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## How to write farm job descriptions

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*By Jim Versweyveld*

For farm owners and managers, labor management and leadership of the team are becoming increasingly important aspects of day-to-day responsibilities. Job descriptions are a tool that can add clarity to farm tasks and procedures, helping to avoid confusion and potential disagreements about the work at hand. Important for both nonfamily employees and family members working on the farm, job descriptions can improve working relationships and keep things running smoothly.

Job descriptions can help farms recruit, select, hire and manage successful farm employees. Well-written job descriptions provide a clear, concise way to communicate expectations, skills and requirements to prospective team members. They are a great way to make sure prospective employees fully understand what the job entails. Once a new hire is onboard, the job description can also help with employee training by identifying skill gaps and areas you need to review or focus on.

During interviews, a detailed job description may result in some candidates self-selecting out of the process. While it can be disappointing to have an interview end abruptly, it's better to know sooner rather than later if a potential employee can't or won't do an important aspect of the job. For example, if climbing a silo is a job requirement, it's best to learn about a candidate's fear of heights before an offer of employment is extended.

The job description is also a great tool to provide performance feedback to employees. Having a concise listing of job expectations can make it easier to discuss an employee's strengths as well as areas where he or she needs to improve.

To develop descriptions for the positions on your farm, follow this step-by-step guide to writing a job description. Each step corresponds to a part of the sample job description that follows.

**Step 1: Select a job title.** Use a descriptive title that best captures the responsibilities of the position but doesn't limit the scope. For example, "calf feeder" or "milker" may be too narrow if other general farm duties are routinely expected. When you select a title, don't use potentially discriminatory terms such as "hired man."

**Step 2: Provide a job summary.** Give a concise description of the primary duties. This short description (one paragraph) builds on the job title and is used for recruiting purposes. Mention the work culture that you try to emulate on your farm and why an individual would want to work for you.

**Step 3: Outline core duties.** Start with the most important duties, followed by those that may be performed less frequently. Bullet points are a great way to make these responsibilities stand out. Start bulleted sentences with active words such "operate," "maintain" and "perform" versus weaker words such as "assist" or "observe."

Make sure to describe all primary day-to-day activities in this section. Indicating whom the role reports to can help candidates understand how the role fits into the overall operation. For example, "take direction from the farm manager" will let the

potential employee know how the day-to-day reporting structure works. Use current employees to develop this section of the job description. They can give valuable input on the tasks and responsibilities that should be included.

**Step 4: List necessary skills and experience.** This section should include knowledge, experience, education and training necessary to perform the job. Must-have skills should include the word “required.” While it might be tempted to list every qualification you envision in an ideal candidate, too many responsibilities may discourage people from applying. If a skill would be nice to have but would not exclude potential candidates if they don’t have it, use the word “preferred.” For example, “truck driving experience required, CDL preferred.”

This section should include both hard skills and soft skills. Hard skills are technical requirements that are necessary to perform the job, such as “operate skid steer.” Soft skills are behavioral or personality traits that could help an individual be successful in the role. Examples of soft skills are “handle cattle calmly” or “work well with a team.” Physical requirements should also be included. For example: “ability to lift 50 pounds routinely” or “position requires standing for long periods of time.”

### **Sample Job Description**

#### **CROP PRODUCTION TEAM MEMBER**

**Farmer Family Farms** is a large, row-crop operation located in Anytown, WI. We grow corn, soybeans, and wheat in northwest Any County. We run a progressive agricultural operation that uses some of the newest precision ag technologies and practices available. We are family owned and value our employees like part of our extended family.

#### **Job Duties include, but are not limited to:**

- Manage precision agriculture equipment and ensuring accurate collection of data in field
- Perform light maintenance on equipment and working around the shop
- Operate farm equipment including tillage, nutrient application, sprayers, tender trucks, and harvesting including use of on-board computing systems
- Operate tractor-trailers related to logistics of grain and agricultural inputs
- Utilize technology in farming practices on every trip across our farm
- Perform light maintenance of equipment including oil changes, changing wear points, light welding, and working on implements
- Maintain clean working area in shop, on grounds, and in tractors
- Follow farm safety guidelines and training

#### **Skills and Experience:**

- 3-5 years of production agricultural experience required
- Willing to work long hours during planting and harvesting. During planting and harvesting season, it is not uncommon to work long hours; outside of that we typically work 40 -45 hours a week with occasional weekends.
- Demonstrate a general knowledge of agronomic management practices as well as willingness to learn and ability to use the technology associated with modern equipment and record keeping.
- Knowledge of mechanical operation of agricultural equipment including routine maintenance and repair.
- Ability to work as a team and assist others depending on the task at hand
- Effective communication with colleagues and with management including the ability to develop a productive and cooperative relationship with others.
- Valid driver’s license required, CDL preferred
- Ability to lift 50 pounds routinely. Heavier lifts less frequently with assistance available
- Driven personality, desire to succeed, and a team player with a positive attitude

Use this simple, step-by-step process to develop job descriptions for all positions on your farm. Your completed job descriptions can also be the basis for your job postings when you have a vacancy. To modify a job description into a job posting, add information about compensation, benefits, housing and how to apply.

For more information about developing job descriptions or any other aspect of your farm employee recruiting efforts, see [Extension’s Human Resource Management in Agriculture resources](#).

*Versweyveld is the Extension agriculture educator in Walworth County, Wis. This column is provided by the University of Wisconsin-Extension Dairy Team.*