workers' comp or liability insurance. A plurality—about 29 percent—rated it slightly valuable. About 46 percent said they would not increase their hourly base rate in order to secure workers' comp through entity X, though about 42 percent said they'd be willing to pay 50 cents more per hour for it. As with overtime and unemployment, existing requirements in different states likely influenced how people responded.

- "There's pretty different rates for when our staff are caring for pigs or working on vegetables. We would need a time sheet that differentiated that sort of thing in order to make this system work."
- "I just can't imagine how this could be done correctly, knowledgeably, with an entity that isn't knowledgeable of what your operation entails...you'd need to have more intimate knowledge of your business than what entity X would have for all of you."
- "We did try to get a claim for one of our workers, an H2A worker who didn't speak English and it was impossible. I was trying to get her money for a claim and the fact that she couldn't speak English and all the bureaucratic layers of trying to file a claim made it that she had to leave and go back to Mexico before we got any of that sorted out....if that service [entity X] is going to help an employee file a claim through workers' comp, I would actually value that."
- "I don't know if you're assuming that we want to hire our entire workforce through entity X. We wouldn't, so we're already gonna have to deal with workers' comp, so it's not gonna save us to have them deal with a portion of it....I just don't think this question really pertains to New York State."
- "There are a lot of beginning farms that might not be hiring at all, and for them, that would be a huge service, because they don't want to just start a policy for a temporary worker or something like that."
- "As New York State kind of cracks down on people offering internships and apprenticeships that aren't actually legal in their eyes, demand for this kind of service would probably go up."

Several farm owners questioned whether entity X would be effective in shopping around or negotiating for the best rates. A few doubted that entity X would be able to secure better rates than the Farm Bureau already does. Several also asked how entity X's liability coverage would

account for the variety of different work situations that exist on farms, and several contended that workers' comp was going to be expensive no matter what.

- "We've found that insurance rates tend to ratchet up over the years, and if we don't shop around every few years, we're paying more than maybe we should be. I think it would be important to know that company X was shopping around for the best rate for workers' comp."
- "Is it safe to assume that it not only provides that insurance, but provides a better value than we could otherwise get on our own?"
- "I've only owned a small farm, but it feels like particularly for a very small farms with one to two employees, maybe a bunch of part-time employees, it is a big cost for us at this scale."
- "Connecticut's got a really weird workers' comp thing where they throw farm workers into a pool, and if you have to go out and get workers' comp insurance it can be very expensive. You also have a minimum to get involved that's super expensive. I could see this being super valuable to people with small numbers of employees. There are solutions out there with other companies that will do your payroll and pay your workman's comp that provide kind of what you're talking about, so there's some competition there."
- "Working with the Farm Bureau can be frustrating sometimes, but it's kind of seamless and we have had claims before and it's come through for us and we had support too."

Social values

The majority of farm owners surveyed saw at least some value for their own businesses in capturing social values; a 37-percent plurality deemed it slightly valuable, and just under 15 percent deemed it not at all valuable. Their rating of its value for their farm-owning peers was only a little different, with about 42 percent saying it would be slightly valuable and about 12 percent saying it would be not at all valuable. But 54 percent indicated that they would not be willing to pay more to capture those values. One-third said they would be willing to pay 50 cents more per hour.

Farm owners had a mixed and often highly nuanced range of thoughts in the focus group about what "social values" would mean for their bottom line, the work environment, and their relationships with customers. Some farmers thought that consumers cared about social values and would pay a higher price for farm products in order to capture those values, but others seemed to think consumers are not interested in the finer details of how a farm does business. Several farmers indicated that they already felt they were capturing the benefits of social values, and therefore didn't think it'd be worth paying more to capture them through entity X.

- "This is an area where people feel good about it, but are they willing to pay more for a product because of it? I don't know if they're willing to pay more for a head of lettuce because we're there as opposed to not."
- "Many people are, in fact, willing to pay more if you're up front with them about why."
- "I think the worker-owned co-op part of the social construct may not be as valuable to people as just simply saying, 'we're paying our workers better,' or 'we're housing or workers better,' or as with organic or regenerative, 'this is what growing our food this way does for the planet, good and/or bad, and that's why it's gonna cost more.' The structure of the business is probably too removed from the customer to be worth anything.... We have more employee-owned businesses in Vermont than the national average, by quite a bit, but I just think most consumers aren't quite there yet."
- "The members of an ag co-op are owners, so therefore they've got skin in the game. As long as things are formed as a true cooperative and management doesn't steal all the profits to further management's aims against the will of its members, then that's a really robust system that would engender having some dedicated people being involved in it. If you're really talking about a cooperative, like Rochdale principles... in that context, I would say it has a lot of value, because then you're creating a stable workforce."
- "If I'm getting labor from a certain pool, then that pool has some sort of decision-making ability over how I'm running my business... it sounds to me like a labor union. I wouldn't want to have a labor union telling me how many employees I should have or how much they should be working or what I should be doing in my business."
- "I just love cooperatives, so I feel like yeah. I sell to a cooperative grocery, and I really appreciate how well they treat us as vendors, the prices we can get from them. It really does feel like a different relationship. I don't think I would be able to pay a ton more because we already command a premium in the market, and we're already trying to convince buyers of that. I don't love the idea of then re-differentiating my product again, on top of all the ways we do that already, and charging you more of a premium."
- "I've been thinking possibly about making my business more of an educational resource. If it were a 501(c)(3) or something like that, or even if it wasn't, if I just said that we use fair trade practices and all that sort of thing, and that it's an educational entity, I think it would be very valuable for me and I would definitely pay more for something like that."
- "Besides knowing how to do the work, on our farm we value social value and those things very very highly on our list. It's kind of one of the requirements when we do selective volunteering... we're more concerned about how you view things overall on a long-term, not on short-term goals.... for us it's a people thing. We understand we're here to make money, we would like to pay you a good wage so you can perform well and produce well in your life, but also, when we're on the farm, it's very important that we all respect each other and kind of in the same pool of thinking to move forward."

The focus group discussions also brought out some skepticism, or perhaps confusion, about how a multi-state workforce company would go about driving social values. Can a company with a multi-state scope really develop social values in a way that benefits small farms with very specific needs? Can such a company simultaneously develop social values while also maintaining the business model it would need to be profitable?

- "[Initially] I was envisioning a farmer-owned cooperative type thing, where the farmers would make the bigger decisions in this organization, and I also imagined it being much more local to us. I would be much less likely to participate if this was an interstate company than if it was just, say, New Hampshire-based and we could work with other farms nearby to kind of trade labor a little bit."
- "I put down not at all. For whatever reason it just doesn't speak to me as something that would offer much benefit, even in marketing value. I feel like what we do already commands a high price for our products. We practice regenerative agriculture, we're doing good things for the environment, etc. We don't really need that kind of marketing appeal to pull from a labor force like that. On my level, my biggest challenge is finding the right people to do the work, not necessarily to promote a social benefit to those people, beyond treating them well as employees."
- "As a non-profit, the social part of it, being socially responsible, it probably does have some value [in contrast to being an LLC]."
- "I think if you start dealing with worker-owned things, you can go to California and study to your heart's content about UFW and what that means, what that might look like."
- "I don't think there would be much of a marketing advantage for us in that. I potentially see, if they're training workers better somehow, that would be something that would be of benefit to our farm, if we had workers here who were better able to operate or maintain equipment."
- "At some point in time we kind of have to talk about who these employees are. Are these employees your neighbor or the person down the road, or are these employees coming from Vietnam or are these employees coming from China? That would change how I would answer that question."
- "I would value it as a farm owner, but I don't know if my customers would value it and be willing to pay any more for it."

Leadership

Just over a third of respondents said that the opportunity to hold a leadership position would be slightly valuable, about 23 percent deemed it "very valuable," and about 23 percent deemed it "not at all valuable." Their willingness to put time into a leadership role capped out at two to four hours per week—no respondents chose the five-to-10 hour or 10-plus options. And about 30 percent said they would not be willing to put any hours into a leadership role. One farm owner did modify their response, saying "Maybe I'd contribute an hour" and "I would want to know that farms of my size and type are represented and well served by the work of company X."

- "I would only be interested in doing it if this was a Vermont business dealing with Vermont... this would be a small part of our total business, and unless I wouldn't have to spend much time during the growing season on it, it would be difficult for me to justify much time on it."

- "I just wouldn't have time to. I'm trying to practice saying no to more things and it's really hard. I think just the value of that and being a voice in it and doesn't translate to the amount of time, even if it's an hour a week. But that's just where I am right now. Farming, as we all know, is crazy times."
- "It just sounds like a can of worms, like a lot of arguments and a lot of disparate opinions, and like a headache."
- "As a co-op board member I can attest to that. [Referring to above quote.] But to the bigger point, you are sort of just trading off that paperwork burden or that administrative burden on your farm to pick up a different level of burden. We don't get into farming because we like hanging around with a lot of other people, necessarily."
- "If I would end up spending more time in a leadership position per week than the amount of hours I spend per week already doing the other things that I would hire somebody for, it doesn't really balance itself."
- "I wouldn't mind providing some assistance to the group, but boy, more than 30 minutes a week would just be way too much."
- "Extremely valuable. I'd have no problem doing two or four hours a week. I work 70 hours a week as it is anyway, so... I want my two cents in there if we're going to be paying somebody to do it. I want to have a little control over what's going on."
- "I think if it was more of a habit that you did weekly, something that was short but part of your routine, it would be easy to do. If it was big outings places, or big chunks of time, potentially it would be less valuable or [less of an] incentive."
- "I'm already overwhelmed."
- "We kind of do this already...we have a pool of H2A workers that we're working on two other farms with."

In focus group discussions, many farmers made the point that *if* they got involved with entity X, they'd want to have some say in it—reflecting some concerns we've already seen about how entity X would intrude on their autonomy and day-to-day business decisions. On the other hand, spending time in a leadership position is clearly a hard sell for a lot of farmers who already feel stretched thin and want to focus on the actual farming.

- "In a hypothetical world where entity X existed, I would absolutely be interested in having some leadership over it.... our businesses mean so much to us, and hiring and maintaining a good crew is so crucial, that we would want to have serious oversight "
- "I think the leadership is important. A once-a-week meeting for like an hour or so. That's kind of what we do on our farm... but yeah, once a week you want to follow up on what's going on, you want to run things as smooth as possible so everyone can have more free time for their personal life."
- "it would be nice to have our opinions heard...because it's not going to be my biggest pool of workers coming from that, I probably would limit it to, minimal, like a half an hour of week or something, in order to just kind of state my views and where I'm coming from with the business model that we're currently in. If every year I started from scratch, I think that that would be a little bit more valuable, but we've been working with a lot of our

teenagers and teachers and part-timers that come back to us year after year, so it's really just a little filling in that we need."

Investment and dividends

Response to the opportunity to receive dividends was mixed. About 30 percent of farm owners answered that it would be not at all influential. Still, there were significant contingents who deemed it slightly influential (about 26 percent), moderately influential (about 19 percent), and very influential (about 22 percent). Only one respondent said that it would be extremely influential. Response was much more negative when the question was about the opportunity to *invest* rather than the opportunity to receive dividends: nearly half of respondents said this would be not at all influential.

- "If you know of any farmer out there willing to invest in something, can you have them give me a call? I don't think I've ever met a farmer that wanted to invest in somebody else other than their own farms. It's usually the other way around."
- "It is nice, when you utilize the service, it comes back to you... you use it a lot, you get a lot of benefit. And if you use it a little bit, the ratio is correct. So I think it is a good model and an incentive for people to utilize it."
- "Profit sharing in some way shape or form always provides amazing incentive, not just to participate in entity X but also to contribute to the growth and success of entity X. It provides many different layers that can contribute to success for everyone involved with the organization."
- "I'm just conservative with money, so the thought of risking putting money out there for a venture that potentially would fail or I wouldn't get my money back, I wouldn't do it."
- "I put moderate because I think some people might be in a better cash position to be able to consider that type of investment... I don't think small farms would be interested."

A lot like farm workers, the farm owners in focus group discussions expressed serious doubts that farmers would have money around to invest in entity X, or that entity X could make enough profit to return meaningful dividends. Plus, Farm Commons facilitators told focus group participants that entity X would need to branch out into non-farm activities in order to be profitable. Still, there were farmers in the focus group who saw value in profit-sharing.

- "I would be interested in all these things, but as I go forward with this conversation, it just does not seem like a good fit for our industry. It seems similar to something I've heard of from the Main Street Project. I think they're in Michigan, where they're training farmworkers to come in and do specific jobs around regenerative poultry operations. That's a standardized year-round model, which vegetables just aren't in our climate up here. All of it sounds great, it just might be the wrong kind of community to be building the foundation for it."

- "I'm starting to worry about entity X in regards to being viable at all. I wouldn't anticipate receiving any dividends at all, so it wouldn't be influential to me because so far the lines don't meet up."
- "We're not interested in generating profits in a way that is not farm-based, so none of this would be interesting to us."
- "It's important to understand the diversification of a portfolio, to have different avenues as a stream of revenue... that would be a long-term goal. we would definitely want to do something like that as we get established during the years to help out other farmers, like leasing land or going in on some specific type of equipment..."
- "As long as we can get some quarterly reports and stuff like that, I'm all for it."

Has the pitch changed?

When the focus group discussions turned to questions of leadership, investment, and structure, it created a bit of confusion among both workers and owners. The sense, at least among some people in different focus groups, was that the fundamental proposition of entity X had changed. That wasn't always necessarily a negative reaction, but clearly it wasn't what some people had in mind when they first started considering entity X. The common shorthand in these discussions of a "farm temp agency" might be hard for some people to reconcile with the concept of a cooperatively run business where different stakeholders actually have the opportunities (or demands) or leading or investing.

A few respondents on the owner side were also unsure about whether all the questions about price were cumulative—i.e., if they initially responded that they'd be willing to pay a certain amount for entity X, were they then being asked about paying more than that for specific benefits? This did not seem to come up in the parallel section of the workers survey, where workers were asked how much of their hourly wage they'd be willing to sacrifice in exchange for certain benefits. Respondents on both the worker and owner sides voiced skepticism about the possibility that entity X could turn a profit or handle its combined scope of farm and non-farm activities.

It's hard to draw any specific conclusions from these responses. The survey deliberately leaves a lot of things about entity X open-ended. But it does suggest that respondents wanted a clearer idea of how entity X would function within specific structures.

Structure of entity X

Not surprisingly, farm owners expressed a strong preference for structuring entity X as a farmer-owned cooperative—the first choice of 44 percent of respondents asked to rank their options. A worker-owned cooperative structure was a notably close second, being the first choice of 40 percent of respondents. Only 16 percent of respondents indicated that a private business would be their first choice of structure.

OSHA

Farm owners were ambivalent about whether OSHA enforceability would influence their willingness to work with entity X. About 37 percent answered that it would not change their willingness, though about 30 percent answered that it would make them much less willing, and about 26 percent said it would make them somewhat less willing to work with entity X. Only two of the farm owners surveyed indicated that it would make them more willing.

In focus group discussions, farm owners acknowledged the importance of farm safety but expressed worries about how regulations and a stronger OSHA presence would impact their businesses. Not everyone surveyed was dead-set against OSHA involvement, but the discussion stirred up a lot of concern about whether the benefits of entity X would balance out the burdens and risks.

- "We've come under so much oversight that I can't imagine anybody wouldn't want to go under the bar of not being audited by OSHA as a result of entity X. If OSHA comes down on me because of my participation in entity X, I absolutely don't want that."
- "If the cost of full compliance with OSHA requirements is offset by the incredibly increased productivity of this labor pool and the patronage dividends I was receiving as a co-op member, that would be one thing. But short of that, I don't know why you'd take the plunge."
- "It's just the balancing of the benefits and the risks to this whole program. I see more risk being incurred rather than benefits. There are some benefits, but the scale is tipping toward higher risks for me, so that's why I'd shy away from it."
- "No one wants to see OSHA at their farm, because no matter how good you think you're doing and how safe you're doing it, they're gonna find something."
- "Honestly, I don't mind. I guess because I have a small operation, everything is pretty compact, all the stuff that you listed is already in play, so I don't mind."
- "We already have a training system in place and obviously we can always do better, but I think for me, same as I've said before...I have this pool of people who come back to us, and then just a couple people who I might need to fill in, which would be a great way of doing it by pulling it in from this entity, but then I feel like I've got these couple [of workers] that haven't been trained with these summer-long people and it seems like more work to me, especially if the liability is OSHA coming through. It sounds complicated."
- "I put that it was somewhat OK. I think as farmers and producers in this field, we all already adhere to really strict safety measures and trainings when it comes to that, but I think when you add another layer of bureaucracy, when it comes to paperwork or even something as simple as having to update your posters from OSHA every year, I think it just kind of adds another layer of work and confusion to a lot of small producers that I think it would make it scary."

- "I think it would be just a good thing. Even for smaller farms... it just makes you a better employer. For me, it wouldn't stop me from joining entity X."
- "I don't think I would ever like to invite more government enforcement of random stuff on our farm, but that might just be me."
- "It sounds like too much of a burden to me if I'm only having part-time employees a couple times a year."

FLC

Responses to the question about being required to register as a Farm Labor Contractor (FLC) were very similar to the responses about OSHA. There was some confusion over whether FLC requirements would create a burden for individual farms, or just for entity X as a whole. As with OSHA, farm owners were not always dead-set against it, but were wary of creating new administrative headaches.

- "I'm dizzy from all the regulations about regulations. Liability for just a few hours a few times is too much. I'd be less likely."
- "I'm a pretty independent person. This makes me pretty uncomfortable."
- "For me, I have a hard time envisioning it, just because our realities may be so different than farmers in other parts of the country. Maybe that's got to do with the scale or whatever. I don't know if the responses I crafted actually made any sense to me...it's such an alien way to approach labor. Even though I use the H2A program, it's hard to imagine how it would function without seeing those kinds of workers at the dooryard. We're having so much trouble getting American help anyway. Extending ourselves financially to make this work, I guess I feel kind of negative about it."
- "I don't really understand this. Aren't we not the contractor? We're the contractee."
- "I assume that entity X would really do the most... basically would just give us documents to sign. So I don't think it's a big deal."
- "If some random person comes to work on your farm as a contractor, then you suddenly have to cover their workman's comp and things like that. It just seems like a very backhanded way of getting people taken care of."

Other comments

- "Overall, too much risk to be interested. Excess oversight. Good labor is already hard enough to find. Having someone else choose my employees will never happen. My business is much too specialized to hire just anyone."
- "The marketing component of attracting farm workers is of value."
- "Maybe a business that is closer to what the average farmer would be interested in working with would be useful."
- "I like the concept. Not sure that the basic foundation works around plant cultivation in this climate. Vegetable production could work, maybe in tandem with winter time

industries such as tourism and recreation. It's a worthwhile idea to explore further in the context of all the agricultural and economic activity in Vermont, or maybe as the future of agriculture develops here. (Right idea but maybe wrong time)."

- "It seems like some aspects of Entity X are enticing while others are not so much. As a small farm, we primarily hire part time so that we can offer employees more of a sense of 'crew community,' but at the same time we're looking for folks that have a few years of farm experience who are familiar with the work—we train them to our standards but they're already at a level of self management. Which means that we're looking for a very particular slice of the workforce, in a very small, rural state... It just seems hard to find the right folks. That being said, when we do find the right folks, we have a high retention rate. I also think that if there were a hub of sorts to help farm workers in part time positions find complementary work that allows them to have a full schedule, that would be beneficial. But overall it seems that Vermont is not a big enough state to support something like this—our farms vary widely in needs and styles, sizes and length of time in business. Instead, I feel like building out a Farm Employment Services branch of NOFA or the UVM Extension would be more beneficial and applicable."
- "Farm worker Training videos would be most helpful to us. Some universities provide them. But sometimes they are not regional or scale appropriate."
- "Thank you. This is interesting. Most need for me and peer farms seems to be in the training, retention, and housing arena."

Owner Group Conclusions

Farm owners on the whole took a more skeptical view of entity X than the farm workers surveyed—and in large part that skepticism is about just what they'd get for the hourly rate they pay entity X for each worker. Still, many of the farmers surveyed acknowledged that a business like entity X has some extremely helpful features. They especially saw potential in being able to rely on entity X for more smooth and consistent handling of the administrative tasks that come with having employees, and for the headaches of regulatory compliance. Several also worried, though, that with those benefits would come more regulatory oversight, and with the unintended consequences of driving workers away or making it harder to secure workers with the skill sets they need.

Like the farm workers surveyed, farm owners were receptive to the idea of taking on leadership roles with entity X, but at the same time doubted that entity X could make a significant profit. Throughout different parts of the focus group conversation, farm owners expressed a wariness of giving up control over aspects of their farms. They also expressed doubts about how entity X would truly meet small farmers' needs while also functioning across multiple states and industries. Differing legal and regulatory environments and different states, as well as a wide range of attitudes about protections like unemployment insurance and overtime, just seemed to deepen the ambivalence.

Worker Group Analysis

Value of entity X

Most of the farmworkers thought that entity X would be more valuable to other farmworkers than to themselves. This nuanced attitude largely reflects these workers' commitment to building long-term careers on one farm, developing a deep understanding of the farm's workings, enjoying a sense of community, and gradually earning higher wages over time. In focus group discussions, it was clear that many participants either had already spent several years learning the way one specific farm works and moving up the ladder there, or hoped to do the same in the future. For some, those long-term concerns about continuity and work culture outweighed the potential administrative benefits, and having workers rotate from one farm to another could create a lot of stressful and time-consuming training for all parties involved. But they thought entity X could provide valuable experiences for younger workers still figuring out where they want their farming careers to go.

- "I could imagine it being more helpful for others than myself. I was thinking specifically about right after I graduated from college with an ag degree, not knowing exactly what kind of farm I wanted to work on and not having a ton of skills, I can imagine that going into a program like that even just for a year would have helped a lot to clarify what I wanted to do. But now that I've farmed for a little while, I am happy and excited to be with one farm where I can build community and become part of their systems and processes and seek change over time."
- "It takes many seasons to get really good at just one farm. After three seasons at Pitchfork I felt like I finally had real managerial experience, even though they had a complete lack of HR understanding."
- "I could see the value for someone young just starting out in farming, bopping around and seeing how new farms work."
- "On small farms there is a sense of camaraderie that is built over the course of the year, and that teamwork really makes the farm run better. Having a system where employees are in and out can cause a disruption in that and make it feel a little more dispensable."
- "It would be valuable for me to be able to add in some random, more hours on other farms. But I am mostly trying to get into familiarity and a routine with the farm I'm at. I think it would be hard to be constantly mixing that up, like throughout the summer when it's really busy."
- "For someone who is just getting into farming, who doesn't have that steady position, it could be valuable for them to learn different styles of farming... For me, and in my experience, there's also a huge value to a steady crew that knows my farm and knows each other."
- "In terms of the learning curve and re-training multiple times a season for different farms, that can be really taxing... I know how much time it takes to train a worker for them to do their role well."

Still, the majority of workers did acknowledge that entity X would have at least some value for their own careers. Much of that value stems from the seasonal nature of farm work, and the possibility that entity X could either make it easier to find winter jobs or fall back on unemployment insurance. In focus group discussions, the administrative streamlining of entity X did have at least some appeal—one farmworker noted that there's an "air of mystery" around time off and addressing problems on their farm—but that alone did not outweigh the uncertainties or reservations.

- "Steady farmwork is a huge potential benefit... this model is sort of trying to smooth out and corporatize the thing I do on my own, which is very messy and patchwork if I'm just piecing together work during the winter at different farms. I'm maple sugaring and doing deliveries and welding this winter, and piecing that all throughout the winter until the farm season starts. If my farm was able to offer year-round work I would just work at my farm. That would be ideal. But it is a huge benefit to have a potential network of farms where the need for employment and the need for labor can link up. I think that is a good goal."
- "Farm business owners kind of need to be everything in their businesses oftentimes, but don't necessarily have all the skills to do that."
- "Especially early on in my farming career, where I live in Massachusetts obviously there isn't a lot of work over the winter... I would always be scrambling to find another job."

And not all the farmworkers entirely rejected the idea of working on multiple farms in the context of a more long-term career. While the overwhelming consensus was that it's more important to build a deeper relationship with one farm over the years, workers did acknowledge the value of getting a variety of experiences.

- "That idea of working at several different places getting different experiences in different areas sort of appeals to me and makes sense as someone who eventually wants to move into a year-round managerial role on a single farm."

Farmworkers by and large seemed to want to know more before they gave the idea of entity X a solid thumbs-up or thumbs-down. As one worker put it, "The logistics feel like everything." Workers mostly had a lot of questions: How much control would entity X employees have over how they divide up their work time? How would travel and housing factor in? Would I have to commute to a different farm every day? How does this intersect with policies and practices regarding migrant workers? Would I have to check in at the entity X office before and after every work shift? Workers also raised concerns about autonomy and working conditions. The workers, some of them hoping to run their own farms one day, also questioned whether small farms could really afford entity X's services, or whether, as one worker put it, entity X could reach a "critical mass" of users and workers:

- "I feel like the businesses themselves are going to want to be poaching the quote-unquote 'best' [workers]... it seems like a losing incentive for the employer to be treating you well."

- "I would want to have more autonomy over where I choose to go.... I don't like the concept of somewhere where I wouldn't have a say in that."
- "A lot of farms, some years it's really tight, and salaries and wages are a huge chunk of the expenses each year. I'm just curious, if a farm doesn't have an issue retaining or hiring employees, what would be the incentive to pay extra for a program like this?"

The importance of worker-farmer relationships

Nearly all the workers *and* farm owners surveyed about entity X would agree that long-term working relationships are absolutely crucial to their careers. Each small farm depends upon its own balance of skills and personalities. Especially in areas where agriculture is highly diversified, that could make it hard for workers to rotate from one operation to another—say, a vegetable farm one day, a dairy operation the next day. In this scenario, would farm owners end up having to train new workers more often, possibly disrupting the flow of day-to-day work as they draw on new members of entity X's labor pool? Can entity X's hiring and assigning processes really make sure that a given worker is a good fit for a team that has been working together for years?

Most of the farm workers value continuity just as much as farm owners do—they're farming because they are deeply invested in certain kinds of farm work. They might be willing to take up other kinds of work, especially in the off-season, but clearly most of the workers surveyed envision themselves developing a specialized skill set over time. For many, that means returning to a specific farm season after season, year after year. Workers also want to stick with a specific farm long-term in order to secure raises or promotions over the years—and in concert with that, farm owners also seek workers who can get to know their operation better and better with time, maybe eventually taking on management roles.

A few farm owners were reluctant to give up all control over the hiring process. They want to be able to screen employees not just for their technical farming skills, but for those more intangible factors that make someone a good hire. Some farm owners even envisioned hiring some of their workforce from entity X and continuing to hire the rest of their employees directly. Most of the farm owners surveyed saw at least some potential or value in entity X, but just weren't sure it aligned with their ideas about how to run a farm and develop a workforce.

Farm workers often thought entity X would be more valuable for other workers for themselves—a point the above section already makes, but one worth revisiting. Workers who were already on a specific path, and/or already creating a long-term relationship with a farm, might not want to sign on with an agency that will assign them to multiple workplaces. But many workers surveyed thought it would make sense for newer farmworkers—that is, people just dabbling in farm work, or people who know they want to farm but are still figuring out what specifically they'd like to do.

There's a general sense that entity X might be at odds with the kind of hands-on professional development that both farm owners and workers value. This raises some questions for the

future. Are there ways for entity X to foster more long-term working relationships between farm owners and farm workers? Does entity X actually provide a model conducive to that, or is it something owners and workers need to be willing to sacrifice a bit in order to access entity X's benefits? What kinds of relationship-building and professional-development resources, if any, would integrate well into entity X's model? How would those resources impact farm owners' and farm workers' willingness to participate?

Acceptable pay scale

The vast majority of respondents said they'd want to make between \$15 and \$20 per hour working for entity X. They had lower estimates of what other workers would accept. For instance, only 4.55 percent of respondents said they'd accept a wage of \$14 per hour, but 31.82 percent of respondents said their "farming peers" would accept \$14 per hour. Note the parallel here between this question and the previous question about the value of entity X; in both questions, the workers are thinking about people who aren't on quite the same stage of their farming career. And similarly, these responses suggest that entity X's structure is at odds with the way a lot of these workers view their own farming careers. Workers acknowledged that making lower wages might be acceptable for people just starting their farm careers or people who struggled to find steady employment on one farm. But they raised concerns that lower wages would make long-term farming careers unsustainable. Their experiences with pay at different farms and differing minimum-wage laws in different states also may have impacted their reactions to entity x's potential wage scales.

- "Under current systems, the way that a worker at a farm gets a raise and gets paid more and gets offered more benefits is if you stay there for a long time and learn more systems and get better at using those systems and teaching other people how to use them."
- "If you're trying to make farming a full-time career position...in my mind, I want to have a living wage, otherwise it's just not sustainable in terms of your future and savings and being able to have a decent life."
- "\$14.50 is the highest wage I've ever gotten for a lower-level farm job, and I know nationally the agricultural minimum wage is much, much lower than that.... these wages are so high. I don't know how this organization is going to get the money. If someone [wants \$23/hr], there's no way that this company would be able to afford that."
- "I think part of the incentive for some people for working possibly harder is the potential to get a raise or move up the chain... if you were locked into a certain wage, that might take away an incentive for people."
- "\$14.50 is the highest wage I've ever gotten for a lower-level farm job, and I know nationally the agricultural minimum wage is much, much lower than that.... these wages are so high. I don't know how this organization is going to get the money. If someone [wants \$23 per hour], there's no way that this company would be able to afford that."

One farmworker hit upon a possible tension between a standardized wage scale and the different kinds of labor entity X workers might have to perform as they move from farm to farm:

- "It's hard to know, based on these pay scales and based on the amorphous idea of what these different farm entities and businesses might look like, how skilled and trained the various activities area... you would need to pay me a lot more than I'm being paid now to move to a different farm every day, because I feel like I would need to be extremely highly trained and skilled."

Unemployment insurance

The dynamic in responses to questions about unemployment insurance, workers' comp, and overtime pay was hard to miss: these are important protections for workers, but workers don't want to sacrifice pay to secure these benefits. Several respondents pointed out that the COVID-19 pandemic has driven home the importance of unemployment insurance and the security that it provides. Some have worked for small farms that did not have to pay unemployment, and would have welcomed that as an alternative to finding supplemental jobs. One worker said that finding seasonal employment can be "chaotic" and that temporary jobs "don't usually pay well," so eligibility for unemployment insurance would be of great benefit. Still, workers on the whole seemed to think that they were being asked to see unemployment as a value-add, and didn't quite buy that framing.

- "If I'm committed to working for entity X, then it would be non-negotiable that if you don't have work for me and I've committed to working with you for a season that you would give me unemployment. There's no dollar less value that I would take for pay."
- "I think for younger farmers, that would be a huge benefit, and I know for me personally that would be a big factor that would make me more interested in this kind of thing, is having that sense of security."
- "I think this is an interesting question because part of the attraction is the potential for year-round employment... and yet at the same time, unemployment could also be a potential catalyst for some of the downtime in the off-season. That's why it would attract me more."
- "I'm not sure that I understand what would be different about this than working at a farm regularly. When my season ended, I was lucky enough to be able to start another job, but I had co-workers who, when the season ended, they weren't fired, they didn't quit. It was just like, it's over, and they applied for unemployment and were accepted to receive unemployment."

Overtime

More than half of respondents answered that eligibility for overtime pay would make them somewhat more willing to take a job with entity X, and an additional one-third answered that it would make them much more willing. But as with other worker protections and benefits, this isn't something that most workers want to sacrifice their base wage rate for. Two-thirds of respondents wouldn't take a pay cut to secure overtime eligibility, and the rest would accept wage cuts of only 50 cents or one dollar. Overtime is of course a double-edged sword: It provides the possibility of extra pay for workers, but encourages employers to make sure workers don't work more than 40 hours per week.

Discussion of overtime pay also got workers asking questions about how entity X would manage workers' hours, and how the benefits of overtime pay would stack up against the need for extra commuting time and the challenges involved in, as one worker put it, being "shuffled around" from one farm to another on different work days. Responses to questions about overtime, especially in focus-group discussions, may also reflect that it makes for some confusing tradeoffs. "As far as making less money in your up-to-40 hours to get overtime, I'm totally not on board with that," one worker said, adding: "I just don't see them as related." That in turn makes it tricky for workers to decide just how supportive they would be of entity X's business model. How would base wages and the incentives around overtime combine to impact their paychecks? How would entity X's management of overtime impact the continuity of tasks and practices on a given farm? This may simply be another area where people need to see a lot more detail before they decide how they really feel about it.

That said, at least one worker recalled having accepted a pay cut in order to secure overtime in the past, and a few did seem to see it as a reasonable trade-off. Quite a few recalled working overtime hours on farms without getting overtime pay. Their attitudes may also vary depending on what kinds of working environments and differing state laws they've encountered.

- "I would like to be paid time and a half or overtime. I like the respect of boundaries, and sometimes that doesn't exist in the farm world or in a world that doesn't pay overtime...I suppose I would be willing to take a pay cut knowing I'd be compensated for the extra time, but that will not be asked of me very often. I like that."
- "If they limited [work hours], it doesn't seem to make too much sense."
- "I don't typically like to work many more hours than 40, but it is nice, especially in the middle of the summer when you might be working a few days that are longer, to be paid time and a half. I also wonder how this relates to farm labor laws, because I know that in the state of New York, people who own and operate farms are not required to pay overtime until a worker hits 60 hours."
- "I worked at a company that didn't pay me overtime, and I worked 55 hours a week during the high season and I worked with a lot of people who were working 60 to 70 and

it felt really shitty and we all worked six days a week... also I've liked every farm owner that I've ever worked for, so I really feel conflicted."

- "I think overtime is super, super important and I would love to see all farms do that. My only thing is, I don't know if I would personally take that combined with all the things I would lose with not picking the farm I'm working on, being shuffled around, having to travel.... I just don't think I would take that trade-off."

Workers' Compensation

Farm workers in the focus groups overwhelmingly placed a high value on workers' comp, because farm work is physically taxing and dangerous. That does not mean that workers' comp strongly influences a decision to accept a given job or negotiate wages. Just over a third of workers were neutral on the question of whether workers' comp would make them more willing to accept a job. And 90 percent of workers said they would not take a pay cut in order to secure workers' comp. As with minimum wage requirements and other worker protections, workers' comp rules vary from state to state and this may influence some workers to value it more or less than others do. At least one worker said in the focus group that workers' comp wouldn't influence their willingness to take a job; others seemed surprised about the question, because they've worked in places where workers' comp was required or taken for granted. Some questions did come up about whether entity X could just offer health insurance, and whether entity X would do a better job than small farmers when it came to administering workers' comp claims. As with the other benefits and protections the survey covers, workers overall clearly feel that workers' comp is important, but not a value-add.

- "It's absolutely of value to me. There's like three times a day where I'll look down around me and say, 'thank goodness for workers' comp.' I'll be on a ladder, harvesting, knives in your hand. You can be as cautious as you can be, but all it takes is a case of butterfingers. There's a lot of precarious situations that we get ourselves in throughout the day which are necessary, but it can just take one hiccup and it'll cost a lot of money and people get hurt and might not get taken care of properly without medical expenses being covered."
- "If I worked for this entity, I would expect to have it. I don't know if it would be like, 'Oh good, I'm going over there to have workman's comp.' I would be pretty shocked if it wasn't there."
- "It really wouldn't influence my willingness."
- "Would this entity X be better at dealing with workers' compensation? My only experience with it has been helping a past boss try to get it for someone else, and it seemed like a nightmare and extremely difficult to even quality. I'm just wondering if this is about them being a better mediator."
- "I would be way more interested if there was employee-sponsored health insurance. It's so expensive. It's like \$300 per month for the worst option possible.... I think worker's

comp is good, but if you're trying to retain long-term employees, offering health-insurance would be more productive."

- "I found [overtime pay and workers' comp] to be valuable, but it didn't affect the wage I'd be willing to accept, because it just seems like a pretty basic thing that should be provided."

Leadership

All but 14 percent of the workers surveyed saw at least some value in the opportunity to hold a leadership role within entity X, and one-third rated it extremely valuable. Most expressed a willingness to put in at least some hours working in a leadership capacity each week, though just under half capped that at one hour. Many workers were wary of doing unpaid leadership work, but the question also prompted a lot of nuanced discussion and follow-up questions. Attitudes often seemed to hinge upon how much power workers would really have at entity X: would it operate in the spirit of a union or worker-owned cooperative, or would workers end up putting in a lot of time in "leadership" roles only to be ignored by management?

Several workers were wary of taking on leadership roles simply because they'd rather put that time into actual farm work, and some saw a better path to leadership in simply sticking with a given farm for multiple seasons. This is something workers had in common with a lot of owners—while not entirely dismissing the potential of entity X, a lot of the people surveyed, whether owners or workers, expressed some variant of the statement "I just want to farm." On the whole, workers were far from sold on the idea, but also curious to learn more.

- "I can see value if, because you're moving farms multiple times a season, you don't have time to gain leadership in the field or on the farm. I can see career value in being able to point to a leadership experience you have elsewhere.... if the leadership and organizing work that we're doing is to promote our own rights, then I have a feeling that if we were being paid for our employer for the time we spent advocating for ourselves, that would be a conflict of interest."
- "I view it as a union, kind of. I've never been part of a union, but I don't know how much time they normally spend meeting every week. Maybe basing it off of that."
- "I do think it's valuable to have an input in leadership. That part certainly appeals to me. And then it seems a little less valuable to have it be unpaid, because that puts additional labor on farmers who are probably already working a lot."
- "The general structure of the entity as I look at it seems like it could be very exploitative. And so having workers have power within the governance structure is kind of everything to getting rid of some of those elements that I see as exploitative."
- "I am skeptical that you would be doing free labor for your employer... labor work can be sort of conflict-inducing, and they're your employer so there's a conflict of interest there."

- "If I have those two extra hours, I'd rather spend it canning things from the harvest or drying herbs. There's so much to get done that I feel like would benefit me more in the long run and be more personally fulfilling in its relevance to my farming practice."
- "The ability to be a leader in something like this if you wanted to is absolutely valuable....having worked in different areas, I've seen how you could put in a lot of work like this and then have your voice just kind of be overshadowed by the greater company or the bigger powers that be."
- "I currently already sit on a nonprofit board... it is a lot more work than they told me it was going to be. It consumes a lot of my time, and I'm afraid that this would be a similar situation."
- "I feel like logistically, organizing something like this seems really difficult and terrible, so I don't think I'd want a leadership role and certainly not an unpaid leadership role."

Dividends and investment

Workers were pretty lukewarm on the whole about the opportunities to invest in or receive dividends from entity X. None of the workers objected to the idea of possibly getting some extra money through profit-sharing, but about 43 percent were neutral on whether dividends would make them more willing to take a job at entity X. That comes down to skepticism about whether a business revolving around small farms would ever really make enough profit to pay out meaningful dividends. Further, several workers argued that if entity X *did* make a good profit in a given year, paying out dividends to members might not be the best use for that money—what about reinvesting that money into the farms, or simply raising entity X workers' wages in the first place?

Farm Commons facilitators made it clear that entity X would likely need to expand beyond just farm work to accomplish such profit margins. But these workers made it clear, as we've seen above, that they are mostly in this for the farm work itself, and place greater value on getting hands-on experience, learning the ins and outs of farm operations, and building long-term working relationships with a given farm. The opportunity to participate as a leader and/or investor in something like entity X just doesn't line up with a lot of the workers' motivations for getting into farming in the first place.

A couple of workers pointed back to the possible fault lines here between entity X's value to younger, shorter-term farmworkers and more experienced long-haul farming lifers. There wasn't a great deal of discussion about this point, but it seems like a crucial one to revisit when refining the idea of entity X: If the "farm temp agency" model works best for short-term workers just getting their feet wet, can it foster the committed buy-in that would make a worker investment model viable? As with the leadership question, responses were at once skeptical and curious, and attitudes were very much bound up in how we are to conceive as entity X. From the discussions in focus groups, it's clear that workers would be way more enthusiastic about investing in entity X *if entity X did not reproduce other capitalistic structures that hurt small*

farms. One worker did note that leadership and ownership combined "are a pretty powerful motivation to participate in an organization."

- "In terms of small farms, much of the profit often is just reinvested into the infrastructure. It just seems difficult to wrap my brain around, in terms of this being an option for a smaller farm."
- "My hope for where farming and worker-owned things can go is not necessarily so much a matching of other for-profit structures to such an extent. That seems like it might recapitulate some of the other economic problems that are going on... on the one hand, I think it could be a really practical solution, but... if I'm putting my time and effort into thinking about organizational structure type things or where we're putting our efforts, maybe it's divesting a little bit more from current company economic structure type things."
- "I don't think that most farm owners are sitting on buckets of cash that they're trying to have us not have access to. It seems like inputting this other entity in the middle, you're diverting even more money that isn't even really there necessarily in the first place. With a major corporation, I can see these things being beneficial to workers, but it seems like there could be a different mode with something like farming, where the profit margins aren't as high."
- "It reminds me of something that some farms do where after working there a certain number of years you start to be able to experience profit sharing. I don't know if, fresh out of college as I am or as an entry-level farmworker, this is the level at which I'd be thinking when accepting a job, but as someone who cares about the ag industry and cares about farmworkers, seeing that in an organization would make me more comfortable with them and more comfortable that they actually care about workers."
- "You've shifted what the business is now. It was initially pitched as sort of a farming temp agency, and now I'm working the winter making sauerkraut or at a landscaping company? That really changes any desire to work for the company... I would rather invest in something that is more oriented towards places I feel need the money and are worth investing in than a landscaping company."
- "I would rather be interested in investing in land with a collective of other farmers to collectively steward that land in our respective ways."
- "I totally agree that more money sounds great. The only thing that this question brings up for me is, I'd have to feel certain that the benefits that the cooperative are providing me are worth the difference between what the farmer is paying the entity and what I am getting from the entity. We as small farmers know that there are a lot of middlemen in agriculture who do nothing but hurt farmers and consumers. I wouldn't want to become part of a system where profit is being extracted between the farm owner and the farmworker. But I think if this entity was structured in a way that wasn't simply extracting that fee from farmers without providing additional benefits to workers, then I'd be all for it."
- "If there is somewhat more profit, maybe they just need to take less overhead from your hourly pay."

Structure

More than half of workers ranked a worker-owned cooperative as their preferred structure for entity X. A farmer-owned cooperative came in second, the first preference of about 35 percent of respondents. An overwhelming majority—76 percent—ranked the "private business" structure as their least-favored structure. It's worth noting that "private business" and one form or another of cooperative are *not* mutually exclusive, but these responses clearly show strong support for a structure where workers and/or small farmers call the shots.

OSHA requirements

About half of workers were neutral on whether OSHA requirements would impact their willingness to take a job. Workers acknowledged the importance of following workplace safety rules. Several also saw how OSHA requirements could create undue burdens and costs for small farmers. At least one worker brought up the question of whether entity X or small farms themselves would pay for compliance costs. This is another question where the range of experience among workers could have impacted the overall response—in focus group discussions, some workers were clearly less savvy than others about worker-safety rules, some had experienced the dangers of lax farm safety, some had been able to take OSHA protections for granted throughout their careers.

- "I don't imagine OSHA would have any significant impact on my day-to-day work in either direction. It's kind of a moot point almost—sure, whatever."
- "Health and cleanliness [are] important, but stringent OSHA guidelines can be annoying sometimes."
- "Every farm that I've worked at has complied with those requirements, so it's not much of a consideration."
- "I think this gets to an interesting question of where profit and safety diverge. I would find OSHA requirements generally a positive thing. At the same time, being around a lot of small organic farmers, you get a little bit more empathy for having to deal with red tape, especially when you're small and don't have a ton of income."
- "Hearing that the farm would have to pay for their modifications, I think it would cut out a lot of the farms I would want to work at, or even farms I've worked at in the past."
- "I originally was like, 'OSHA, I don't care about OSHA. That's just annoying.' To me OSHA's just the video I had to watch at a farm that says 'Make sure you wash your hands after you use the bathroom,' and I was like, 'This is dumb.' But then you mentioned tractor roll-over bars and that to me is really important... if I got to a farm, and they were asking me to apply pesticides and didn't provide proper protection or asked me to often operate a tractor that didn't have a rollbar, that would be a legitimate reason to consider leaving."

- "I have seen enough small farms use that to put people in danger that I'm not super sympathetic to that. That's a bigger concern to me than a farm's profit margins... I wonder if there's a way that entity X could potentially do some kind of incentive things where it could help farms that want to come into compliance or need a certain amount of investment in adding roll-over bars...if there's something that can help bring those two needs together."

FLC registration

More than half of the workers surveyed were neutral on the question of whether FLC registration would impact their willingness to work for entity X, though one-third said it would make them somewhat more willing to take the job. In focus-group discussions, workers did highlight how FLC registration might be valuable to younger or more transient workers. At least one worker did not know enough to answer the question with confidence, saying, "I have never encountered that language before."

- "If I was going out and trying to find more farm work at different farms, I would potentially feel more comfortable doing that through entity X because of the assurance that there are these legal protections... if I'm established at a farm already, it's more of a moot point."
- "If I was starting out, that would give me more confidence if I wanted to try different farms."

Other comments

- "I wish we had also talked about how the entity would promote equity in farming—as a queer farmer, I've had to think about this as I apply to jobs. Would I be part of a community that supports me? I also worry that this would not be open to farmers (who have lots of experience) but don't speak English. Would this become a way for white farm workers to simply take jobs from migrant workers? I also wonder about housing if jobs aren't close together."
- "I think this is potentially a good idea for new farmers starting out but a lot would depend on the flexibility of the service if it could expand past that. Could college students sign up as just seasonal help or farmers who already have a farm they work in the summer sign up for just the winter without the other benefits offered to full time employees of entity X? Not sure with most employees who work for entity x just farm hands or new farmers how making it a coop could work. The other labor markets entity x would look at getting into, like canning and home gardening are not the same skill set as farming so not sure how the crossover would work but could be of interest to farmers who want to work in winter

regardless of what kind of job it is so they wouldn't have stress of looking for work themselves. it seems though with such a low paid work force and clientele it seems unlikely that this company would be able to find enough farms who struggle with hiring (my small farm alone had 50 application for the summer within the first week) who could also afford to pay a higher wage for what would essential be low skilled new farm hands to make enough money to cover administration fees let alone turn a profit."

- "If entity x is committed to helping farm workers in a paid WOOF like situation only with guaranteed safety and benefits then it seems like a lovely idea. I don't see how this can be profitable without taking advantage of workers and farm owners. By definition if the company is profiting they are overcharging or underpaying. Issues like right to choose farms within a field of interest (for example I only want to work at organic vegetable farms) would be personally necessary. Other concerns would be right to refuse work, and clear procedures for time off. I love the idea of traveling to other farms regionally and nationally without having to commit to 6-8 months of employment."

Worker Group Conclusions

The farm workers surveyed about entity X do see a few key points of value in entity X: steady income to even out the inherent seasonality of farm work, reliable access to worker protections, and, to a lesser extent, the chance to get a variety of work experiences. To a large extent, workers seemed to reject the premise of making trade-offs (especially accepting lower wages) in order to access entity X's benefits: Instead, entity X would need to do a very good job of ensuring good working conditions in order to gain workers' confidence. And to invest time and energy in potential leadership roles with entity X (not to mention actual monetary investments), workers would likely need to see a much more specific plan detailing how entity X would become profitable and how it would balance the needs of farmers with its other non-agricultural ventures.

Especially in the focus group conversations, farm workers responded to the idea of entity X with a highly nuanced analysis of their day-to-day work lives and longer-term career aspirations. Few of them seemed ready to either go all-in with entity X or reject the proposal entirely. Most of them seemed to want a more concrete explanation of how entity X would address the practical problems they've experienced on the farm.