

WORKFORCE

Job opportunities in food, agriculture, renewable natural resources or the environment will outpace the number of individuals with the education and skills necessary for the positions in the next five years, according to a nationwide survey conducted by U.S. Department of Agriculture and Purdue University. In Kansas, in addition to having access to a sufficient number of laborers and skilled workers, agricultural employers also face challenges related to the need for training, leadership development and management programs. Employers know how important it is to offer quality of life, housing and community services necessary to recruit and retain good talent. Identifying solutions to these challenges will require a better understanding of the needs of both employers and employees.

INITIAL LIST OF CHALLENGES AND IDEAS FOR POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Talent Recruitment

Initial List of Challenges

- It can be difficult to attract mid-career talent to Kansas from larger cities or other locations around the country.
- Attracting employees to western Kansas is challenging and even more so when a spouse needs employment as well.
- The areas of state with the greatest need for additional employees have low unemployment and areas of the state with greater unemployment have been less engaged in growing their agricultural industries.
- Ag industry employment is relatively consistent; however, it can be difficult to compete for employees when other commodity prices are high such as oil. Employees will “jump” to the oil and gas industries for higher wages then come back to agriculture when the market for oil and gas drops.

Ideas for Potential Solutions

- Working with Kansas universities to develop partnerships to recruit university alumni living in other states back to Kansas for mid-career employment, with a focus on both native Kansans and students who chose Kansas schools as out-of-state students.
- Partnering with local and regional entities can help in recruiting local talent at an earlier age.
- Develop a statewide agriculture career advocacy program highlighting the benefits of working in all geographic regions and sectors of Kansas agriculture.

Training and Skill Development

Initial List of Challenges

- Finding employees with experience and technical skills related to current openings has been identified as a primary challenge by agricultural employers.
- A lack of structured or required internships or mentorships in all majors and postsecondary programs prevents students from gaining valuable on-the-job experience and also results in fewer relationships being developed between employers and potential future employees.
- There is a lack of opportunities for high school students to gain experience in and learn about career opportunities in agriculture or work directly in local industries.

Ideas for Potential Solutions

- Expand intern/mentor programs aimed at developing entry- and middle-level employees.
- Developing strong relationships between business and education (secondary and postsecondary programs) will help direct instruction and better prepare those entering the workforce directly or soon after high school.
- Increasing opportunities for high school students to participate in agricultural education curriculum and FFA will expand the pool of potential future employees with a knowledge of agriculture, especially in urban and suburban areas.

Federal Laws and Regulations

Initial List of Challenges

- The application process for temporary worker programs are time consuming and difficult to navigate without outside help. Guest worker programs do not work for all sectors of agriculture.
- Insurance/Occupational Safety and Health Administration regulations make it difficult to hire high school age workers.

Ideas for Potential Solutions

- Immigration reform to allow year-round agriculture work visas would benefit employers.
- Simplify the application process for guest workers so individuals can complete paperwork on their own and not have to hire companies to do it.
- Investigate how to streamline driver's licensing process for international workers.

Affordable Housing

Initial List of Challenges

- A lack of affordable housing for skilled workers in agriculture is a challenge for employers trying to hire employees.

Ideas for Potential Solutions

- Explore opportunities for public-private partnerships to develop affordable housing infrastructure solutions that meet the needs of agricultural employers.

Quality of Life

Initial List of Challenges

- Community development/amenities are priorities for potential hires. Schools, entertainment and health care need to be addressed in rural areas to attract middle and upper management.

Ideas for Potential Solutions

- Coordinate with industry employers to develop programs to highlight the quality of life benefits in Kansas that can be used with mid-career candidates.
- Work with local economic development professionals to identify potential funding sources for community improvements such as schools, housing and community parks.

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