

Managing employee conflict on the farm



UW Extension Corner
Jim Versweyveld
Guest columnist

While farm managers across Wisconsin have a lot on their plates this time of year, probably the last thing they care to deal with is two employees who are not getting along. As much as leaders may want to avoid the issue, hoping it will go away, it could actually escalate and get worse if it isn't dealt with quickly.

Leadership is often about doing things that many would rather avoid. It's best to address the conflict directly, before things get out of hand.

Regardless of the size of your farm workforce, it's very likely that employee disputes will occur from time to time. Disagreements can arise on the farm where the pace is often fast and expectations are high. Personality, communication style, work ethic and even cultural differences between farm workers can lead to conflict, leaving you as the farm



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manager to sort the issues out.

Competing agendas often create conflict. Two employees may have varying views of what the team should be focusing their efforts on. It may require your leadership to set the priorities, when two employees disagree on which tasks to tackle first. Summertime's long hours and hot weather can also add challenges, as patience and tempers wear thin.

Even other employees not directly involved in the feud, may be impacted. Just being around unchecked conflict can be stressful and distracting. Groups of like-minded workers can form quickly on either side of the issue, impacting productivity, morale and even safety.

Here are some tips for you to address the conflict and get your team focused on the work at hand:

- Avoid jumping to conclusions based on one side of the story. Often the truth



Take the time to understand both sides of the issue. UW-MADISON, CALS

lies somewhere in the middle, so it is important to take the time to understand both sides. It may be helpful to talk with the feuding individuals separately so that you can listen to each perspective and evaluate what is creating the conflict.

- Don't react in anger. As frustrating or seemingly petty as the issue may be, take the time you need to manage your own emotions. Be a role model for treating others with respect, so your employees see how you expect them to behave. Raising your voice or using words that you may end up regretting later won't help. Your reaction to the situation could actually add to the existing conflict unless you react with a cool head and with reasonable and constructive guidance.
- Help both parties stick to the current issue, versus dredging up issues they may have had in the past. Focus on the real or perceived impact to the farm

business and avoid personal attacks. Set ground rules on how your employees will speak to each other. Name calling or other aggressive acts can't be tolerated, regardless of the issue.

- Avoid "taking sides". The truth is, you may actually agree with one employee and not the other, but it's important for you to appear impartial and unbiased. Your employees can perceive your stance with one side or the other as favoritism, which can hurt your relationship with the entire team.
- Establish your expectation that the team will get along and work things out between themselves. Promote open communication where employees are encouraged to resolve conflict on their own. Don't create an environment where they run to you every time a minor disagreement comes up.

Lastly, remember that not all employee conflict is a bad thing, as long as it doesn't escalate too far. Sometimes differing opinions can be a way to challenge the status-quo and think of creative ways of doing things differently.

For additional information on managing conflict or other farm human resources topics, see the UW Extension web resources at <https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu> Becoming the Employer of Choice.

Versweyveld is the Agriculture Extension Educator for the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Division of Extension in Walworth County.

Take action to prevent tick and mosquito bites

Wisconsin Department of Health Services

With the unofficial start of summer behind us, many Wisconsin residents are looking ahead to warmer weather and all the resources our state has to offer. The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) has launched a statewide campaign to help everyone Fight the Bite and avoid tick and mosquito bites this season.

Many people find ticks and mosquitoes to be annoying when they're enjoying outdoor activities; but even worse, bites from either can make you sick. Lyme disease, spread by ticks, and West Nile virus, spread by mosquitoes, are the most common diseases spread by these pests in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin is in the top 20% of all U.S. states reporting high numbers of illnesses spread by ticks. Thousands of Wisconsinites get Lyme disease each year and hundreds more get other illnesses spread by ticks, like anaplasmosis and Powassan virus. Last year, 3,105

cases of Lyme disease were reported in Wisconsin.

There were 33 human cases of West Nile virus reported in our state in 2018, many of whom were hospitalized for severe illness. Certain dead birds can be a sign of West Nile virus activity in an area. DHS urges anyone who finds a sick or dead bird to call the dead bird reporting hotline at 800-433-1610.

Wisconsin residents can protect themselves from illnesses spread by ticks and mosquitoes, yet still enjoy the outdoors. You can take these simple steps can take to stay safe and avoid getting sick:

- Use an EPA-registered repellent, such as DEET, and apply according to label instructions.
- Use permethrin-treated clothing and gear.
- Wear light colored long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Check for and safely remove ticks from yourself, family, and pets.
- Take steps to control mosquitoes outside your home.



Wisconsin residents can protect themselves from illnesses spread by ticks and mosquitoes, yet still enjoy the outdoors. REVIEWED.COM



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JD 920 flex head, F+A.....	\$4,995	\$3,500
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Bush Hog 2715 15' batwing mower, 540 PTO.....	\$9,995
Woods 3180 15' batwing mower, 540 PTO - NICE!.....	\$7,500
Woods 3180 15' batwing mower, 1000 PTO - CLEAN!.....	\$7,850
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Rhino 172 6' rotary cutter - JUST LIKE NEW!.....	\$1,995
Bush Hog 72" finishing mower - LIKE NEW!.....	\$1,895



New Hiniker 1700 6-row stalk shredder.....	SPECIAL
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2) J&M 350-20 Gboxes w/J&M 13T wgn - Starting At.....	\$2,995
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Killbros 500 bu Gbox, 15T wgn, brakes.....	\$6,850
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Killbros 385 Gbox w/Killbros 1072 wagon.....	\$2,995
Killbros 375 Gbox w/Killbros 12T wagon.....	\$2,795
Killbros 350 Gbox w/Killbros 12T wagon.....	\$1,495
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Heider 6x12' barge box w/Midwest 7T hoist, 8T wgn.....	\$1,850
Heider 7x14' barge box w/hoist, 10T wgn.....	\$1,850



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EZT 672 30' head cart - HARD TO FIND!.....	\$1,995

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