



NEBRASKA EXTENSION

Nebraska Agricultural Labor Guide

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Contents

Chapter 1. Recruitment	3
1.1 Job Description	2
1.2 Finding Job Candidates and Applicants.....	4
1.3 Job Applications.....	9
1.4 Resources List.....	9
Chapter 2. Hiring	13
2.1 Interview	13
2.2 Background, drug and reference checks	16
2.3 Eligibility verification.....	17
2.4 Extending an offer.....	18
2.5 Probationary period.....	18
2.6 New hire paperwork filing	18
2.7 Independent contractors	19
2.8 Resources List.....	20
Chapter 3. Employee Development	22
3.1 Onboarding	22
3.2 Training.....	23
3.3 Coaching	24
3.4 Mentoring.....	25
3.5 Resources List.....	25
Chapter 4. Operations.....	27
4.1 Safety	27
4.2 Compensation	28
4.3 Benefits	32
4.4 Taxes	35
4.5 Youth Labor	37
4.6 Insurance	39
4.7 Other laws	41
4.8 Employee manual.....	41

4.9 Recordkeeping	42
4.10 Resources List.....	43
Chapter 5: Retention.....	47
5.1 Human Resources System.....	47
5.2 Communication.....	47
5.3 Feedback	48
5.4 Resources List.....	48
Chapter 6. Termination	50
6.1 Employment at Will.....	50
6.2 Final Wages	50
6.3 Reporting Responsibilities After Termination	50
6.4 Insurance Benefits.....	51
6.5 Exit Interviews	51
6.6 Resources List.....	52
Chapter 7. Appendix	53

In Nebraska agriculture, employees are a key **asset** to the success and long-term viability of the operation. The decision to hire begins when you recognize a labor need, and from there, employers must make a series of intentional choices to design a fair, effective process to attract applicants, select employees, support day-to-day people management and ensure that employees contribute to the business in a meaningful way.

This guide highlights several factors Nebraska agricultural employers should consider as they build and manage a workforce. It breaks the employment process into six segments:

- Recruitment
- Hiring and onboarding
- Training and mentoring
- Day-to-day operations
- Retention
- Termination

By understanding and planning around these six areas, employers can put a solid, practical framework in place for managing human resources on their farm or ranch.

Note: This guide is intended to provide general information to help Nebraska agricultural producers think through their approach to human resources management. It reflects information believed to be accurate at the time of publication but is subject to change as laws and best practices evolve. It is not a substitute for legal, accounting or other professional advice. Agricultural employers should work with an attorney, accountant, consultant, and other appropriate professionals to ensure that their policies, employment practices and human resources systems comply with applicable labor laws and support the overall goals of their operation.

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and other farm and ranch management resources online:**

<https://cap.unl.edu/labor>



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Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources

Think about when you need help most during the day and week: mornings, afternoons, evenings, weekdays, weekends or a mix of these and whether the role is tied to a particular season (calving, planting, harvest) or needed year-round. As you answer these questions, you can begin drafting a practical job description that reflects both the demands of your operation and what you realistically expect from an employee.

1.1 Job Description

Developing Effective Job Descriptions in Agricultural Operations

A well-developed job description is one of the most important management tools available to farm and ranch operators. It establishes expectations, supports effective hiring, reduces legal risk, and improves long-term employee retention. Clear job descriptions also provide a foundation for training, performance evaluations, and compensation decisions.

1.1.1 Job Analysis

Before you sit down to write a job description, it helps to complete a simple job analysis for your Nebraska farm or ranch. A job analysis outlines the key details of the work you need done and provides the foundation for a clear, usable job description. In general, a job analysis has three parts: defining a job's tasks and responsibilities, listing the qualifications needed, and describing the environment where the employee will work.

Tasks and responsibilities are the specific duties, decisions, and areas of work for which the employee will be held accountable. Qualifications include the skills, knowledge, experience, education, and any licenses or certifications needed to do the job well. For positions that involve physical labor, be sure to note physical demands such as lifting, bending, working outdoors in Nebraska weather, operating equipment or walking on uneven ground. Environmental factors include where the employee will work (shop, field, feedlot, office, or a combination), typical working conditions, and the kind of interactions they will have with coworkers, supervisors, customers, and vendors, as well as whether they will supervise others. A good job description then communicates these needs and expectations for the position.

Three steps of a job analysis

1. Identify tasks, responsibilities and decision-making expectations
2. Outline necessary qualifications (including any physical requirements)
3. Describe the work environment and working conditions

To analyze an existing job in your operation, you can visit with current employees in that role and ask them to describe what they actually do during a typical day, week, or busy season. As you walk through this process, pay attention to whether important duties are being missed or pushed aside. If so, your operation may need to hire additional help or adjust current positions to better cover those needs. While your job analysis should be specific to your operation, it can be helpful to look at general information for similar jobs to make sure you are in line with common industry expectations for that type of position.

1.1.2 Writing a Job Description

An effective job description typically includes four core components: (1) job title, (2) job summary, (3) core duties and responsibilities, and (4) required and preferred skills and qualifications.

Selecting an Appropriate Job Title

The job title should accurately reflect the scope and level of responsibility associated with the position. Titles that are too narrow may unintentionally limit applicant interest or fail to reflect the full range of responsibilities. For example, titles such as “Calf Feeder” or “Milker” may not adequately represent a role that includes equipment operation, recordkeeping, or facility maintenance.

Conversely, titles should not overstate authority or responsibility. A balanced, descriptive title such as “Crop Production Team Member” or “Livestock Operations Technician” communicates both professionalism and flexibility.

Operators should avoid outdated or potentially discriminatory terminology (e.g., “hired man”) and instead use inclusive language that reflects a professional workplace culture.

Writing the Job Summary

The job summary provides a concise overview of the position’s primary purpose. Typically limited to one paragraph, this section builds upon the job title and communicates the essential function of the role within the operation.

Because the job summary is often used in recruitment postings, it should also briefly describe the operation’s culture, management philosophy, or work environment. Communicating values—such as teamwork, innovation, safety, or stewardship—can help attract applicants who align with the operation’s long-term goals.

A strong job summary answers three basic questions:

- What is the primary purpose of this role?
- How does it contribute to the operation?
- Why would a qualified individual want to work here?

Defining Core Duties and Responsibilities

The core duties section provides greater detail than the job summary and outlines the specific tasks the employee will perform. Responsibilities should be listed in order of importance, beginning with primary, day-to-day duties and followed by less frequent or seasonal tasks.

Bullet points improve clarity and readability. Each duty should begin with a strong action verb such as:

- Operate
- Maintain
- Manage
- Coordinate
- Monitor
- Perform

Avoid vague or passive language unless it accurately reflects the responsibility. Clear descriptions help applicants understand expectations and help employers evaluate performance later.

This section should also clarify reporting relationships. For example, stating that the position “reports directly to the Farm Manager” or “takes direction from the Ranch Owner” helps applicants understand the chain of command and communication structure.

Current employees can provide valuable insight when drafting this section. Their input ensures that the job description reflects actual day-to-day responsibilities rather than assumed duties.

Identifying Required and Preferred Qualifications

The final section outlines the knowledge, experience, and abilities necessary to perform the job successfully. It is important to clearly distinguish between qualifications that are required and those that are preferred.

If a qualification is essential to performing the job safely and effectively, it should be labeled as “required.” If it would enhance performance but is not mandatory, it should be labeled as “preferred.” Overstating requirements may unintentionally discourage otherwise strong candidates from applying.

Qualifications should include both:

Hard Skills

Technical competencies necessary to perform the job, such as:

- Operating agricultural equipment
- Performing mechanical maintenance and repair
- Utilizing precision agriculture or livestock data systems

Soft Skills

Behavioral characteristics that support workplace effectiveness, such as:

- Ability to work as part of a team
- Effective communication
- Attention to detail
- Ability to handle livestock calmly

Physical requirements

These should also be included, particularly in production agriculture where work is physically demanding. Examples may include:

- Ability to lift 50 pounds routinely
- Ability to stand for extended periods
- Ability to work outdoors in varying weather conditions
- Willingness to work extended hours during peak seasons

Including physical requirements promotes transparency and helps ensure compliance with employment regulations.

Sample Job Description: Crop Production Team Member

Operation Overview

Nebraska Family Farms is a large row crop operation located in Anytown, Nebraska. The operation produces corn and soybeans and utilizes precision agriculture technologies to improve efficiency and sustainability. The business is family-owned and values long-term employee relationships.

Job Summary

The Crop Production Team Member supports crop production activities through equipment operation, data management, maintenance, and logistics. This role contributes directly to operational efficiency and overall farm productivity.

Core Duties

- Operate tillage, nutrient application, spraying, and harvesting equipment
- Manage precision agriculture technology and ensure accurate data collection
- Operate tractor-trailers related to grain and input logistics
- Perform routine maintenance and minor repairs on equipment
- Maintain clean and organized shop and work areas
- Follow all farm safety policies
- Report directly to the farm manager

Required Qualifications

- Three to five years of production agriculture experience
- Valid driver's license
- Ability to work extended hours during planting and harvest
- Ability to lift 50 pounds routinely

Preferred Qualifications

- Commercial Driver's License (CDL)
- Experience with precision agriculture systems
- Mechanical repair experience

Sample Job Description: Ranch Hand / Livestock Technician

Operation Overview

Nebraska Ranch Family is a medium-sized cow-calf operation located in Anytown, Nebraska, specializing in genetics and herd improvement. The operation emphasizes stewardship, animal welfare, and team collaboration.

Job Summary

The Ranch Hand supports daily livestock care, facility maintenance, and herd data collection activities essential to cow-calf production.

Core Duties

- Provide daily care and husbandry for 600–800 head of cattle
- Assist with calving, processing, and herd health monitoring
- Maintain fences, equipment, and facilities
- Assist with pasture management and grazing rotations
- Collect and record herd performance data
- Travel between pastures as needed
- Report directly to the Ranch Manager

Required Qualifications

- High school diploma and one year of beef livestock experience (or equivalent experience)
- Valid driver's license
- Ability to work irregular hours during calving season
- Ability to work outdoors in varying weather conditions

Preferred Qualifications

- Experience with livestock data management systems
- Equipment maintenance experience

Developing clear and accurate job descriptions is a proactive management practice. When thoughtfully written, job descriptions improve hiring outcomes, strengthen workplace communication, and contribute to the long-term sustainability of agricultural operations.

1.2 Finding Job Candidates and Applicants

Finding good employees is one of the biggest challenges for Nebraska farms and ranches. Labor needs can shift quickly depending on the season, type of operation, and skills needed. Developing a simple recruitment plan before you begin hiring can make the process smoother and help reach the right people.

Resources from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension emphasize that successful agricultural employers are intentional about how they recruit workers. Instead of relying on one method, most producers find better results by using several approaches at the same time.

1.2.1 Promoting a Position

Nebraska agricultural employers have several ways to promote open positions. In many rural communities, a mix of traditional outreach and online recruitment works best.

You might consider:

- Local newspapers and radio stations
- Flyers at feed stores, equipment dealers, or community bulletin boards
- Word of mouth through neighbors and other producers
- Social media pages connected to your operation
- University or college job boards
- Agriculture-specific job websites

Connecting with local agricultural education programs can also be effective. Nebraska producers often find strong candidates through relationships with:

- High school agricultural education programs and FFA chapters
- Local 4-H programs
- Community colleges and universities with agriculture programs

In Nebraska, this might include reaching out to students or graduates connected with the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and its Extension network, which often works closely with students interested in agriculture careers.

Industry experience also shows that recruiting improves when employers clearly explain the opportunity and the work environment. Articles focused on agricultural hiring trends highlight that producers who describe the job accurately and communicate expectations early tend to attract candidates who stay longer.

Common places to publicize agricultural job openings include:

- Social media
- Newspapers and radio
- Community bulletin boards
- Industry association newsletters
- University job search websites
- Job posting or career websites
- Word of mouth among current employees

Online job boards can also help broaden your reach. There are some websites which focus specifically on agriculture, while others reach a larger audience. Keep in mind that some platforms may generate many applicants but fewer qualified candidates, so screening applicants carefully is important.

Another strategy successful agricultural employers use is employee referrals. Current employees often know people with similar skills or work ethic. Some operations offer a referral bonus if the recommended employee is hired and stays for a certain period of time.

Research and industry hiring guidance consistently show that taking time to recruit carefully leads to better long-term employees. This includes being selective and focusing on candidates who are a good fit for both the work and the culture of your operation.

Producers should also make sure all applicants follow the same hiring process. Even when a candidate is a friend, neighbor, or family member, consistent hiring practices help protect the business and maintain fairness.

1.2.2 Work-Based Learning Opportunities

Some Nebraska agricultural operations attract employees by offering internships or apprenticeships. These opportunities allow workers to gain hands-on experience while contributing to the operation.

Internships can help introduce students or beginning agricultural workers to your farm or ranch. In many cases, interns must be paid and meet wage and hour requirements, although certain internship arrangements may qualify differently depending on federal guidelines.

Apprenticeships—sometimes called “earn-and-learn” programs—combine paid work with training. For employers, these programs can:

- Develop skilled employees
- Reduce turnover
- Strengthen the future workforce for the operation

These approaches are becoming more common as agriculture looks for ways to address ongoing labor shortages and build long-term workforce pipelines.

A Practical Tip for Nebraska Producers

Many successful Nebraska producers rely on a combination of local relationships and broader recruitment tools. Community connections remain one of the most reliable ways to find good employees, but online job postings and social media can expand your reach when local labor is tight.

Taking the time to develop a clear recruitment plan and updating it each season can make hiring much more manageable and improve the chances of finding employees who fit your operation well.

1.2.3 H-2A Workers

H-2A Workers in Nebraska Agriculture

Labor availability in Nebraska remains one of the most significant constraints facing agricultural producers. In response to ongoing workforce shortages, many operations have been interested in exploring or have adopted the federal H-2A temporary agricultural worker program as part of a broader workforce resiliency strategy.

Overview of H-2A program

The H-2A program allows U.S. agricultural employers to hire foreign national to perform temporary or seasonal agricultural labor when there are insufficient U.S. workers who are willing, able, qualified, and available. The program is jointly administered by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

In Nebraska, H-2A workers are used in a variety of operations, including:

- Specialty and row crop production
- Livestock enterprises with seasonal labor demands
- Custom harvesting businesses

While historically H-2A workers are more common in fruit and vegetable production in other states, the program has expanded as labor markets have tightened.

Core Requirements for Nebraska Employers

Participating in the H-2A program involves significant regulatory and administrative obligations. Producers considering the program must understand that H-2A is not simply a recruitment mechanism. The H-2A program is a highly structured compliance program with strict timelines and documentation requirements.

Key employer obligations include:

1. Demonstrating Need and Recruiting U.S. Workers

Employers must:

- a. Establish that the job is temporary or seasonal in nature
- b. Submit a job order to the Nebraska State Workforce Agency
- c. Conduct prescribed recruitment efforts to hire U.S. workers first

Only after being able to demonstrate insufficient domestic labor availability may an employer proceed with certification.

2. Labor Certification and Visa Petition

The employer must:

- a. File an application for Temporary Employment Certification (Form ETA-9142A) with DOL
- b. Upon certification, file a petition with the USCIS
- c. Coordinate with approved workers applying for visas at U.S. consulates abroad

The process is timeline driven and often begins several months before the anticipated start date.

3. Wage and Compensation Requirements

H-2A employers must pay the highest of:

- a. The Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR)
- b. The prevailing wage rate (if applicable)
- c. The federal or state minimum wage
- d. The agreed upon collective bargaining wage (if applicable)

Employers must also comply with detailed recordkeeping, payroll documentation, and disclosure requirements.

4. Housing and Transportation

New employers must:

- a. Provide free, inspected housing that meets federal and state standards
- b. Provide or pay for inbound transportation and subsistence
- c. Provide daily transportation between housing and the worksite
- d. Cover return transportation upon completion of the contract period

Housing compliance is one of the most significant practical and financial considerations for producers evaluating program participation.

5. The 75 Percent Rule

Employers must guarantee workers' employment for at least 75 percent of the total hours in the contract period. This creates financial risk in years with weather disruptions, market volatility, or operational slowdowns.

H-2A in the Context of Workforce Resilience

The H-2A program in Nebraska serves as a broader part of the discussion on a resilient workforce discussion. The program can:

- Stabilize seasonal labor supply
- Provide workforce predictability for time-sensitive operations
- Reduce last-minute labor shortages during planting, detasseling, or harvest

However, H-2A also requires:

- Strong management systems
- Advanced planning
- Cash flow capacity to handle upfront costs
- A commitment to compliance

Producers must weigh whether H-2A complements or replaces other labor strategies, such as improving retention of domestic employees, enhancing workplace culture, investing in mechanization, or restructuring work schedules.

Strategic Considerations for Nebraska Producers

Before entering the program, producers should evaluate:

- **Scale:** Does the operation have sufficient labor demand to justify fixed housing and administrative costs?
- **Timing:** Can the business manage strict filing deadlines?
- **Cash Flow:** Can the operation absorb wage rate increases and upfront expenses?
- **Management Capacity:** Is there a system in place for compliance, documentation, and supervision?

For many Nebraska operations, H-2A is not a short-term fix but a structural shift in labor strategy. When integrated thoughtfully into overall workforce planning, it can enhance labor reliability. When entered into hastily, it can create legal and financial exposure.

Conclusion

The H-2A program is an increasingly important tool in Nebraska agriculture, particularly as labor markets remain tight and demographic shifts continue. However, it is best viewed not as a simple hiring pathway but as a regulated labor framework requiring careful planning, compliance discipline, and financial preparedness.

Producers considering H-2A participation should consult with experienced legal counsel and trusted advisors before beginning the application process. In Nebraska's evolving agricultural labor landscape, informed decision making remains the foundation of resilience.

1.3 Job Applications

Once you have identified potential candidates, the next step is to ask interested individuals to complete a job application. A well-designed application helps Nebraska farm and ranch employers gather consistent information about each applicant and decide if the person is a good fit for the position and the operation.

Guidance from Nebraska Extension emphasizes that a clear, organized hiring process benefits employers and applicants. Job applications should collect basic information needed to evaluate experience, skills, and availability, while avoiding questions that are inappropriate, illegal, or discriminatory.

One helpful approach is to provide the job description along with the application. When applicants understand the expectations of the role including work hours, physical requirements, and seasonal demands, they are more likely to apply only if the job truly fits their situation. This can save time for both the employer and the applicant.

A typical agricultural job application may include:

- Contact information
- Work history and agricultural experience
- Position-related skills (equipment, livestock handling, recordkeeping, etc.)
- Availability and start date
- References

After reviewing applications or resumes, employers can begin narrowing down candidates for interviews. Many producers find it helpful to sort applicants into three groups:

1. Those you want to interview.
2. Those you might interview.
3. Those you do not plan to interview at this time.

This simple system helps keep the hiring process organized, especially during busy seasons when time is limited.

As you review applications, remember that experience matters but so do personal qualities. Many Nebraska producers say the employees who succeed on their operations are those who demonstrate:

- A strong work ethic
- Reliability and willingness to learn
- A positive attitude
- The ability to work safely and as part of a team

Taking the time to carefully review applications before moving to interviews can improve hiring decisions and help you find employees who will contribute to the long-term success of your operation.

1.4 Resources List

The information in this section draws on research, Extension publications, and agricultural workforce guidance that can help Nebraska producers recruit and hire employees effectively. The following

resources may provide additional insight as you develop job descriptions, promote openings, and evaluate applicants.

Job Description and Hiring Planning Resources

These tools can help you clearly define positions before recruiting employees.

- Hiring and workforce management resources from University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension
- [Job Description Generator, University of Vermont Extension](#)
- [Assembly of Farm Job Descriptions \(PDF\), Iowa State University Extension and Outreach](#)
- [Developing Effective Job Descriptions for Small Businesses and Farms \(PDF\), Purdue Extension](#)
- [Job Description Generator for the Dairy Industry, Penn State Extension](#)
- [Legal Aid of Nebraska Migrant, Seasonal and H-2A Agricultural Worker Handbook](#)
- [Building a Resilient Ag Workforce: Enhancing Retention for Agricultural Employees and H-2A workers-Webinar, University of Nebraska](#)
- [Farm and Ranch Employee Intake and Onboarding University of Nebraska](#)
- [Ag Workers Rights, Legal Aid of Nebraska](#)
- [Writing effective job descriptions, University of Wisconsin](#)
- [How to find and keep good employees, Farm Progress](#)

Well-developed job descriptions help applicants understand the work expectations before applying. This can improve the quality of candidates and reduce turnover.

Recruiting and Workforce Development Resources

The following resources provide guidance on recruiting employees, addressing labor shortages, and developing a strong agricultural workforce.

- Workforce and agricultural labor resources available through University of Nebraska–Lincoln
- [A Quick-Start Toolkit: Building Registered Apprenticeship Programs \(PDF\), U.S. Department of Labor](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions About Apprenticeship, U.S. Department of Labor](#)
- [Get the Right Start in Hiring Employees, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach](#)
- [Help Wanted: How Farmers Are Tackling a Labor Shortage, Successful Farming](#)
- [Hiring the Right Fit: Interview Questions, AgCareers.com](#)
- [Internship Programs Under the Fair Labor Standards Act, U.S. Department of Labor](#)
- [Labor Readiness Assessment, University of Vermont Extension](#)
- [Recruiting and Retaining Good Employees: Strategies That Work, Progressive Dairy](#)
- [Unpacking the Farm Labor Puzzle, Women in Ag Learning Network](#)

Practical Hiring Tip

As you review applicants, it can be helpful to sort them into three groups:

1. Applicants you want to interview
2. Applicants you might interview
3. Applicants you do not plan to interview

This simple approach helps producers stay organized during busy seasons when hiring decisions need to move quickly.

Additional Online Tools and Workforce Information

These websites can help Nebraska producers better understand job requirements, recruitment planning, and agricultural workforce needs:

- Occupational information and job skill data through [O*NET Online](#)
- Employer hiring resources through [CareerOneStop](#)
- Registered apprenticeship resources through [Apprenticeship.gov](#)

Moving Into the Hiring Process

After you have recruited candidates, the hiring process typically moves into the next steps:

- Interviewing top candidates
 - Checking references and past employment
 - Verifying work eligibility
 - Confirming skills and experience
 - Extending a job offer
 - Completing required hiring paperwork

Using a hiring checklist can help Nebraska producers track each step and maintain consistent hiring practices across employees. This is especially helpful for operations that hire multiple seasonal or year-round workers.

Web addresses in Chapter 1

1. <https://www.uvm.edu/aglabor/dashboard/job-description-generator>
2. <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/wholefarm/html/c1-73.html>
3. https://agrisk.umn.edu/Library/Record/developing_effective_job_descriptions_for_sma
4. <https://extension.psu.edu/job-description-generator-for-the-dairy-industry>
5. https://legalaidofnebraska.presencehost.net/file_download/inline/3248bd13-fd21-4c5a-b400-b2cb81e7f362
6. <https://cap.unl.edu/building-resilient-ag-workforce-webinar-2025/>
7. <https://mediahub.unl.edu/media/22718>
8. <https://legalaidofnebraska.org/what-we-do/programs/ag-worker-rights.html>
9. <https://farms.extension.wisc.edu/articles/writing-effective-job-descriptions/>
10. <https://www.farmprogress.com/farm-business/how-to-find-and-keep-good-employees>
11. https://www.apprenticeship.gov/sites/default/files/apprenticeship_toolkit.pdf
12. <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/help>
13. <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/wholefarm/html/c1-70.html>
14. <https://www.agriculture.com/farm-management/estate-planning/help-wanted-how-farmers-are-tackling-a-labor-shortage>
15. <https://www.agcareers.com/employers/resource-library/recruitment-strategy/hiring-the-right-fit--interview-questions.htm#gsc.tab=0>
16. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fact-sheets/71-flsa-internships>
17. <https://www.uvm.edu/aglabor/dashboard/labor-readiness-assessment>
18. <https://www.agproud.com/articles/31157-recruiting-and-retaining-good-employees-strategies-that-work>
19. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kkA7MilP6zM>
20. <https://www.onetonline.org/>
21. <https://www.careeronestop.org/>
22. <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/>

Chapter 2. Hiring

After job candidates have been recruited, the hiring process proceeds to interviewing the top candidates, checking their backgrounds including references, criminal records, and drug offense records, validating their skill sets, verifying their work eligibility, extending an offer, and filing the appropriate forms and paperwork. Using the hiring checklist in the appendix, you can track a candidate's progress in the hiring process.

2.1 Interview

During an interview, employers should learn about the person being interviewed and share information about the position and business. Listening skills are important. If an interviewer talks too much, the interviewee doesn't have as much time to speak. As a general rule, the interviewer should speak only about 20% of the time and the person being interviewed should speak the other 80%. Listening more than you talk gives you the opportunity to learn as much as possible about the interviewee in the allotted time. You can still ask follow-up questions and share information about the position or the business, but the key is to listen closely and talk sparingly.

General interviewing rules

- Ask open-ended questions
- Use the same questions for all interviewees
- Listen
- Take notes
- Avoid unacceptable questions

During an interview, ask open-ended questions, not questions that could be answered with only a yes or no. Open-ended questions help you get to know a job candidate better. Use the same questions for all people interviewing for the same position. Doing so adds consistency to the interview process and helps you easily compare answers from each candidate. Also, take good notes because remembering specific responses after the interview concludes can be difficult.

Crafting interview questions

- Use the job description to guide the questions you ask
- Group similar questions into categories
- Ask questions that can reveal how well the interviewee works with others
- Avoid unacceptable questions (see Section 2.1.2)

2.1.1 Acceptable questions

To ensure interviewers collect information they need to evaluate a job candidate, they could group questions by categories. For example, interviewers might start by asking questions about a candidate's education or work experience. Specific questions could include the following:

- What education or job training have you had?
- What positions have you held during previous employment?
- Tell me about job tasks for which you've been responsible in the past.
- What types of tasks have you enjoyed the most? Why?
- What types of tasks have you enjoyed the least? Why?

Then, interviewers could transition into questions focused on a prospective employee's fit for the specific position. At this point, use the job description as a guide. For important tasks associated with a job position, interviewers could ask questions about a job candidate's experience and interest in similar work. If a job requires physical labor, then ask whether the interviewee is capable of handling the physical requirements.

- _____ is an important task in this job. What related experience do you have?
- If a particular scenario (explain a possible scenario) happens, how would you respond?
- Why are you interested in this position?
- How does this position fit your long-term career goals?
- Workers in this position may need to lift as much as 50 pounds and stand for three-hour shifts. Are you able to do both?

In some cases, prospective employees may not have the exact experience needed to perform various job tasks. However, interviewers can ask questions to assess if a potential new hire has the ability and willingness to learn the needed skills.

- Think of a skill you previously had to learn on the job. What was your approach to making sure you learned it?
- If you need to learn a new skill to do well in this job, what steps would you take to learn it?
- What efforts do you take to continue learning while on the job?

Performing specific tasks is an important part of holding a job, but the ability to work with people can be equally important. New hires might need to interact with coworkers, managers, suppliers, buyers and other people who support the business, so their ability to develop positive relationships with these people can impact their job performance — and the employer. These are some possible questions to ask about a job candidate's willingness to work with others:

- Describe a situation in which you had a challenging relationship with a coworker or supervisor. What did you do in that situation?
- What types of people create an enjoyable work environment for you?
- If you have supervised other people in previous jobs, describe how you managed those employees and what the experience was like for you.

2.1.2 Unacceptable questions

Interviewing prospective employees can create risk if employers ask the wrong questions. Several types of questions should be off-limits including those listed below.

Avoid questions about age, race, ethnicity, religious preference, political affiliation, living arrangement, sexual orientation, disabilities or medical conditions. Because answers to these questions don't explain someone's ability to perform job tasks or duties, they are irrelevant.

Avoid questions about an applicant's family or marital status. Again, answers to these questions don't affect the ability to perform job tasks or duties. If working days and hours or schedule flexibility are concerns, then present the requirements for the job, and ask whether the prospective employee could meet

those needs. For example, you may ask, “Our operation occasionally needs help on evenings and weekends. Do you have the flexibility to work during evenings and weekends?”

Do not ask questions about vehicle ownership unless it is a requirement for an employee’s job. Otherwise, what matters is that an employee can get to work. For job positions that require on-the-job vehicle use, you may ask whether a prospective employee is licensed to operate the type of vehicle required.

2.1.3 Other interview elements

A skills test assesses whether an applicant has the skills needed to do the job.

Generally, interviews are considered a question-and-answer time. However, an interview can also include a skills test. During a skills test, prospective employees would be asked to apply their skills and perform a task that would be required if they were hired. A skills test can show whether a potential new employee has the skills necessary for the job or if the person could benefit from extra training. However, the results should only be used as one tool to screen applicants, and the test itself shouldn’t create problems with respect to equal-opportunity employment. For example, a basic skills test could involve counting change or writing an email.

Personality inventories are other tools for determining whether a prospective employee would fit well within your operation. They can help employers understand candidates’ personality traits, their work style, and how they like to work with others. However, personality inventories do have several potential drawbacks. For example, the test should have controls to prevent respondents from selecting only socially desirable responses. Controls are questions designed to assess test takers’ honesty and consistency in their responses. These tests shouldn’t be used as medical exams or invade respondents’ privacy. If you’d like to use a personality inventory as part of your applicant screening process, then identify a testing program that’s effective in gauging job performance.

A personality inventory evaluates whether an applicant would fit well in your organization’s culture.

2.1.4 Closing an interview

Before concluding an interview, give the job candidate an opportunity to ask questions. Not only does this practice address remaining questions, but it also creates an opportunity for an interviewer to learn about an individual’s ability to develop questions. Then, establish the next steps the interviewee can expect

Closing the interview

- Let the candidate ask questions
- Share what the next steps are in the hiring process
- Thank the candidate

during the hiring process. If you have a timeline in mind, you can mention it. Share whether you’re planning to schedule second-round interviews with the top candidates. Last, thank the interviewee for showing interest in the position and participating in the interview.

2.1.5 Post-interview evaluation

After conducting interviews with multiple candidates, rank the acceptable candidates based on their qualifications, attitudes, abilities to learn and other soft skills, such as interaction with people. Ideally, a candidate will “check all the boxes.” If not, prioritize characteristics based on their importance. If no acceptable candidates are identified, you may need to repeat the hiring process for new candidates. Candidates who possess abilities in the characteristics you prioritize as the most important may be your top contenders.

2.2 Background, drug and reference checks

Employers may use background checks, drug tests, and reference checks to see if a candidate is suitable, reliable, and safe for their workplace.

2.2.1 Background checks

Background checks are important because the employees your operation hires will directly interact with other employees and possibly your family. You want to respect the safety and security of your current team and ensure new hires will be upstanding people.

Types of background checks

- Reference checks
- Online or social media inventories
- Public database reviews

Background checks can be formal or informal. Informal checks involve reviewing publicly available information about a job candidate. Start by doing an online search. Use a search engine such as Google or Bing. Narrow the search with keywords such as school names, state of residence, former employers and hometown. You can also review an applicant's social media activity on platforms such as

Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn and Instagram and validate addresses on sites such as whitepages.com and 411.com.

Employers should also consider checking public databases to learn more about applicants. You can use public information to check whether applicants have a sex offender or court judgment history. The State of Nebraska maintains a statewide sex offender registry¹. Users can search the registry by name or location. The Nebraska court system maintains case search tools², which retrieves case history from Nebraska courts. Users can search by litigant name to find cases that mention a specific individual.

For positions involving sensitive information or managerial responsibilities, a more extensive, and formal, background check may be necessary. Several companies offer background check services. Consider comparing the options available and choose a company that can provide the types of information that will help you to make your hiring decision. Before engaging a third-party company to help with a background check, get written consent from the applicant.

2.2.2 Drug testing

Requiring a drug test can communicate clearly that substance misuse will not be tolerated on your operation, but it is important to approach this topic thoughtfully and within the bounds of the law.

Alcohol and drug use on the job can contribute to serious injuries or even fatalities. In agriculture, where employees often work around livestock, machinery, and unpredictable conditions, safety must come first. An employee who is under the influence poses a risk not only to themselves but also to coworkers, family members on the operation, and anyone nearby. For that reason, some employers choose to include drug testing as one part of a broader safety culture. Policies like these can help set expectations and reinforce that safe work practices matter.

¹ <https://sor.nebraska.gov/>

² <https://www.nebraska.gov/justicecc/ccname.cgi>

That said, drug testing policies should be developed carefully. This section provides general considerations, but every operation is different. Before implementing a testing program, it is wise to consult an attorney or human resources professional to ensure your policy complies with applicable state and federal laws and fits the needs of your operation.

Employers have several options for conducting drug tests. Some operations use on-site testing kits that provide results quickly, which can be helpful when timing is important. Others choose to work with an outside testing provider that manages the testing process and documentation. Drug tests may use urine, hair, blood, or saliva samples, depending on the approach selected and the level of verification needed.

Many employers who require testing do so before a new employee begins work. In these cases, a pre-employment drug test typically takes place after a job offer is accepted but before the employee's first day on the job. If your operation uses this approach, the offer letter should clearly state that passing the drug test is a condition of employment. It should also explain that failing to complete the test or failing the test may result in the offer being withdrawn.

Some operations also conduct drug testing after employment begins in specific situations. For example, testing may be required following a workplace accident or injury to help determine whether substance use may have played a role. In other cases, if a supervisor observes behavior that raises safety concerns, a test may be used as part of a documented process to address the situation.

It is also important to remember that substance use disorders are a health issue as well as a workplace concern. When employees are struggling, connecting them with appropriate resources can be an important step. In Nebraska, assistance and support services may be available through the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. Providing information about available help can support both employee wellbeing and long-term workplace safety³.

2.2.3 Reference checks

With a reference check, employers can confirm information an applicant has provided and learn about the applicant from people who know him or her well. When questioning references, employers can ask about previous job positions the applicant held or work the applicant has done. Also, simply asking whether the reference would hire the applicant can suggest employability. Possible references include past employers, teachers, and other professional contacts.

2.3 Eligibility verification

Before hiring any employee, proof of the individual's authorization to work in the U.S. is required. U.S. citizens or authorized foreign citizens may work here legally. Using Form I-9, Employment Eligibility Verification⁴, employers must validate employee identity and work authorization status through birth certificate, passport or green card records. For help checking an employee's work eligibility, use the E-Verify system⁵.

³ <https://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/behavioral-health.aspx#>

⁴ <https://www.uscis.gov/i-9>

⁵ <https://e-verify.gov>

Eligibility verification

- All employees must fill out an I-9 form to verify work authorization prior to hire.
- The E-Verify system can help employers check a person’s work eligibility.
- You must verify an employee’s work eligibility even if you think you know their work authorization status.

2.4 Extending an offer

Before extending an offer, you might consider hosting multiple interviews with a prospective new hire. Scheduling multiple interactions can expose candidates to different settings (e.g., phone interview, in-person interview) and allow them to meet different people in the business.

After making a hiring decision, employers can call the new hire to extend an offer. However, a written offer should follow the phone call. The letter should outline details — including compensation, benefits, tasks, responsibilities and work schedule — pertaining to the hire’s new job.

2.5 Probationary period

Some employers choose to hire employees on a probationary basis. During that time, the employer can determine whether the employee has the necessary skills, conducts himself or herself in an acceptable manner and fits well with the operation’s culture. Plus, observing employees during a trial phase can help employers identify training needs. A probationary period can also benefit new hires, giving them an opportunity to learn whether they like the work and the team.

2.6 New hire paperwork filing

2.6.1 Employer identification number

Any employer who operates in Nebraska and pays workers must have an employer identification number (EIN) provided by the federal government. Employers, partnerships, limited liability companies and corporations may request an EIN from the IRS⁶.

Additionally, employers must register for a Nebraska employer tax identification number. This number is used to report state tax withheld from worker pay. To register, use the Nebraska Department of Revenue⁷. Newly hired and re-hired employees must be registered within 20 days of their hire date with the Nebraska⁸ State Directory of New Hires. For more information about tax withholding requirements,⁹ go to Section 4.4.

Important new hire paperwork

- Federal employer identification number
- Nebraska employer tax identification number
- Forms W-4 and W-4N or W-4NA
- Form I-9, Employment Eligibility Verification

⁶ <https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/get-an-employer-identification-number>

⁷ <https://revenue.nebraska.gov/businesses/register-your-new-business-online>

⁸ <https://ne-newhire.com/>

⁹ <https://revenue.nebraska.gov/about/forms/income-tax-withholding-forms>

2.6.2 Form W-4

New employees must complete a Form W-4 (PDF).¹⁰ Based on information shared in the form, employers will withhold the necessary federal tax. Employers aren't held accountable for information provided on a Form W-4, completed by the employee.

2.6.3 Form NE W-4N or W-4NA

When a Nebraska employer hires a new employee, the employer must alert the Nebraska Department of Revenue about the hire. That communication must occur within 20 calendar days of the earlier of the employee signing a Form W-4N or W-4NA¹¹, the employee first working on the job, or the employee carrying out the job's required duties. An employer that doesn't report the necessary paperwork to the state may be fined.

2.7 Independent contractors

An independent contractor is not classified as an employee under common law rules.

In agriculture, independent workers are sometimes used for short-term or day work. These workers are often referred to as independent contractors. An independent contractor is not classified as an employee under common law rules, which means the employer does not exercise the same level of direction and control over how the work is completed.

For Nebraska producers and ranchers, the distinction between an employee and an independent contractor matters. Choosing one arrangement over the other affects responsibilities related to unemployment insurance, workers' compensation, and taxes. Misclassifying a worker can create legal and financial risk, so it is important to evaluate how the relationship actually operates, and not simply what it is called.

Guidance used in Nebraska often mirrors the federal approach that looks at the entire working relationship. Resources from the Nebraska Department of Administrative Services explain that worker classification generally centers on three broad areas: behavioral control, financial control, and the overall relationship between the parties. In practical terms, this means looking at how much direction the operation gives the worker, who controls the financial aspects of the job, and whether the arrangement functions more like employment or an independent business providing services.

In many agricultural settings, a working relationship may be more likely to resemble an independent contractor arrangement when the following conditions are present:

- The operation provides general goals or project outcomes, while the worker decides how the work will be completed
- The individual supplies their own tools, equipment, or machinery and sets their own work schedule.
- The workers has the opportunity to realize a profit or incur a loss based on how the work is managed.
- The individual offers similar services to other farms, ranches, or agricultural businesses.

¹⁰ <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/fw4.pdf>

¹¹ <https://revenue.nebraska.gov/about/forms/income-tax-withholding-forms>

- The services are project-based or short-term rather than part of the ongoing, core work of the operation.

Even when several of these factors are present, classification is rarely based on a single test. State and federal agencies evaluate the entire relationship when determining whether someone is truly operating as an independent contractor/business.

Nebraska producers who are uncertain about classification have a few options. The Internal Revenue Service provides guidance on worker classification and allows businesses to request an official determination by filing form SS-8. Another option is to seek professional help by talking with an attorney, accountant, or human resources professional.

When questions arise, it is worth taking the time to review your situation carefully. Talking with an attorney, accountant or human resources professional familiar with agricultural operations in Nebraska can help ensure your worker arrangements are set up correctly and potentially reduce risk for your operation over time.

2.8 Resources List

Some of the information in this section was adapted from resources such as the following, which may provide other insights about the employee hiring process.

Interviewing

- [7 Interviewer Interview Questions for First-Timers, AgCareers.com](#)
- [7 Interview Mistakes Most Managers Make, Robert Half](#)
- [Sample Interview Questions \(DOC\), The University of Texas at San Antonio](#)
- [Interviewing Short List Applicants, UNL Business & Finance, Department of Human Resources](#)

Employee checks

- [Background Checks: What Employers Need to Know, U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#)
- [Farm Drug Testing – Should You Test?, AgHires](#)
- [Applicant Background Checks \(PDF\), Iowa State University Extension and Outreach](#)
- [Pre-Employment Testing: A Helpful Way for Companies to Screen Applicants, Forbes](#)
- [Workplace Drug Testing in Nebraska, HealthStreet](#)

Other hiring resources

- [Migrant, Seasonal and H-2A Agricultural Worker Handbook Legal Aid of Nebraska](#)
- [Building a Resilient Ag Workforce: Enhancing Retention and H-2A Workers – The Basics, UNL Center for Agricultural Profitability](#)
- [H-2A Visa Program, USDA](#)
- [Nebraska Equal Opportunity Commission: Fair Employment Practice Act, Age in Discrimination in Employment Act, and Equal Pay Act](#)
- [Get the Right Start in Hiring Employees, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach](#)

- [Testing and Assessment: An Employer’s Guide to Good Practices \(PDF\), Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor](#)
- [Understanding Employee Probation Periods, AgCareers.com](#)
- [State of Nebraska State Accounting Manual for Nebraska](#)

Web addresses in Chapter 2

1. <https://www.agcareers.com/employers/resource-library/recruitment-strategy/7-interviewer-interview-questions-for-first-timers.htm#gsc.tab=0>
2. <https://www.roberthalf.com/us/en/insights/hiring-help/7-interview-mistakes-most-managers-make>
3. <https://www.utsa.edu/people-excellence/documents/people-leaders/interviewquestions.doc>
4. <https://hr.unl.edu/recruitment-selection-manual/selecting/interviewing-short-list-applicants/>
5. <https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/background-checks-what-employers-need-know>
6. <https://blog.aghires.com/hiring-advice-blog/farm-drug-testing-should-you-test>
7. <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/wholefarm/html/c1-80.html>
8. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/lisaquast/2011/09/13/pre-employment-testing-a-helpful-way-for-companies-to-screen-applicants/#569bbc152606>
9. <https://www.health-street.net/state-laws/nebraska-drug-testing-compliance/>
10. https://legalaidofnebraska.presencehost.net/file_download/inline/3248bd13-fd21-4c5a-b400-b2cb81e7f362
11. <https://cap.unl.edu/building-resilient-ag-workforce-webinar-2025/>
12. <https://www.farmers.gov/working-with-us/h2a-visa-program>
13. <https://neoc.nebraska.gov/>
14. <http://extension.iastate.edu/agdm/wholefarm/html/c1-75.html>
15. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/research/publications/testing-and-assessment-employers-guide-good-practices>
16. <https://www.agcareers.com/employers/resource-library/hr-practices/understanding-employee-probation-periods.htm#gsc.tab=0>
17. <https://das.nebraska.gov/accounting/nis/contractor.htm#:~:text=>

Chapter 3. Employee Development

Developing your employees into confident, high-performing team members is critical to the long-term success of your farm or ranch operation. Thoughtful onboarding, ongoing training, coaching and mentoring should work together to give new hires a strong start, build their skills over time, boost day-to-day job performance and support their growth as long-term members of your operation.

3.1 Onboarding

Onboarding is the process of helping a new employee settle into your farm or ranch during the first few days and weeks on the job. For Nebraska producers, a simple and intentional onboarding process can make a big difference in how quickly employees become comfortable, safe, and productive.

Early conversations should help employees understand how the operation runs, what is expected of them, and how their work contributes to the success of the business. It is also time to confirm that the employee's skills, attitude, and interests are a good fit for the position.

Resources from University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension and the UNL Center for Agricultural Profitability offer guidance on workforce management, employee retention, and building strong farm teams.

During onboarding, aim to:

- Welcome the employee and introduce them to the team
- Explain how your operation works and what you value
- Review job responsibilities and expectations
- Discuss safety procedures and workplace policies
- Give the employee time to ask questions

Starting employees off on a positive note helps build commitment to the operation. When new hires feel prepared and included, they are more likely to stay and succeed in their role. On the other hand, a confusing or rushed start can lead to frustration and turnover - something many Nebraska farms and ranches are trying to avoid in a tight labor market.

Onboarding is especially important for employees who are brand new to the operation, but it can also be helpful when an existing employee moves into a new role. In those cases, take time to review the updated job description, introduce new responsibilities, and connect the employee with the right supervisor or mentor.

3.1.1 Create an Onboarding Plan

Before a new hire's first day, create a simple onboarding checklist to cover the topics that matter most. Ask a recent hire for input they can often point out what would have helped them feel more prepared and welcome.

Some items will apply to every new employee but consider customizing the checklist by role so each employee gets the information and training they need to succeed.

Nebraska producers can find helpful templates and guidance for building onboarding schedules through:

- University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension (unl.edu)
- Center for Agricultural Profitability (cap.unl.edu)
- Cornell Agricultural Workforce Development (agworkforce.cals.cornell.edu)

3.1.2 Tips for Onboarding

A strong first day sets the tone for employee success. Consider these practical steps:

1. Introduce your operation. Share your vision, mission, and goals. Explain who owns and runs the business and what the operation values.
2. Give a tour. Show the employee key areas—workstations, parking, lunch areas, bathrooms, and safety zones. Introduce coworkers along the way.
3. Explain job expectations. Cover the most important tasks, workplace policies, dress code, cellphone use, and safety practices. Point employees to the handbook or manual for details.
4. Demonstrate processes. Show how to record and submit time sheets, review the job description, and provide important contacts (supervisors, emergency personnel, and team members).
5. Provide technology access. If the employee will use a tablet, computer, phone, or email, make sure devices and login info are ready.
6. Encourage questions and feedback. Leave time throughout the day for discussion. Ask the employee if they have what they need to succeed and for suggestions to improve the onboarding experience.
7. Handle paperwork efficiently. Avoid spending too much time on forms on day one. Provide a packet employees can take home to review and return or share key documents in advance.

Finally, emphasize open communication. Let employees know they can ask questions, provide feedback, and request support as they settle in. A well-structured first day helps build confidence, commitment, and long-term success on your operation.

3.2 Training

Training is ongoing education that helps employees do their jobs safely, efficiently, and correctly. For new hires, training is critical in the first few months, but regular training for all employees ensures your team stays skilled and your operation runs smoothly.

Start by setting broad goals, then define specific, measurable objectives. Tie objectives to a timeline so employees know what to learn and by when. Current employees can help identify training priorities, as they know firsthand what skills are essential for the job.

3.2.1 *Customize Training to Your Operation*

Training needs vary by farm type.

- Livestock operations may focus on animal care, feeding, reproduction, worker safety, and product safety
- Crop operations may focus on equipment use, scouting for pests and disease, postharvest management, and precision agriculture data

Written standard operating procedures (SOPs) help ensure training is consistent and work is done correctly.

3.2.2 *Know Your Audience*

People learn differently. Some employees need to watch a task, some need to hear instructions, others learn by reading or by doing. Mix methods to accommodate learning styles and avoid overloading employees with too much information at once. Employees without an agriculture background may need extra guidance to understand the basics before tackling more complex tasks.

3.2.3 *Training Methods*

Use both formal and informal approaches.

- Formal methods: structured classes, seminars, or online courses
- Informal methods: on-the-job training, regular feedback, and demonstrations

Show employees how to complete a task and why it matters. Follow training with a Q&A session to clarify concepts and gather ideas to improve the operation. Vendors, veterinarians, seed reps, nutritionists, and equipment dealers can also provide training resources.

Successful training strategies:

- Tailor training to your operation
- Use multiple teaching methods to fit learning styles
- Allow adequate time for training
- Explain why tasks must be done a certain way

Follow training with discussion and Q&A

3.3 *Coaching*

Coaching focuses on improving specific job skills or performance areas. Unlike training, which introduces new skills, coaching helps employees refine and enhance skills they already have. Coaching is usually short-term and targeted, often lasting six months to a year.

3.3.1 *Developing a Coaching Plan*

1. Assess needs: Identify the employees' strengths and areas needing improvement. New employees may need broad coaching, while experienced employees may need targeted guidance.
2. Prepare the plan: Choose coaches with the right technical and people skills. Set clear objectives, timelines, and check-in points.

3. Implement the plan: Allow time for coaching to develop and encourage regular feedback and communication.
4. Monitor and adjust: Track progress and adjust the plan as needed. Coaching works best when it is flexible and responsive to the employee's needs.

Effective coaches can be current staff, former employees, or external experts. Coaching helps employees reach higher levels of performance and confidence while improving overall operation efficiency.

3.4 Mentoring

Mentoring supports long-term employee development. Unlike coaching, mentoring is broader and focuses on career growth, leadership skills, and overall professional development. Mentoring relationships are often longer than coaching—sometimes lasting several years.

3.4.1 Setting Up a Mentorship Program

1. Define goals: Decide what employees and the operation should gain from mentoring—leadership skills, knowledge sharing, or internal networking.
2. Develop a framework: Decide how mentors and mentees will interact, how often, and for how long. Programs can be formal or flexible.
3. Pair mentors with mentees: Consider interests, experience, aptitudes, and personal preferences. Check in periodically and allow changes if the pairing isn't working.

Mentoring benefits both sides. Experienced employees pass on knowledge, and less experienced employees bring fresh ideas. Explaining the program's purpose and sharing success stories can encourage participation and show its value.

3.5 Resources List

Nebraska producers can find additional information and tools through:

- [University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension](#)
- [UNL Center for Agricultural Profitability](#)

These resources provide guidance on workforce management, employee training, and farm business planning.

University and Extension resources

- Onboarding resources from Cornell Agricultural Workforce Development
- Coaching and employee development guidance from South Dakota State University Extension
- Agricultural workforce training materials from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

Industry and workforce resources

- Employee training strategies from Progressive Dairy
- Agricultural workforce insights from Women in Ag Learning Network

Web addresses in Chapter 3

1. <https://extension.unl.edu>
2. <https://cap.unl.edu>

Chapter 4. Operations

A business' operational plan outlines the activities and processes that will help it reach its goals. When evaluating your operational plan, think about the work environment from your employees' perspective. Ask yourself, "Would I want to work here?" Then, adjust accordingly. This section describes operational considerations for a farm.

4.1 Safety

To protect employees, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration¹² mandates that workplaces protect employees from recognized hazards that may cause or are likely to cause worker death or serious harm and provides a short summary of key employer responsibilities¹³. The OSHA Small Business Safety and Health Handbook (PDF)¹⁴ may help small business owners navigate OSHA requirements.

The Nebraska Department of Labor¹⁵ offers free, confidential, on-site safety and health consultation services to help employers identify hazards and comply with regulations.

The Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health (CS-CASH), headquartered at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, works with ag safety and health partners across a seven-state region and beyond to improve the health and safety of members of the agricultural community and offer many resources (in English and Spanish) on their website.¹⁶ They offer no-cost training¹⁷ including equipment, grain handling, feedyard safety, and mental health support, as well as a wealth of resources for employers and employees, some of which are explained below.

4.1.1 Livestock Worker Safety

Working with livestock can be dangerous. These sometimes-large animals can be unpredictable and aggressive if they feel threatened or stressed. CS-CASH has many resources¹⁸ to stay safe and healthy while working with livestock.

4.1.2 Farm Safety

Farms are incredibly busy places, with many people, machines, and animals present. Be prepared by utilizing the Certified Safe Farm and other farm safety resources¹⁹ produced by CS-CASH.

¹² <https://www.osha.gov/>

¹³ <https://www.osha.gov/workers/employer-responsibilities#:~:text=Provide%20a%20workplace%20free%20from,and%20properly%20maintain%20this%20equipment.>

¹⁴ <https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/publications/small-business.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://dol.nebraska.gov/LaborStandards/OnsiteSafetyandHealthConsultation/OnsiteConsultationProgramOverview>

¹⁶ <https://www.unmc.edu/publichealth/cscash/outreach/index.html>

¹⁷ <https://www.unmc.edu/publichealth/cscash/outreach/index.html>

¹⁸ <https://www.unmc.edu/publichealth/cscash/resources/resources-livestock-worker-safety.html>

¹⁹ <https://www.unmc.edu/publichealth/cscash/resources/resources-farm-safety.html>

4.1.3 Weather Safety and Preparedness

Nebraska weather can be unpredictable and at times dangerous, especially for those working outdoors. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln is helping agricultural producers, businesses, and communities increase resiliency by identifying vulnerabilities and prioritizing actions through resources available on the Weather-Ready Nebraska website²⁰.

Thunderstorms may bring lightning and hail. Did you know?²¹

- Lightning kills between 75 and 100 people nationwide annually
- During thunderstorms, stay inside and away from skylights, glass doors, and windows. If you are outdoors, an automobile is a safe place to be
- Indoors, keep away from doors, windows, stoves, sinks, metal pipes or other conductors. Don't use the phone. Disconnect electrical appliances.
- Outdoors, minimize your height but don't lie flat. Do not take shelter under a tree. Stay away from wire fences or other metallic conductors. Avoid standing in small sheds in open areas.
- Hail stones in severe storms can be as big as a softball and fall at 100 mph.

Lastly, prevent heat- and cold-related illnesses. To prevent dehydration and possible heat-related illnesses, drink plenty of water in addition to the preventative measures listed above. Dress in layers and have extra clothing available when working outdoors.

4.1.4 Cancer Prevention

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in the U.S. and is one of the most preventable. Melanoma, the most dangerous form of skin cancer, is the fifth most common cancer in Nebraska. Incidence and mortality rates of melanoma cancer are higher in Nebraska compared to U.S. rates due to several risk factors, including high UV radiation year-round. More resources²² are available through Nebraska Extension.

To protect your skin and for early detection of skin cancer:

- Regular skin exams
- Wear sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher and reapply it often
- Wear a hat with a 2-3-inch-wide brim, UV-blocking sunglasses, and protective clothing when in the sun

4.2 Compensation

A key to attracting good employees is offering competitive compensation. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports employment statistics for various occupations. Its Occupational Outlook Handbook²³ section on farm workers can inform employers about setting competitive, fair wages for employees. The U.S. Department of Agriculture also conducts a semiannual survey of farm labor rates²⁴ by region. If hiring other types of workers to support an agricultural business, employers can review the Bureau of

²⁰ <https://weather-ready.unl.edu/>

²¹ <https://nema.nebraska.gov/severe-weather-preparedness.php>

²² <https://preec.unl.edu/news/share-message-about-skin-cancer-and-protect-your-skin/>

²³ <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/farming-fishing-and-forestry/agricultural-workers.htm>

²⁴ <https://usda.library.cornell.edu/concern/publications/x920fw89s>

Labor Statistics' Occupational Employment and Wage Statistic Tables²⁵ to set competitive wages for them.

4.2.1 Minimum wage

Nebraska's minimum wage rose to \$15.00/hour in 2026 for employers with four or more employees at one time. Every year thereafter, the minimum wage will be adjusted upward based on the cost of living. Neb. Rev. Stat. § 48-1203. The best place to get minimum wage updates is through the Nebraska Department of Labor²⁶.

Agricultural employers are generally exempt from the state minimum wage law, but there are two important situations in which a Nebraskan agricultural employer must pay the state minimum wage.

Type of work assigned. If an agriculture employer assigns any non-agricultural labor at any point during a workweek, that employee must be paid at least the state minimum wage for all hours worked during that week, including agricultural hours. See the definition of agricultural labor below.

Size of the operation. If an agriculture employer uses more than 500 "man-days" of labor in any calendar quarter of the previous year, then the state minimum wage applies for the entire current year. One "man-day" is any day on which an employee spends at least 1 hour performing agricultural work.

Farm and ranch employers seeking to apply the law accurately must become familiar with how the law defines agriculture. In general, the law defines agricultural labor as including tilling, planting, cultivation, and harvesting of crops, among other tasks. But a lot of labor that gets assigned to farm workers, including selling at an off-farm farmer's market or the commercial canning of vegetables, is considered non-agricultural labor. In cases where non-agricultural labor is assigned, the state minimum wage does apply, depending on the size of the business.

Nebraska's minimum wage applies to businesses with four or more employees when non-agricultural labor is assigned.

If an agricultural employer has three or fewer employees and assigns those employees non-agricultural labor, the state minimum wage does not apply, but the federal minimum wage still does. The federal minimum wage is \$7.25/hour.

4.2.2 Overtime

Nebraska does not have a state overtime wage law, but federal law typically requires that employees who work more than 40 hours a week be paid at least 1.5 times their hourly rate for hours worked over 40. However, federal rules exempt agricultural labor from these overtime requirements.

Thus, Nebraska farm and ranch businesses are not obligated to pay overtime wages to workers who perform exclusively agricultural labor. If the worker performs at least one hour of non-agricultural labor in a workweek, then non-agricultural rules apply, and the employee is owed overtime pay for all hours worked over 40 in that week.

The distinction between agricultural and non-agricultural labor can be complex. In general, the law defines agricultural labor as including tilling, planting, cultivation, and harvesting of crops, among other

²⁵ <https://www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm#45-0000>

²⁶ dol.nebraska.gov/LaborStandards

related tasks. But a lot of labor that gets assigned to farm workers, including packing produce from other producers, selling at an off-farm farmer's market, or processing agricultural commodities into value-added products, is considered non-agricultural labor and would be subject to federal overtime laws.

For more information about overtime and agricultural labor, see The U.S. Department of Labor fact sheet [Agricultural Employment Under the Fair Labor Standards Act \(FLSA\)](#).

Employees who would otherwise be owed overtime may be exempt if:

- They are paid a salary
- They make at least \$684/week with that salary (regardless of time spent working), and
- They have managerial authority

For more information on the salary exemption, see the U.S. Department of Labor fact sheet [#17A: Exemption for Executive, Administrative Professional, Computer & Outside Sales Employees Under FLSA](#).

Generally, employees who do agricultural work on a farm are exempt from **overtime pay** requirements. To verify whether your farm must pay overtime wages to an employee, seek guidance or clarification from the U.S. Department of Labor.

4.2.3 Nonmonetary compensation

Compensation provided to employees may include some benefits that can't easily be valued with a cash amount. These benefits may be called "nonmonetary compensation." Such compensation includes access to farm equipment or tools; the opportunity for employees to continue their education; and a supply of meat, milk, produce or other farm products. Other possibilities include offering meals, hosting social recognition events or providing farm apparel. Items like these may cost little but create reasonable value for workers. Employees themselves, not the employer, determine the specific value, so get to know your employees and what they enjoy. Note that tax implications for non-monetary compensation may vary by item. Such benefits may be a tax-free form of compensation.

If you plan to offer your employees non-monetary compensation, choose items they would like. Offering housing on the farm may be crucial to attracting immigrant labor but have less value to local part-time employees.

Giving employees options may ensure they receive something they'll enjoy. Then, in a compensation package, do your best to share information about non-monetary compensation with employees, and estimate the value of those benefits.

Nonmonetary compensation examples

- On-farm housing
- Access to farm equipment or tools
- Meat, milk or produce
- Meals or snacks
- Farm apparel
- Hunting and fishing privileges
- Extra time off

4.2.4 Incentive pay

An incentive pay system rewards employees for their part in the business achieving certain production, marketing or financial goals. Based on performance, incentive pay encourages a productive work environment and strong workplace morale. It also may make employees proud of their work and attract workers who enjoy the opportunity to earn more as they perform well.

Incentive pay

- Rewards employees
- Encourages workplace productivity and morale
- Can attract workers who enjoy opportunity to earn more

To develop an incentive, pay program, first consider your business' objectives. If your goal is to improve product quality, then your incentive pay system could be based on the grade assigned to your harvested products. If your goal is to increase productivity, then your system could reward employees for handling or harvesting a certain quantity of product in a certain time period.

Although employers should match incentive pay to their goals, the standard set for incentive-based pay shouldn't boost one performance measure to the extent that it causes a decline in another important measure. For example, if your goal is to increase harvest yields, then an incentive pay standard may establish that it will only measure product harvested that meets a certain quality threshold. Also, focusing exclusively on individual high performance may cause coworkers to feel like they're working against one another. An effective incentive pay system requires recordkeeping that tracks employee performance relative to the certain goal. Standards should be monitored periodically, to determine how well a standard addresses and drives your initial goal, so that improvements can be made to them if necessary and you can update your workforce about overall performance. To be fair, do not reduce or eliminate a system's potential payout in the middle of a given year, but use the monitoring information collected to improve the system for later years.

Businesses have multiple incentive pay options to consider.

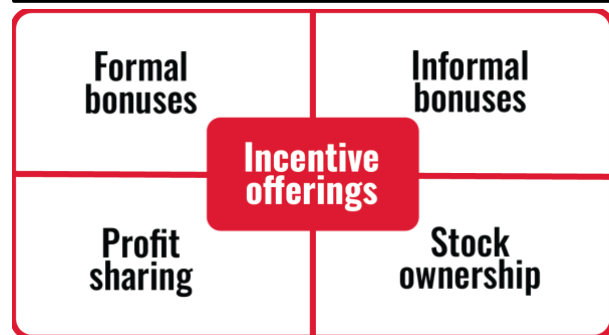
Formal bonuses: As bonuses that tend to be paid at defined times each year, formal bonuses are often cash-based incentives. They can serve as tools to acknowledge work anniversaries, seasonal work effort, project milestones, holidays and good safety or work performance. They're limited in their effectiveness if they create morale issues and if employees start to expect them as basic compensation.

Informal bonuses: These bonuses can show employees that their unique contributions are valued, and they tend to be paid irregularly with cash. Businesses may award informal bonuses if employees demonstrate specific instances of positive performance or leadership; share beneficial ideas with the team; and celebrate personal successes or occasions, such as marriage or community involvement.

Profit sharing: With profit sharing, employees earn a portion of the operation's profits. Because the amount they earn depends on the business operating profitably, employees should feel incentivized to improve the business' bottom line. They may also feel more personally invested in the operation's performance.

Employee stock ownership plan (ESOP): Another tool to create an ownership opportunity for employees, an ESOP uses a formula to allocate shares, which along with cash may be maintained in an ESOP trust fund for employees. Later, if employees have vested in the ESOP and they leave the operation, they may exchange shares for cash.

Exhibit 4.2.4.1 – Incentive pay options



Despite their advantages, incentive programs also have some limitations. They should always prioritize employee safety and health. In an attempt to increase their chances for receiving an incentive-based payment, employees shouldn't work to the extent they create liability or labor law compliance issues for the operation. You don't want employees to lack confidence in the incentive system and its fairness, so be transparent in explaining how the incentive system works and how employees can qualify for incentive payments. If needed, seek the help of an accountant, attorney or consultant to create an effective incentive pay system.

4.2.5 Payday requirements

Payday requirements dictate how often employers must pay their employees. Typical frequencies are weekly, bi-weekly, bi-monthly, or monthly. Each state determines its own payday requirements.

Nebraska state law only requires employers to pay workers on a regular schedule. The specific payday frequency can be set by the employer or agreed upon by both the employer and the employee.

After the payday is established, an employer must provide 30 days written notice to employees before changing the schedule of paydays.

If an employee leaves or is terminated, the last paycheck must be paid on the next regular payday, or within two weeks of the last day of employment, whichever comes first.

Wage statements must include certain information, including:

- Identity of the employer
- Pay period ending date
- Hours for which the employee is being paid
- Gross wages
- Deductions made from the paycheck

Deductions, withholdings, or any other diversion of payments must be authorized by state or federal law or court. Employers cannot deduct from paychecks for items such as shortages, breakage, or tools unless they have written authorization from the employee to do so. Such deductions cannot reduce an employee's wages below the applicable minimum wage rate.

4.3 Benefits

Benefits agricultural employers may provide to employees include health insurance, retirement plans and time off.

4.3.1 Health insurance

The Affordable Care Act created health care insurance provisions for employers to provide affordable coverage with a minimum value. Requirements for an employer in a particular calendar year vary according to the average number of people employed during the previous year. A full-time employee is considered to be one who works at least 30 hours per week; part-time employees are counted on a full-time equivalency basis. Use the Full-time Equivalent (FTE) Employee Calculator to estimate your business' number of employees. Note that employers who offer health insurance must provide the benefit to eligible employees within 90 days of an employee's first workday.

For operations with fewer than 50 full-time employees or full-time equivalent staff on average in a year, the act's employer-shared responsibility doesn't apply in the following year. However, these businesses may offer self-insured health benefits or coverage through the Small Business Health Options Program. Visit [HealthCare.gov](https://www.healthcare.gov) for details about health insurance coverage options for small businesses. Some small businesses may also qualify for a small business health care tax credit. Employers that average at least 50 full-time or full-time equivalent staff must satisfy certain parameters specific to employer shared responsibility and information reporting. More information is available on the IRS webpage [Affordable Care Act Tax Provision for Large Employers](#).

Beyond the Health Insurance Marketplace, other options may include association health plans or private insurance. In Missouri, qualified membership organizations may offer health care benefits by contracts starting on Aug. 28, 2025. Independent insurance agents or brokers may be able to help you find a plan suitable for your farming operation.

Health insurance requirements for an employer in a particular calendar year are based on the average number of people employed in the preceding calendar year.

4.3.2 Retirement plan

If operations choose to offer a retirement plan to employees, they have several options from which to choose. First, a simplified employee pension (SEP) plan, which is a type of individual retirement account (IRA), enables businesses to contribute a variable rate from year to year that's consistent for each employee in a given year. With an SEP, the employer is the only contributor; employees themselves don't have the option to contribute. However, a SEP-IRA is established for each employee, and the employees are fully vested, meaning that all funds in an employee's SEP-IRA belong to the employee. SEPs are known for having inexpensive overhead, and the setup and operational details are relatively easy to navigate. More information is available on the IRS webpage [Simplified Employee Pension Plan \(SEP\)](#).

A savings incentive match plan for employees (SIMPLE) IRA is an option for small businesses, particularly those that don't employ more than 100 people. With a SIMPLE IRA, employers have more specific rules to follow governing their contributions to employee retirement accounts. In a year, employers either contribute 2% of an employee's salary — maximum limits do apply — or offer to match as much as 3% of an employee's contribution. Employees have the option to contribute funds to a SIMPLE IRA. Like with an SEP, SIMPLE IRA plans enable employees to fully vest, meaning the employees own their SIMPLE IRA funds. More information is available on the IRS webpage [SIMPLE IRA Plan](#).

Visit the IRS webpage for information about other retirement plan options.

4.3.3 Time off

Nebraska employers with 11 or more employees must provide paid sick leave to their employees, unless otherwise exempt. Year-round agricultural employees are not exempt from the Nebraska Healthy Families and Workplaces Act, but seasonal or temporary agricultural employment is.

Under this rule, employees accrue 1 hour of paid sick time for every 30 hours worked, up to a certain amount based on the business's size. Agricultural employers with 11-19 employees must provide up to 40 hours of paid sick time per year. Employers with 20 or more employees must provide up to 56 hours of paid sick time per year. Employers can also provide more than the Act requires.

As stated above, temporary or seasonal agricultural workers are exempt from paid sick leave requirements. Other types of employees that are exempt include:

- Independent contractors
- Owner-operators
- Workers with less than 80 hours of work per calendar year
- Individuals under 16 years of age

Paid sick time accrues only after 80 hours of consecutive employment. Unused time generally carries over year to year but does not have to be paid out when employment ends (unless the employer specifically agrees to it).

Other benefits, such as paid time off (PTO) or vacation leave, are not required by Nebraska law. Federal law requires family leave under the Family Medical Leave Act, but only for businesses with 50 or more employees.

However, if an employer promises PTO as a benefit in a policy or employment agreement, that benefit becomes legally enforceable. Earned vacation generally must be paid at termination. Neb. Rev. Stat. § 48-1230.

Meal and rest breaks during a workday are allowed at the discretion of the employer. Farm businesses in Nebraska are not required by law to offer meal and rest breaks at specific intervals or for specific lengths to employees performing agricultural work.

With some agriculture jobs, work must happen every day, regardless of it being a weekend or holiday or during non-traditional hours. For example, dairy cows require milking, and a pest outbreak can occur in crops at any time. Because of demands such as these, providing time off to employees can make completing a workload more challenging. However, offering time off may help to attract workers.

Employers have several choices for offering time off as a benefit for farm employees. For example, they may choose the type of time off to provide. Options include vacation days, sick days, holidays and personal days. Some employers, particularly those with continuous operations, choose to use a paid time off (PTO) system. With PTO, employees receive a certain number of paid days away from work each year. The employees can use the paid days at their discretion, and the employer and employee don't track how a day off was used — for example, whether it was a sick day, vacation day or holiday.

Employers must also determine how much time off to offer. A sliding scale that provides more time off to more experienced workers is an option. Employers can also choose whether they pay employees during the time off and whether employees receive extra compensation if they don't use all or part of their paid time off. Alternatively, employers may consider allowing employees to carry over at least some unused time off into the next year.

Employers who choose to offer time off as a benefit can create guidelines to make providing the benefit more manageable. Some agricultural employers ask that employees avoid taking time off during busy seasons. Also, some require workers to coordinate their schedules and stagger their days off. Such coordination ensures that multiple employees don't take leave at the same time. Employers also have the option to require that employees submit time-off requests in advance and to grant supervisors the authority to approve or deny those requests. If an employer requires requests, the process for submitting

and reviewing those requests should be outlined clearly in the operation's employee handbook. Points to address include the process and timeline for managing time-off requests.

4.3.4 Other benefit options

Benefit packages may also include items such as access to a work vehicle, on-site childcare, wellness programs, continuing education funds and donations to charitable organizations. From a health perspective, employers may choose to offer added insurance benefits, such as life, disability, dental or vision insurance. A creative, strong benefits package may enable your operation to compete with other local employers for new workers and retain employees who already work for you. Forms of non-monetary compensation (see Section 4.2.3) may also serve as extra benefits for employees.

4.4 Taxes

4.4.1 Federal

Employers must withhold three forms of federal taxes — federal income, Social Security and Medicare — and file those taxes throughout the year. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) webpage [Understanding Employment Taxes](#) offers an overview of these taxes.

Federal income tax withholding depends on information provided on an employee's [Form W-4](#). For employees who do not complete Form W-4, employers still have an obligation to withhold taxes. In that case, the withholding default is that for a single person with no adjustments. More information about federal income tax withholdings is provided in the [IRS Employer's Tax Guide \(Publication 15\)](#).

If an employer hires agricultural workers with H-2A status, the rules for reporting their compensation and withholding taxes are different. Employers should consult IRS guidance specific to agricultural and H-2A workers to ensure compliance.

Employers and employees share Social Security and Medicare tax payments. Depending on the employee's wages, additional Medicare tax may be required. The IRS provides instructions for computing proper withholding and reporting requirements.

Federal unemployment tax (FUTA) is paid exclusively by employers. This tax is separate from federal income tax, Social Security and Medicare taxes. The federal unemployment tax rules are unique for operations that employ agricultural workers.

Paying federal unemployment taxes is required when an employer:

- Paid at least \$20,000 in cash wages to farm workers during any calendar quarter in the current or preceding calendar year, or
- Employed 10 or more agricultural workers for some part of a day during at least 20 different calendar weeks in the current or preceding calendar year

The IRS details FUTA requirements for farm operations in Publication 15 and Publication 51 ([Agricultural Employer's Tax Guide](#)).

Basic tax-related responsibilities for employers

- Collect payroll tax documentation from employees

- Withhold payroll taxes and pay employees
- File required reports by deadlines
- Send payroll taxes to federal agencies
- Keep accurate and complete payroll records

4.4.2 State

Every employer paying taxable wages and holding an office or conducting business in Nebraska must withhold income taxes for the state of Nebraska on top of federal tax obligations. Neb. Rev. Stat. § 77-2753(1)(a). Hiring an independent contractor is not the same as having an employee, and farm businesses are generally not responsible for withholding taxes from independent contractors.

Before employers can file state income tax withholding, they must obtain a Nebraska Withholding Certificate, which includes their state identification number. Businesses apply using the [Nebraska Tax Application, Form 20](#).

Employers withhold state tax based on information provided on an employee's Nebraska Withholding Allowance Certificate, Form W-4N. If an employee does not provide the form, the employer must withhold tax using the default single-person, no-exemptions rate.

Employers with more than 24 employees must generally withhold at least **1.5% of each employee's taxable wages**. A lower amount may be withheld if the employee provides documentation supporting the reduced withholding. [2026 Nebraska Circular EN](#).

All Nebraska employers must make quarterly filings via the Nebraska Income Tax Withholding Return, Form 941N, unless licensed as an annual filer. Deposits on these withholdings must also be made quarterly if more than \$500 was withheld during the quarter. All payments for income tax withholding must be made electronically if the total payments made in any prior year exceeded \$5,000.

In Nebraska, an agricultural employer becomes liable for **unemployment insurance (UI)** when it meets the Federal Unemployment Tax Act (FUTA) agricultural tests. Neb. Rev. Stat. § 48-604 (4). An agricultural employer is liable when either:

- The farm pays \$20,000 or more in wages for agricultural labor during any calendar quarter in the current or preceding calendar year, or
- The farm employed 10 or more workers assigned agricultural labor during some portion of a day in each of 20 different weeks in the current or preceding calendar year.

Liability to pay state unemployment insurance can also be influenced by other factors, such as whether the organization is a nonprofit entity or if the employee works in multiple states. The Nebraska Department of Labor's [Employer's Guide to Unemployment Insurance](#) offers more information on state unemployment insurance obligations.

4.4.3 Local

Nebraska does not generally impose local income taxes on wages at the city or county level. However, employers should verify whether local occupation taxes, business license taxes or other municipal requirements apply in their community.

Check with your local city or county government to determine whether your business is subject to any local tax obligations related to employment.

4.5 Youth Labor

There are rules for when and under what conditions farms can use youth labor. Generally, once a child turns sixteen (16), they can work on a farm at any time. 29 USC § 213(c). But there are work restrictions for younger children based on age, the times of day work is allowed, the number of hours children can work in a day or week, and the type of work they may perform.

For example, children under 16 generally cannot perform “hazardous” agricultural jobs. Hazardous agricultural work includes tasks considered especially dangerous for young workers, such as operating large tractors, working inside silos, handling certain chemicals, or working with breeding livestock. 29 CFR § 570.71. Children working for their parent(s) on a farm owned or operated by that parent are exempt from this restriction.

Furthermore, Nebraska state law requires minors under the age of 16 to get an employment certificate from the Department of Labor before beginning work. Neb. Rev. Stat. § 48-302. Even with this certificate, the restrictions on working hours and the types of work minors may perform still apply. Neb. Rev. Stat. § 48-302.02.

This certificate isn’t required in two circumstances. First, parents of the child worker who employs and directly supervises their own child do not have to obtain this certification. Secondly, the certificate requirement does not apply to youth working in corn detasseling operations. Neb. Rev. Stat. § 48-302.03.

A child under 16 can work as a detasseler in Nebraska without an employment certificate if the job takes place outside of school hours between June and August, the parent provides written consent, and the child lives within 75 miles of the farm. Furthermore, the employer must provide at least two supervisors who are 18 years of age for the crew. The child’s hours must also be limited to those outlined below.

Generally, 14 and 15-year-olds cannot work before 7 a.m. nor after 7 p.m., and they can work no more than:

- 3 hours on a school day
- 18 hours during a school week
- 8 hours on a non-school day
- 40 hours in a non-school week

This time frame is extended from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. from June 1 to Labor Day. 29 CFR § 570.35.

Children who are 12 or 13 years old can perform farm work outside of school hours with parental consent, or if their parent is employed at the same farm. Children under 12 may work only on farms owned by their parent(s) and must still work only outside of school hours.

Nebraska Child Labor Law (Non-Parent Employers)

Nebraska statutes (Neb. Rev. Stat. §§ 48-301–48-313) require that any minor under 16 who is not employed by a parent or guardian have an employment certificate on file with their employer (§§ 48-302, 48-303).

- The certificate must be approved by the principal of the school the child attends, or by a person authorized by the principal or superintendent.
- Employers must maintain the certificate and make it available for inspection.

State law also sets hour and time-of-day limits for minors under 16 employed by non-parent employers (§ 48-310):

- Maximum of 8 hours per day
- Maximum of 48 hours per week
- Work permitted only between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m.
- Work must not interfere with school attendance

Note: These restrictions apply only when the minor is employed by someone other than a parent/guardian.

Parental Employment Exemption

Minors employed by a parent or guardian who directly supervises them on a parent-owned farm:

- Do not require an employment certificate
- Are exempt from Nebraska state hour limits

Nebraska Detasseling Exception

Nebraska law provides a specific exception for corn detasseling (§ 48-302.03):

- Minors 12–15 years old may work during June, July, and August, outside school hours if:
 - Written parental consent is obtained
 - The minor lives within 75 miles of the detasseling site
 - Work does not exceed 9 hours per day or 48 hours per week
 - Work occurs between 6 a.m. and 8 p.m. for those under 14, or 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. for ages 14–15

Federal Agricultural Child Labor Law

Federal law (29 U.S.C. § 213(c); 29 C.F.R. Part 570, Subpart E) applies to agricultural employment:

- Youth of any age may work on a farm owned or operated by their parent or legal guardian
- Youth 14–15 years old may work in agriculture outside school hours
- Youth 12–13 years old may work outside school hours with written parental consent

- Minors under 16 may work only outside school hours; work must not interfere with school attendance

Note: Federal hazardous occupation restrictions apply to all minors under 16, including those performing detasseling work or working for a parent. Federal coverage may depend on farm size or interstate activity (29 C.F.R. §§ 570.71–570.72).

Minimum Wage Considerations

Nebraska minimum wage law generally exempts agricultural employment (§ 481203(2)). Federal exemptions may also apply depending on farm size and operations (29 U.S.C. § 213(a)(6)). Employers should verify whether minimum wage requirements apply to their operation.-1203(2)). Federal exemptions may also apply depending on farm size and operations (29 U.S.C. § 213(a)(6)). Employers should verify whether minimum wage requirements apply to their operation.

Enforcement

- Nebraska child labor laws are enforced by the Nebraska Department of Labor (§ 48-311)
- Federal agricultural child labor provisions are enforced by the U.S. Department of Labor

Employers should review both Nebraska statutes and federal regulations before employing minors. For detailed guidance, consult the Nebraska Department of Education’s Child Labor Laws for Workplace Experiences: <https://www.education.ne.gov/workplace-experiences/child-labor-laws/>

4.6 Insurance

Hiring employees can help a farm or ranch grow, but it also introduces new legal and financial responsibilities. One of the most important areas for Nebraska agricultural employers to understand is insurance and liability particularly workers’ compensation coverage and broader risk management practices.

This chapter outlines what Nebraska producers should know about workers’ compensation requirements, liability considerations, and employment laws that may apply to agricultural operations.

4.6.1 Workers’ compensation

Workers’ compensation insurance may provide medical coverage, partial lost wages and permanent disability benefits to employees who are injured at work. Coverage also protects employers from civil lawsuits that could otherwise result from on-the-job employee injuries.

Nebraska farm and ranch businesses are not obligated to purchase workers’ compensation for agricultural workers unless they employ 10 or more unrelated, full-time employees for 13 weeks during the calendar year (the weeks do not have to be consecutive). Neb. Rev. Stat § 48-106(2). Note that farms that have fewer than 10 workers for the majority of the year can still be subject to the workers’ compensation law if they have busy seasons throughout the year where their employees swell to 10 or more, as long as there is a total of 13 weeks with 10 or more employees.

If a farm or ranch fails to secure workers’ compensation as required, the penalties can be severe, including responsibility for all costs of medical treatment plus a fine for noncompliance.

Many business owners see workers' compensation as a regulatory obligation, which it often is. However, many farmers don't realize that the workers' compensation system was designed to protect the business owner from lawsuits. Some farmers choose to purchase workers' compensation even if it isn't a legal requirement because it helps manage legal risk.

Alternatively, a farm that isn't required to purchase workers' compensation and may not be able to opt into the state program, may choose instead to purchase a liability policy that covers worker injuries. Worker injury liability policies may not cover all worker injuries and may exclude some workers. Be sure to speak to an insurance agent in-depth about the policy's coverage.

4.6.2 Liability

Even if workers' compensation is not legally required, many Nebraska producers choose to carry a policy voluntarily. Producers often cite several benefits, including:

- Protection from unexpected medical costs after a workplace injury
- Reduced legal exposure in case of accidents
- Greater financial stability for employees and their families
- Stronger overall risk management for the operation

Agricultural work involves physical labor, livestock handling, machinery operation, and exposure to environmental hazards. A serious injury can create significant financial strain for both employer and employee. For these reasons, workers' compensation coverage is often viewed as a practical and proactive management tool.

Insurance agents who specialize in agricultural operations can help determine whether coverage is required, whether voluntary coverage makes sense, and what policy options and costs fit best.

Many Nebraska farms and ranches rely heavily on family members for labor. In some cases, family members may be treated differently under workers' compensation statutes. The treatment of family labor often depends on:

- The business structure (sole proprietorship, partnership, corporation)
- Whether wages are paid
- The family member's role within the operation

Because these factors can change over time, producers should periodically review how the law applies to their family employment arrangements.

Insurance is only one part of managing risk. Nebraska producers can reduce potential liability by promoting safety and controlling access on their operations. Helpful steps include:

- Posting "No Trespassing" or safety signage where appropriate
- Clearly marking hazards such as grain bins, feedlots, or equipment yards
- Monitoring visitors and contractors entering the property
- Maintaining safe equipment and facilities
- Providing employee training for machinery, livestock, and chemical handling

These practices not only reduce risk but also demonstrate reasonable care to protect workers and visitors.

Many farms and ranches also carry general liability or farm liability insurance. These policies help cover claims related to injury, property damage, or accidents connected to the operation. Coverage should reflect the specific nature of the business, whether that involves livestock, grain handling, custom work, trucking, agritourism, or direct marketing ventures. Review coverage periodically to ensure it aligns with current risks.

4.7 Other laws

All employers are prohibited from discriminating against employees or applicants. Federal nondiscrimination laws, enforced by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), require employers to provide equal employment opportunities and, in many cases, reasonable accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities. Employment decisions must not be based on a person's race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, sexual orientation and gender identity), national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, marital status or other protected characteristics.

Nebraska agricultural employers should ensure that all aspects of their employment practices recruitment, hiring, pay, benefits, training, promotion, discipline and termination are free from discrimination and harassment. The EEOC fact sheet "Federal Laws Prohibiting Job Discrimination" provides a concise overview of these rules.

Agricultural employers may also be subject to additional federal laws, including:

- Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act (MSPA) – Provides protections for certain migrant and seasonal agricultural workers related to wages, housing, transportation, disclosures and recordkeeping, and requires registration of farm labor contractors.
- Agricultural Worker Protection Standard (WPS) – Administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and designed to protect agricultural workers and pesticide handlers from pesticide exposure through training, notification, decontamination and emergency assistance requirements.
- Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) – Applies to covered employers that have employed at least 50 employees for at least 20 workweeks in the current or previous year. It provides eligible employees with job-protected, unpaid leave for certain family and medical reasons.

Because coverage thresholds and definitions can be complex, Nebraska producers should review current federal guidance and consider consulting an attorney or HR professional to confirm how these laws apply to their operation. The National Agricultural Law Center's labor overview is another helpful reference for agriculture-specific labor topics.

4.8 Employee manual

An employee manual (or handbook) gives Nebraska farm and ranch employers a written way to communicate policies, expectations and benefits. Putting these details in writing can reduce confusion, provide consistency and help protect the operation if questions or disputes arise later. Many operations also include a statement in the manual clarifying that, if there is any conflict between the manual and other communications, the manual is considered the official statement of policy.

You can make your manual as simple or detailed as you need, but aim for clear, practical language that employees will actually read and use. The manual should supplement not replace direct communication such as team meetings, one-on-one conversations, training and informal check-ins.

Common components of an employee manual include:

- Business history and background – A brief description of the farm or ranch, its history in Nebraska, and its values, mission and vision.
- Expectations – Clear rules and standards around topics such as work schedule and attendance, dress code or PPE, safety practices, cell phone use, social media, use of employer equipment and vehicles, conflicts of interest, harassment and discrimination, substance use, and emergency procedures. Include what may happen if an employee violates these policies.
- Compensation and benefits – Pay periods and paydays, overtime policies, bonuses or incentive programs (if any), and available benefits such as health insurance, retirement plans, housing, beef or commodity allowances, and paid or unpaid time off.
- Employment relationship – A statement that employment is at-will (unless you have a different, written agreement), meaning either the employer or employee may end the employment relationship at any time, consistent with applicable law.
- Acknowledgment – A page employees sign to confirm they received, read and understand the manual. Place signed acknowledgments in each employee's personnel file.

When drafting an employee manual, you can review examples from other farms and agribusinesses or use templates and generators created for agricultural employers, adapting them to Nebraska law and your operation. It can also be helpful to ask trusted employees to review a draft and suggest topics that may need more explanation or clarity. Have your attorney review the final version to ensure it aligns with current Nebraska and federal law.

4.9 Recordkeeping

Agricultural employers must comply with several federal and state recordkeeping requirements. At the federal level, the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) specifies wage and hour records that employers must keep for nonexempt employees, including:

- Full name and Social Security number
- Address
- Birth date (if under 19)
- Sex and occupation
- Time and day the workweek begins
- Hours worked each day and each workweek
- Basis on which wages are paid (hourly, piece-rate, salary)
- Regular hourly pay rate
- Total daily or weekly straight-time earnings
- Total overtime earnings for the workweek
- All additions to or deductions from wages
- Total wages paid each pay period

- Date of payment and the pay period covered

Other federal laws, such as FMLA, OSHA, EEOC requirements and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA), also set specific record retention standards (for example, OSHA injury and illness logs, FMLA leave records, and termination or benefit plan records).

At the state level, Nebraska requires employers to keep records — name, social security account number, residence (by state), nature of job and the place where the job will be performed, date of hire, pay, and allowance or reimbursement for traveling or other business expenses — for each employee for at least four years.

A practical best practice for Nebraska farms and ranches is to:

- Maintain a personnel file for each employee that includes the job application, job description, hiring notes, signed offer letter, tax and employment forms (such as W-4, I-9), benefits forms, performance evaluations, disciplinary notes and signed acknowledgments of the employee manual.
- Maintain separate, secure files for confidential medical or FMLA information.
- Keep required payroll and safety records for at least the minimum retention period specified by the relevant federal or state laws.

Electronic recordkeeping can reduce paper and improve organization, but employers who store records electronically should ensure that they have secure backups and appropriate privacy protections in place.

4.10 Resources List

The following types of resources can provide additional information to Nebraska agricultural employers on human resources, compliance and risk management. When possible, look for Nebraska specific guidance from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL), the Center for Agricultural Profitability, the Nebraska Department of Labor, the Nebraska Department of Revenue and the Nebraska Workers’ Compensation Court. Useful categories include:

- Compensation and benefits – Federal minimum wage and overtime rules, federal tax guidance for farm employers, and land-grant extension resources on employee compensation in agriculture.²⁷²⁸²⁹³⁰³¹³²
 - [Agricultural Employment and the Fair Labor Standards Act \(FLSA\)](https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fact-sheets/12-agricultural-employment-flsa)
[U.S. Department of Labor \(DOL\)](https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fact-sheets/12-agricultural-employment-flsa)
 - [Minimum Wage Laws in Agriculture \(State-by-State Compilation\) National Agricultural Law Center](https://nationalaglawcenter.org/state-compilations/agpay/minimumwage/)
 - [Overtime Laws in Agriculture \(State-by-State Compilation\)](https://nationalaglawcenter.org/state-compilations/agpay/overtime/)
[National Agricultural Law Center](https://nationalaglawcenter.org/state-compilations/agpay/overtime/)

²⁷ <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fact-sheets/12-agricultural-employment-flsa>

²⁸ <https://nationalaglawcenter.org/state-compilations/agpay/minimumwage/>

²⁹ <https://nationalaglawcenter.org/state-compilations/agpay/overtime/>

³⁰ <https://www.irs.gov/affordable-care-act/employers>

³¹ <https://www.agriculture.com/content/are-you-fighting-employees-over-paid-vacation>

³² <https://www.agriculture.com/content/are-you-fighting-employees-over-paid-vacation>

- [Affordable Care Act \(ACA\) Requirements for Employers Internal Revenue Service \(IRS\)](#)
- [Are You Fighting Employees Over Paid Vacation? Agriculture.com](#)
- Taxes – IRS Employer’s Tax Guide, Farmer’s Tax Guide, and IRS resources for businesses with employees; Nebraska Department of Revenue employer withholding guidance and forms.
 - [Farmer’s Tax Guide \(Publication 225\) Internal Revenue Service \(IRS\)](#)
 - [Employer’s Tax Guide \(Publication 15 / Circular E\) Internal Revenue Service \(IRS\)](#)
 - [Forms and Publications to Assist Farmers Internal Revenue Service \(IRS\)](#)
 - [Nebraska Income Tax Withholding Nebraska Department of Revenue](#)
 - [Farm Employee Cost Estimator Tool University of Vermont Extension](#)
 - [Farm Employee Cost Estimator Tool University of Vermont Extension](#)
 - [Estimated Costs of Crop Production in Iowa \(Ag Decision Maker\): Iowa State University Extension and Outreach](#)
- [Beyond Basic Compensation: Employee Benefits in Agriculture NCAT ATTRA Sustainable Agriculture Program](#) Youth labor – U.S. Department of Labor child labor rules for agricultural employment and Nebraska child labor information from the Nebraska Department of Labor.
 - [Employment of Minors \(Nebraska Child Labor Laws Overview Nebraska Department of Labor Child Labor Laws in Agriculture – Nebraska U.S. Department of Labor \(Wage and Hour Division\)\)](#)
 - [Child Labor Bulletin 102: Youth Employment in Agriculture \(FLSA\) U.S. Department of Labor](#)
 - [Youth in Agriculture Safety \(eTool\) Occupational Safety and Health Administration \(OSHA\)](#)
- Insurance and liability – Information on workers’ compensation from the Nebraska Workers’ Compensation Court, farm liability insurance guidance from extension publications and risk management resources from USDA and land-grant universities.³³³⁴
 - [Nebraska Workers’ Compensation Court \(Official Website\) Nebraska Workers’ Compensation Court](#)
 - [Workers’ Compensation \(Risk Management Program\) Nebraska Department of Administrative Services \(DAS\)](#)
 - [Health Care Insurance Options for Farm Business Operations \(FS-2024-0706\) University of Maryland Extension](#)

³³ <https://www.newcc.gov/>

³⁴ <https://das.nebraska.gov/risk/workers-compensation.html>

- [Labor and Management Considerations for Farm Employers \(G455\)](#)
[University of Missouri Extension](#)
- [Do You Need Workers' Compensation?](#)
[Cornell Small Farms Program](#)
- Employee manuals and HR tools – Agricultural workforce development materials, sample handbooks, and personnel policy generators from university and extension programs that can be adapted to Nebraska law³⁵³⁶.
 - [Employee Handbooks for Agricultural Employers Cornell Agricultural Workforce Development](#)
 - [Developing an Employee Handbook for Your Farm](#)
[Iowa State University Extension and Outreach \(Ag Decision Maker\)](#)
 - [Personnel Policy Generator Tool](#)
[University of Vermont Extension](#)
- Other labor resources – Federal labor law summaries for agricultural employment (FLSA, MSPA, H-2A), recordkeeping requirements, and checklists or self-audit tools for agricultural employers.³⁷³⁸³⁹
 - [Employee Handbooks for Agricultural Employers](#)
[Cornell Agricultural Workforce Development](#)
 - [Developing an Employee Handbook for Your Farm](#)
[Iowa State University Extension and Outreach \(Ag Decision Maker\)](#)
 - [Personnel Policy Generator Tool](#)
[University of Vermont Extension](#)
 - [Agricultural Employment and the Fair Labor Standards Act \(FLSA\)](#)
[U.S. Department of Labor \(Wage and Hour Division\)](#)
 - [Handbook for Agricultural Employers \(FLSA Guide\)](#)
[U.S. Department of Labor](#)
 - [Employment Laws Assistance for Workers and Small Businesses \(eLaws Advisors\)](#)
[U.S. Department of Labor](#)
 - [Agricultural Labor Law Overview](#)
[National Agricultural Law Center](#)
 - [FLSA Recordkeeping Requirements \(Fact Sheet #21\)](#)
[U.S. Department of Labor \(Wage and Hour Division\)](#)
 - [Recordkeeping Self-Audit for H-2A Employers](#)
[National Agricultural Law Center \(UM Agricultural Law\)](#)

Because statutes and regulations can change, Nebraska producers should always verify they are consulting the most current versions of laws, regulations and agency guidance, and consider working with legal or tax professionals when developing or updating their policies and systems.

³⁵ <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/wholefarm/html/c1-72.html>

³⁶³⁶ <https://agworkforce.cals.cornell.edu/human-resource-management/employee-handbooks/>

³⁷ <https://agworkforce.cals.cornell.edu/human-resource-management/employee-handbooks/>

³⁸ <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/wholefarm/html/c1-72.html>

³⁹ <https://www.uvm.edu/aglabor/dashboard/personnel-policy-generator>

Web addresses in Chapter 4

1. <https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/understanding-employment-taxes>
2. <https://www.irs.gov/forms-pubs/about-form-w-4>
3. <https://www.irs.gov/publications/p15>
4. <https://www.irs.gov/forms-pubs/about-publication-51>
5. <https://www.irs.gov/publications/p15>
6. <https://revenue.nebraska.gov/businesses/withholding>
7. https://revenue.nebraska.gov/sites/default/files/doc/tax-forms/f_20.pdf
8. <https://revenue.nebraska.gov/sites/default/files/doc/tax-forms/w4n.pdf>
9. <https://revenue.nebraska.gov/businesses/nebraska-income-tax-withholding>
10. https://revenue.nebraska.gov/sites/default/files/doc/tax-forms/f_941n.pdf
11. <https://dol.nebraska.gov>
12. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fact-sheets/12-agricultural-employment-flsa>
13. <https://nationalaglawcenter.org/state-compilations/agpay/minimumwage/>
14. <https://nationalaglawcenter.org/state-compilations/agpay/overtime/>
15. <https://www.irs.gov/affordable-care-act/employers>
16. <https://www.agriculture.com/content/are-you-fighting-employees-over-paid-vacation>
17. <https://www.irs.gov/publications/p225>
18. <https://www.irs.gov/forms-pubs/about-publication-15>
19. <https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/forms-and-publications-to-assist-farmers#:~:text=Form%20943%2C%20Employer's%20Annual%20Tax,Tax%20By%20Farmers%20and%20Fishermen>
20. <https://revenue.nebraska.gov/businesses/nebraska-income-tax-withholding>
21. <https://www.uvm.edu/aglabor/dashboard/employee-cost-estimator>
22. <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/wholefarm/html/c1-61.html>
23. <https://attra.ncat.org/publication/beyond-basic-compensation/>
24. <https://dol.nebraska.gov/LaborStandards/Compliance/EmploymentOfMinors>
25. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/state/child-labor/agriculture#Nebraska>
26. <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WHD/legacy/files/childlabor102.pdf>
27. <https://www.osha.gov/etools/youth-agriculture>
28. <https://www.newcc.gov/>
29. <https://das.nebraska.gov/risk/workers-compensation.html>
30. <https://extension.umd.edu/resource/health-care-insurance-options-farm-business-operations-fs-2024-0706/>
31. <https://extension.missouri.edu/publications/g455>
32. <https://smallfarms.cornell.edu/2016/04/do-you-need-workers-compensation/>
33. <https://agworkforce.cals.cornell.edu/human-resource-management/employee-handbooks/>
34. <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/wholefarm/html/c1-72.html>
35. <https://www.uvm.edu/aglabor/dashboard/personnel-policy-generator>
36. <https://agworkforce.cals.cornell.edu/human-resource-management/employee-handbooks/>
37. <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/wholefarm/html/c1-72.html>
38. <https://www.uvm.edu/aglabor/dashboard/personnel-policy-generator>
39. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fact-sheets/12-agricultural-employment-flsa>
40. <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WHD/legacy/files/AgGuideEnglish.pdf>
41. <https://webapps.dol.gov/elaws/index.html>
42. <https://nationalaglawcenter.org/overview/labor/>
43. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fact-sheets/21-flsa-recordkeeping>
44. <https://umaglaw.org/recordkeeping-self-audit-for-h-2a-employers/>

Chapter 5: Retention

Employee turnover is a reality in agriculture. Each time a worker leaves, it costs your operation both time and money. These costs are often categorized as:

- Direct costs: recruiting, hiring, and training replacements; covering gaps in staffing.
- Indirect costs: lost productivity, reduced morale, and lost institutional knowledge.

Investing in a strong human resources system, prioritizing communication, and offering feedback and growth opportunities can help retain employees longer.

5.1 Human Resources System

A well-structured human resources (HR) system is key to keeping good employees. Start by hiring the right people. While more qualified candidates may cost more upfront, their performance and reliability often justify the investment.

Other HR components include onboarding, training, mentoring, compensation, benefits, safety, and work-life balance. Supporting continuing education and providing opportunities to learn at conferences, seminars, or through UNL Extension and CAP programs can motivate employees while boosting skills.

Recognition also matters. A simple “thank you” or acknowledging accomplishments in front of the team can reinforce commitment. Small rewards or tokens of appreciation further show employees they are valued.

Retention strategies at a glance:

- Support work-life balance
- Offer training and continuing education
- Recognize employee contributions regularly
- Engage employees in problem-solving and decision-making

5.2 Communication

Clear, consistent communication shows employees they are valued and helps set expectations. When employees understand their roles and goals, they are more likely to focus on improving performance and staying with the operation.

Communication strategies:

- Schedule regular team meetings
- Maintain an easy-to-understand employee manual
- Outline expectations and goals
- Ask for employee feedback and act on it

5.3 Feedback

A strong feedback loop encourages continuous improvement and strengthens relationships. Employees should have opportunities to receive constructive feedback and share ideas with management.

5.3.1 Performance Reviews

Performance reviews are formal evaluations of an employee's work overtime. They help employees grow professionally and align their efforts with the farm's goals.

- Reviews can be quarterly, semi-annual, or annual
- Direct managers usually lead reviews, as they best understand day-to-day performance
- Include both objective metrics (hours worked, tasks completed, safety compliance) and subjective measures (attitude, flexibility, work ethic)
- Review job descriptions to assess whether employees are meeting expectations
- Discuss upcoming changes, goals, and opportunities for professional growth

Sample questions to guide reviews:

- What are your top work strengths and areas for improvement?
- What resources would help you perform better?
- How do you plan to continue developing professionally?
- How effectively is your team working together?

360-Degree Feedback: Collect input from coworkers, supervisors, direct reports, and even external partners for a well-rounded performance view.

5.3.2 Informal Reviews

Regular, on-the-spot feedback is just as important as formal reviews. Recognize good work immediately and provide coaching or improvement tips when needed.

5.3.3 Worker Satisfaction Surveys

Surveys give employees a voice and can identify opportunities for improvement. Questions might include:

- How well does the farm support work-life balance?
- Are resources sufficient for employees to succeed?
- Are managers listening and providing guidance?
- Do employees understand their role in the farm's success?

Use survey results to guide improvements and show employees their feedback leads to action.

5.4 Resources List

- [Center for Agricultural Profitability \(cap.unl.edu\)](http://cap.unl.edu) – farm labor and management resources
- [Ohio State University Extension – The Cost of High Employee Turnover](#)
- [Penn State Extension – Meeting Employee Needs](#)

- [ATTRA – National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service – Beyond Basic Compensation](#)
- [Michigan State University Extension – Skin in the Game](#)
- [Center for American Progress – There Are Significant Business Costs to Replacing Employees](#)
- [Progressive Dairy – Help Farm Workers Meet Goals With Performance Evaluations](#)
- [Farm Progress – How to Build an Effective Farm Employee Review System](#)
- [Qualtrics – Employee Satisfaction Surveys: Best Practices and Sample Questions](#)

Web addresses in Chapter 5

1. <https://cap.unl.edu/>
2. <https://dairy.osu.edu/resources/dibs>
3. <https://extension.psu.edu/meeting-employee-needs>
4. <https://attra.ncat.org/publication/beyond-basic-compensation/>
5. https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/skin_in_the_game
6. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/there-are-significant-business-costs-to-replacing-employees/>
7. <https://www.agproud.com/articles/21212-help-farm-workers-meet-goals-with-performance-evaluations>
8. <https://www.farmprogress.com/commentary/easy-guide-for-employee-reviews>
9. <https://www.qualtrics.com/articles/employee-experience/employee-satisfaction-survey/>

Chapter 6. Termination

6.1 Employment at Will

Nebraska is an “employment-at-will” state, which means that agricultural employees or employers may terminate an employment arrangement whenever they choose. Neither party is obligated to give notice or cause of termination.

However, there are some cases in which employees are protected from termination.

For example, discrimination is prohibited by law. If an employee believes their termination was based on their age, race, sex, or other protected characteristic, that employee should contact the Nebraska Equal Opportunity Commission.

Employers also cannot fire employees as retaliation for filing workers’ compensation claims, reporting employer wrongdoing to a state or federal agency, or exercising their rights in another similar manner.

Contractual promises that ensure job security can sometimes override at-will status.

If an employee is terminated, the Nebraska employer must pay the final paycheck by the next regular payday or within two weeks of the termination, whichever is sooner.

6.2 Final Wages

Nebraska law requires employers to pay employees the wages they have earned when employment ends. Under Nebraska Revised Statute, wages generally include compensation for labor or services, whether the pay is calculated by time, task, piece, commission, or other methods. For many farm and ranch operations, this may include hourly pay, piece-rate work, or agreed-upon salary arrangements.

Best practice for agricultural employers is to:

- Provide the employee’s final paycheck promptly after termination or resignation
- Ensure all hours worked, including recent or seasonal labor, are properly recorded and paid
- Follow any written policies your operation has regarding unused leave or other compensation

Because operations often rely on a mix of seasonal and year-round employees, maintaining accurate payroll records is especially important if a question about final wages arises later.

Agricultural employers should also be aware that state and federal wage laws can still apply depending on the size and structure of the operation and the type of work performed. The Nebraska agricultural workforce overview published by National Dairy FARM Program highlights that labor compliance including payroll and wage practices continues to be an important part of managing risk on modern livestock and dairy operations.

6.3 Reporting Responsibilities After Termination

When an employee leaves your operation, there may be more reporting requirements depending on the situation. For example, if an employee has wage withholding related to child support or similar orders, employers may need to notify the appropriate state agency after the employee’s employment ends.

As with many labor compliance issues, the safest approach for agricultural employers is to:

- Review any active withholding orders connected to the employee
- Provide timely updates to the issuing agency if needed
- Keep documentation showing when the employee's employment ended and when notification occurred

Taking these steps helps ensure your operation remains compliant and avoids potential penalties.

6.4 Insurance Benefits

If your operation offers health insurance or other benefits, termination may trigger important notices to the employee about continuing coverage. In some situations, federal law may allow employees and their families to continue health coverage for a limited time after employment ends.

Even when a farm or ranch is small and not required to offer continuing coverage, it is good practice to:

- Clearly explain when benefits end
- Provide written information about any continuation options that may apply
- Document that the information was shared with the employee

This communication can prevent confusion and maintain goodwill with former employees.

6.5 Exit Interviews

Exit interviews are not required, but they can be especially useful for farm and ranch managers. When an employee voluntarily leaves, taking time for a brief conversation can provide insight into how your operation is running and where improvements might help retain future employees.

For agricultural operations, an exit interview can help you understand:

- What worked well for the employee on your farm or ranch
- Challenges they experienced with workload, scheduling, or supervision
- Whether training and communication were clear
- Ideas that could improve employee retention or safety

Many employers find it helpful to have someone other than the direct supervisor conduct the interview, when possible. This can encourage more honest feedback. Questions might focus on:

- Positive and negative experiences working on the operation
- Reasons for leaving
- Suggestions for improving the workplace
- Whether the employee felt safe and supported on the job
- Whether compensation and expectations were clear

Exit interviews can also help capture practical information about unfinished tasks, livestock care routines, equipment use, or projects the employee was handling before they leave.

Practical takeaway for Nebraska producers:

Even though Nebraska is an employment-at-will state, thoughtful documentation, clear policies, and respectful communication go a long way toward reducing legal risk and keeping your operation running

smoothly. These practices are especially important as agricultural operations grow and rely more on hired labor.

6.6 Resources List

- [Termination, U.S. Department of Labor](#)
- [Labor Standards FAQ \(PDF\), Nebraska Department of Labor](#)
- [Human Resources Legal Fact Sheet: Nebraska](#)
- [Running Your Business: Employment at Will University of Nebraska](#)
- [Nebraska state statute 48-602](#)

Web addresses in Chapter 6

1. <https://www.dol.gov/general/topic/termination>
2. <https://dol.nebraska.gov/webdocs/getfile/1dd2714b-6c66-4a3c-b79c-cb2462ace6fd>
3. <https://nationaldairyfarm.com/producer-resources/worker-safety-human-resources/>
4. <https://cropwatch.unl.edu/2018/running-your-business-employment-will/>
5. <https://nebraskalegislature.gov/laws/statutes.php?statute=48-602>

Chapter 7. Appendix

Application for Employment at _____

Date: _____ Position applied for: _____

Personal Information

Applicant name: _____
(last, first, middle initial)

Current address: _____
(number, street, city, state, ZIP code)

Primary phone: _____ Email: _____

Are you legally authorized to work in the United States? Yes No

(Proof of identity and authorization to work in the U.S. will be required upon employment.)

Work Availability

Our business may occasionally require work on evenings, weekends or on short notice.

Are you able to work evenings, weekends or on short notice as needed for this position?

Yes No

If necessary, please explain:

Can you reliably get to and from work at our location for your scheduled shifts?

Yes No

How soon are you available to start work? _____

Education

List your education history starting with the most recent.

School name and location: _____

Years attended: _____ Did you graduate? Yes No

Degree, diploma or certificate (if any): _____

School name and location: _____

Years attended: _____ Did you graduate? Yes No

Degree, diploma or certificate (if any): _____

School name and location: _____

Years attended: _____ Did you graduate? Yes No

Degree, diploma or certificate (if any): _____

Employment History

List your last three employers, starting with your most recent. You may attach a résumé, but please complete this section as well.

Employer 1

Employer name: _____

Address: _____

Job title: _____ Start date: _____ End date: _____

Supervisor name and phone: _____

Brief description of duties: _____

Employer 2

Employer name: _____

Address: _____

Job title: _____ Start date: _____ End date: _____

Supervisor name and phone: _____

Brief description of duties: _____

Employer 3

Employer name: _____

Address: _____

Job title: _____ Start date: _____ End date: _____

Supervisor name and phone: _____

Brief description of duties: _____

May we contact your current employer? Yes No Not applicable

References

List three people (not relatives) who are familiar with your work performance.

Name: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Relationship to you: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Relationship to you: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Relationship to you: _____

Emergency Contact

Name: _____

Relationship to you: _____

Address: _____

Phone(s): _____

Applicant Certification and Authorization

I certify that the information provided in this application (and any résumé or other documents I submit) is true and complete to the best of my knowledge. I understand that any false, misleading or incomplete information may disqualify me from further consideration for employment, and, if I am hired, may result in termination of employment.

I understand that this application is not a contract, offer or promise of employment. If hired, I understand that my employment will be “at will,” which means that either I or _____ (employer) may terminate the employment relationship at any time, with or without cause and with or without notice, subject to applicable law. No representative of the company has authority to enter into any agreement contrary to the foregoing unless it is in a written agreement signed by an authorized representative of the company.

I authorize _____ (employer) to contact the references and former employers I have listed, as well as any other individuals or entities appropriate to verify the information I have provided, and to obtain information related to my work history, performance and qualifications for employment. I release _____ (employer) and all such persons providing information from any liability that may result from furnishing or using this information, to the extent permitted by law.

Signature of applicant: _____ Date: _____

Printed name of applicant: _____

Equal Employment Opportunity Notice (optional but recommended)

_____ (employer) is an equal opportunity employer. Employment decisions are made without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, marital status, disability, age, genetic information, or any other status protected by applicable federal, state or local law. Applicants who require a reasonable accommodation to complete the application or hiring process may contact us to discuss their needs.

Hiring checklist for agricultural employment

Name: _____

Position: _____

Date	Activity
_____	Received job application
_____	Reviewed job application
_____	Scheduled initial job interview
_____	Completed initial job interview
_____	Received initial interview follow-up from applicant
_____	Scheduled second-round job interview
_____	Completed second-round job interview
_____	Received second-round interview follow-up from applicant
_____	Received consent to conduct background check
_____	Passed background check
_____	Checked applicant references
_____	Scheduled drug test
_____	Passed drug test
_____	Presented offer via phone
_____	Sent offer letter
_____	Provided proof of work authorization or eligibility
_____	Received offer acceptance
_____	Sent necessary preemployment forms (e.g., health insurance enrollment, retirement plan enrollment)
_____	Set new hire start date
_____	Established probationary employment period
_____	Received new hire's Form W-4 and Form MO W-4
_____	Received returned pre-employment forms
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Consent Form for New Farm Employees to No Coverage under Nebraska Workers Compensation Act

Name of Employer: _____

Address: _____

LB-210 became operative on August 31, 2003 and this law requires all employers engaged in agriculture operations that are exempt from requirements of the Nebraska Workers' Compensation Act and who hire new employees that they notify all the people that they are NOT covered by workers compensation insurance if such coverage is not voluntarily provided by the employer. The Statute requires the notice to state the following:

IN THIS EMPLOYMENT YOU WILL NOT BE COVERED BY THE NEBRASKA WORKERS' COMPENSATION ACT AND YOU WILL NOT BE COMPENSATED UNDER THE ACT IF YOU ARE INJURED ON THE JOB OR SUFFER AN

OCCUPATIONAL DISEASE. YOU SHOULD PLAN ACCORDINGLY. FAILURE TO PROVIDE THE NOTICE REQUIRED BY THIS SUBSECTION SUBJECTS AN EMPLOYER TO LIABILITY UNDER AND INCLUSION IN THE ACT FOR ALL UNRELATED (TO THE EMPLOYER) EMPLOYEES ON THE BASIS OF FAILURE TO GIVE SUCH NOTICE.

I acknowledge that I have read the above notice and understand that my employment does not include workers' compensation insurance coverage

Employee Signature

Witness

Date



cap.unl.edu/labor



The University of Nebraska does not discriminate based on race, color, ethnicity, national origin, sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, marital status, and/or political affiliation in its programs, activities, or employment.