

## Retail is Detail

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## Have staff will thrive

### Connecting with an affordable labour pool.

Are good, affordable workers just out of reach? Could you double, triple or quadruple your business output if only you could access additional labour? Is market demand growing faster than your business resources? Do you spend more time on production and less on marketing and business management because you can't find staff to help? Labour is the biggest challenge to growth of the farm direct industry. On farm marketers across the province are implementing creative solutions to meet their labour needs.

### Get Ready...case out the neighbourhood.

Hidden gems are hard to hire. "The best way to find good employees is to say you need them," says Susan Meyer of The Berry Basket in Clairmont. "Talk to everyone - even if you don't know them. Tell your business story and include the basic details of the job: type of work, duration, hours/day, and wage. Most people know someone who would fit your operation."

Make everyone your advocate. Use your networks to identify hidden leads. Make it personal. Ask each contact to send referrals. Contact:

- 4-H or church group leaders
- Local high schools, colleges and universities. Teachers, teacher/librarians, apprentice instructors and guidance counselors can provide great referrals. Target the right age group and skill set. Work with your high school or college to set up a work experience credit program.
- Past employees. Call them. Send a note with T-4 slips reminding them to call you in March and refer a friend. Be clear to them that you're looking for friends who are good workers, too.
- Hire A Student/ employment agencies. Specify your requirements. Do employees need their own transportation to your site?
- Farmers' market managers. Past vendors may make great employees.
- Community futures and youth entrepreneurship program offices. They're grads have the drive, the skills and the knowledge.
- Volunteer agencies and community groups. People involved in lots of volunteer activities usually make good employees
- Commodity and business associations, and ag societies. Go to the meetings and talk up your business.

Make connections with the older community. Check out the curling rink, hockey arena, and the Co-op or wherever retired farmers gather for coffee. Put notices in the post office or community hall bulletin boards. Talk to the hall caterers. They know everyone in the community. Run a classified ad in the local newspaper.

### Get Set....you're not alone.

Check out available programs that can help you cover some of the cost of hiring employees. Every year Jerry Kitt of First Nature Farms pays a nominal fee to be listed in the **World Wide Opportunities On Organic Farms** (WWOOF) catalogue. From that he gets up to 15 great (and the odd not so great) volunteers working on his organic farm southwest of Beaverlodge every year.

"They come all times of the year. Some help out for a couple of days while others stay 6 to 8 months. We treat our WWOOFers as part of the family," Jerry explains. "We provide accommodation in a separate

ranch building and they join the family for lunch and supper.”

Anita McDonald of Kuhlmann’s Market Garden and Greenhouses in Edmonton and Blaine Staples of the Jungle near Innisfail use the federal **Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program** (SAWP) to fill their seasonal labour needs. Sponsored by Human Resource Development Canada, this program helps Alberta’s agricultural employers sponsor Mexican employees.

Kuhlmann’s have 14 men working on their farm under the program. They pay each man a wage and provide groceries, housing, laundry facilities and transportation.

“The program is great,” states Anita. Its flexible timing meets our business needs. The Mexicans are hard workers. They return to our farm because we can give them lots of hours.”

Blaine agrees, “The guys are physically fit. They’re willing to work hard for long hours. I had one man who worked for us 12 hours a day, 6 days a week ask if he could find another job in town in his off hours!”

“You can apply to the program any time of the year,” Blaine adds. “But it’s best to apply in early January if you want to get specific employees back. They have to request your farm and you have to request them on the application.” This is the second year The Jungle has used SAWP employees.

“We have to pay the men’s airfares upfront so the initial investment is significant,” continues Anita. But over the season we can deduct the value of a one way fare off their pay.”

Several provincial programs including the **Veterinary Work Experience**, **Summer Farm Employment** and **Agricultural Processing Industry Employment** programs provide wage assistance for hiring summer youth employees. Availability of the vet and ag processing programs is announced in March while the Summer Farm program announcement comes in May of each year pending funding. Call Julie Spawinski at (780) 427-4187 to receive notice of program renewal and application information. For toll free calling, dial 310-0000 first.

The **Alberta Food Processing Association** offers a variety of employment services for the food processing industry including listing available positions, matching job seekers and employers, and funding employee skill development. They define a food processor as any company that substantially changes an agricultural raw material into a value added product through physical change. The product must enter into the normal distribution channels rather than exclusively to retail sales in the processing establishment.

## Go!

Start now! Sleuth out an untapped labour pool, begin making connections and train your staff thoroughly when you hire them..

## Web Links

- WWOOF Canada: <http://www.woof.ca/canada/homecanada.html>
- SAWP <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/epb/lmd/fw/seasagri.shtml>
- Summer Farm Employment Program, Agricultural Processing Industry Employment Program and Veterinary work Experience Program details will be posted on [www.agric.gov.ab.ca](http://www.agric.gov.ab.ca).
- Alberta Food Processors Association labour support: <http://www.afpa.com/hr/>

## Is your Net-Working?

### Market Manager and Food Vendors Wanted for Farmers’ Markets

The **Downtown Farmers’ Market Grande Prairie** is looking for **year round food vendors**. Processors and producers are welcome. Call Tyla Klassen at (780) 814-8224 or email [gpfarmersmarket@telus.net](mailto:gpfarmersmarket@telus.net).

**Redwater Farmers’ Market** requires **seasonal vendors** from June 15 through September 7 for their Thursday evening market. Call Carrie Fischer at (780) 942-3023 [fischerc@telus.net](mailto:fischerc@telus.net) for information.

**Lakedell Farmers’ Market** needs an energetic, enthusiastic, creative and organized **market manager**. Fax your cover letter and resume to the Lakedell Agricultural Society at (780) 586-2924 or email [lakedell@ralcomm.net](mailto:lakedell@ralcomm.net).

## Explore Direct presents...

**Agri-Entrepreneur Scholarship Program Available NOW**

Until March 30, 2006 the Agri-Entrepreneur Scholarship supports leadership development and mentorship training by partially sponsoring farm direct marketing agri-preneurs to attend educational national and international conferences, tours or workshops. Appropriate learning events will offer new business and marketing ideas as well as the opportunity to network with other farm direct marketers, ag tourism operators and farmers' market managers. One example is the Marketing Caravan 2006 (<http://farmcentre.com/english/conference/caravan/agenda.php>). Contact Marian Williams at (780) 679-5168 or email [marian.williams@gov.ab.ca](mailto:marian.williams@gov.ab.ca).

**Options and Opportunities**

Bringing together local entrepreneurs and industry experts to offer innovative agricultural strategies and share successes, challenges and ideas. February 9, 2006 Camrose. For information call (800) 296-8112 or view the website <http://www.cre.ab.ca/>.

**Coaching Circle**

This new approach to develop your on-farm market offers individualized coaching with leading industry players in an intimate learning atmosphere. Airdrie, Alberta. March 22, 2006. For information call Lisa today at (780) 679-5169. Toll free dial 310-0000 first.