



# Cattle Producer's Handbook

Miscellaneous Section

1070

## Understanding the Basics of Managing Ranch Labor

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Hired and family labor costs on western ranches can be as high as \$80 per cow per year, depending on ranch size and often accounts for around 30 percent of the cow costs in any given year. In most ranching operations labor costs are exceeded only by annual feed costs.

Labor on ranches varies widely across and within regions depending on many factors: range, herd size, overall management, winter feeding, other enterprises within the ranch, family size, plus numerous others. However, most ranches at some point will have employees in addition to the base ranch owner or manager.

Labor efficiency varies with ranch size and herd production efficiency. Increased production per herd boosts efficiency because the cost of labor is spread over more pounds of beef sold.

Facilities will influence ranch labor requirements because updated equipment, facility designs, and total ranch layout can reduce labor input. Even with the best operation and the most up-to-date equipment, virtually every ranch operator must manage some labor. Good employees make a difference. In this publication, we'll discuss how to attract good employees to your ranch, keep them, and motivate them to help you make money.

### Designing the Workplace for the Job

Working conditions affect both worker efficiency and satisfaction. Design the job and surroundings with the worker in mind. Provide good buildings, equipment, and tools when possible. Older facilities may require remodeling. Remember that as a ranch owner/manager you may be content to work in situations unsatisfactory for employees.

Eliminate work hazards and dangerous work locations—it's your responsibility to do so. You'll increase job satisfaction and prevent the accidents that lead to

down time and higher premiums for worker compensation insurance. Reduce repetitive, "back-breaking" tasks. Make the job as easy as practical.

Let employees know your goals. Give them goals or tasks to work toward that will assist in achieving long-term goals. Most people enjoy working toward challenging, achievable goals. Goals can come from integrated resource management (IRM) records (see 104). For example, if your calving season is 120 days, involve employees in working toward a 90-day season.

When possible, schedule workloads appropriate to individual workers. Many employees won't be satisfied with too little time for personal needs, while others prefer longer hours for more money. Beware of too long of work schedules that can lead to injuries or worker "burn out." Many workers also appreciate a change in jobs (e.g., repairing equipment as opposed to fixing fence, even temporarily).

### Finding Employees

Once you have decided on the job to be done and you have provided the best working conditions possible, it's time to find that employee with the right abilities and temperament for your job.

Many ranch managers advertise for employees in local newspapers or regional publications. It may be an advantage to look further. You can "advertise" in the "grapevine" by telling field representatives, suppliers, sales people, and extension advisors about your job opening.

Consider informing people in the community or members of church organizations, also your current employees or family members. They may have friends or relatives in the job market. Consider teenagers. Some after-school or weekend work may help out. Let local