Employee Onboarding: The First Step to Develop and Retain the Best People

Richard Stup, Ph.D.
Agricultural Workforce Specialist
Cornell University
rstup@cornell.edu
agworkforce.cals.cornell.edu

Key Points

• Onboarding can increase employee safety, performance and retention.
• Focus on the new employee as a person is critical.
• Understand the Onboarding Project and tools.

What is Onboarding?

• It's a relatively new business term.
• It is more than orientation, which typically covers Day 1 and paperwork.
• It is the overall business process to bring new employees into the organization, complete necessary paperwork, equip them with safety and performance knowledge and skills, and make them feel connected to a worthwhile team.
• Safe, Productive, and Engaged... from Day 1!
Why is Onboarding Important?

Because it can:
- Reduce turnover
- Increase employee safety
- Increase productivity

10 Year U.S. Unemployment Rate

State unemployment as of October 2018: NY is 4.1%, PA is 4.1%, U.S. is 3.7%

Less Immigration to the U.S.? A Smaller Labor Pool?

Fewer Young Mexicans Looking for Work
The Challenge

- Labor is increasingly scarce, but farmers need excellent employees in order to operate successful businesses.
- Turnover, injuries, poor performance, and noncompliance with regulations threaten employees and farms.
- How can we make the best of every employment relationship?

Onboarding Research

- High-level, planned onboarding can increase employees' perceived organizational support, organization commitment, and job satisfaction. (Meyer & Bartels, 2017)
- Onboarding focused on the newcomer's identity, strengths, and application of these to the job delivered positive outcomes such as: stronger employee relationships, less turnover, and better performance. (Cable, Gino & Straats, 2013)
Levels of Onboarding

1. **Compliance**: basic compliance with regulations and policies.
2. **Clarification**: training on safety, work procedures, and expectations.
3. **Culture**: your organization's values, philosophy, traditions, and norms.
4. **Connection**: forging relationships at work and finding one's place to engage and thrive.

The Onboarding Project

- Identified as a priority area by New York's Ag Workforce Development Council.
- Broad industry team engaged to develop a project that will assist farms.

Our Team

- Richard Stup, Cornell University, Team Leader
- Libby Eiholzer, Cornell Cooperative Extension
- Eileen Franko, New York State Department of Labor
- Bill Banker, Dairy Farmer
- Jessica Johnson, NY Vegetable Grower's Association
- Tonya Van Slyke, NEDPA
- Julie Sorensen, NYCAMH
- John Sorbello, NY Farm Bureau
- Lisa Ford, Cayuga Milk
- Jessica Ziehm, Dairy Farmer and New York Animal Ag Coalition

Objectives

1. Establish a farm culture that is safe, productive and engaging.
2. Set clear, upfront job expectations that employees can fully understand.
3. Provide immediate safety training to avoid injuries.
4. Promote compliance with all employment regulations.
5. Communicate important farm policies and procedures, especially those that may differ from previous employers.
6. Overcome language barriers so that everyone can understand each other.
7. Increase employee commitment and reduce turnover.
8. Provide accessible and realistic support for farm onboarding, even when labor and time are in short supply.
Project Components

- Onboarding template for farms to easily adapt and use.
  - Overall organization and regulatory compliance.
- NYCAMH safety resources.
- Resources and learning experiences on how to train more effectively.
- Resources about employee records and training documentation.
- Dedicated web presence at Cornell Agricultural Workforce Development (agworkforce.cals.cornell.edu)

Planned Onboarding Phases

Day 1
- Required documentation
- Basic safety training
- Workplace and housing orientation
- Basic work procedure training
- Do not overwhelm the new person

Week 1
- Focus on work procedures and safety
- Review additional workplace policies
- Evaluate employee learning so far
- Critical time for learning and engagement

Month 1
- Finish review of policies such as sexual harassment prevention
- Complete primary procedure training
- Evaluate learning and performance

Broad Training Areas in Each Phase

About the Farm
- About the farm
- About your job
- Legal matters

Safety and Health
- Your benefits
- Your work procedures

The Onboarding Template: A Checklist

About the Farm
1. Mission: Share the mission or vision that guides your farm business. Share important values that your new employee should know and appreciate.
2. Organization Chart:
   a) Who is your new employee's direct supervisor?
   b) What other positions should they know about?
   c) Who should they go to for help or questions?
3. Facility Overview: Give your new employee an orienting tour about the farm.
   a) Provide a map with the location and name of buildings.
   b) Identify location of important safety resources:
      i. Fire extinguishers
      ii. Safety data sheets (SDS)
      iii. Eye wash stations
      iv. Emergency contact numbers
      v. Location of equipment operation manuals
      vi. Show location of personal protective equipment

Items to Complete by the End of Day 1
The Onboarding Template: Compliance Tool

About Your Job
1. Job Description. Share a clear description of your employee's new job.
   a) What are their most important duties or tasks?
   b) How will they learn their duties or tasks?
   c) How will their performance be measured and supervised?
2. Work Agreement. Go over the "Pay Notice and Work Agreement." New York law requires that all the information in Form LS 309 be filled out and shared, in writing, with the employee in a language they can understand. Here is the Form in Spanish and Haitian-Creole. Form LS 309 is available on the NYSDOL website in multiple languages, see the NYS Department of Labor site for more details under "Wage Theft Prevention Act" (https://labor.ny.gov/immigrants/agriculture-labor-program/services-for-agriculture-employers.shtm).
3. Time Recording.
   a) How should your employee track the hours that he/she works?
   b) What should he/she do if they believe an error was made in time recording or payroll?

The Onboarding Template: Customize for Your Farm

Safety and Health
1. Safety Culture. Share your farm's safety expectations. (Add your reasons below.)
   a) It is important for your new employee to work safely both to protect himself/herself and to protect others.
   b) c)
2. Top 5 Safety. What are the top 5 safety concerns for your new employee's job at your farm? Include any entrapment risks and hazardous materials.
   Safety Risk | How to avoid it...
   Example: PTO drive lines | Never work around unshielded PTO's. Don’t step over a PTO. Don’t wear loose fitting clothing around equipment. Let manager know about any unshielded or damaged PTO shields.
   1. 
   2. 
   3. 
   4. 
   5. 

Who Should Lead Onboarding?
- Ideally the direct supervisor leads onboarding.
- One person should be responsible for seeing that onboarding is carried out consistently.
- Trainers should be qualified.
- An owner should be there on Day 1.

Compliance and Documentation
- Employment regulations
- Ethical management and worker well-being assurance programs
**Simple Training & Evaluation Plans**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training Plan Name:</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Goals (What should the learner know or do after the training is successful?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What?** List the important knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSA's) here.

**Why?** Define why each KSA is important so you can explain it to the learner.

**How to teach and learn it?** List any activities you will line or learning aids such as diagrams or videos.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Action/Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Tell: Describe the procedure, and why each step is important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Show: Demonstrate the procedure and emphasize key points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Do: Allow learner to try, and answer any questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Review: Are all steps in the procedure done correctly?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Praise for the steps done correctly.

Praise for a job well done!
Performance Feedback

• **S**pecific, with details
• **C**redible sources of information
• **O**n-time and frequent
• **R**elevant to performance
• **E**nds looking ahead

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Evaluation at 2 Levels: The New Employee and Your Onboarding Program

**Day 1 Onboarding Evaluation Example Questions:**
• Who is your supervisor?
• What are three important duties of your new job?
• How should you record your work hours?
• What are three important safety hazards on this farm?
• On what day will you be paid?

**Month 1 Evaluation of Your Onboarding Program:**
• Did the new employee gain the knowledge and skills needed?
• At what level is the new employee performing after one month?
  • Below, at, or above standard
• How can onboarding be improved for the next person?

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Why Does Onboarding Work?

1. Gets the farm into compliance with a checklist approach and assigned responsibility for completing.
2. Helps ensure that new employees get all the safety and production training they need.
3. Puts the focus on the new employee where it belongs, helping them to engage.

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Wrap Up

• **Safe, Productive, and Engaged...from Day 1!**
• Organize before your new employee starts.
• Focus on the new person:
  • What are their strengths?
  • How can they contribute quickly?
  • What do they need to be successful?
References
