

TRAINING HELPS FARM MARKET EMPLOYEES SUCCEED

by Bernard L. Erven

No matter how carefully a farm market operator recruits and selects employees, they will not come to their new jobs with all the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities. Training is essential if employees are to reach their potential. Training should help them feel like they are improving and creating better opportunities for themselves.

Training is anything an employer does to help employees learn to do their work the way the employer wants them to do it. Training is an investment in people, benefiting both the employer and employee. In an ideal employer-employee situation, the investment in teaching allows an employee to do the job better. Doing the job better benefits both the employee and the farm market.

Trainers (teachers) are challenged to understand what the employees (learners) know from previous training and experience. Trainers need to see the job through the eyes of the employees. Good training makes complicated and complex tasks seem simple.

Note how complicated riding a bicycle seems until one knows how. All experienced computer users know there is not an "any key" on a computer keyboard. Yet many inexperienced users have searched in vain for such a key to be able to follow the direction in the computer manual which says, "Press any key and

continue." Finding pneumonia in the dictionary happens only after one knows that it begins with a "p" rather than an "n".

The importance of training programs in farm markets will increase dramatically in the 90's. Customers will have higher expectations of market employees. Equipment will become more complicated. The work in successful markets will be more complex. People with all the necessary skills and experience for success in a farm market can not be hired. Without training programs, labor can easily become the weakest link in the plans for success of the farm market.



With a proper training program, employees will know how to use their time more efficiently, even if it involves such basic tasks as cleaning.



Showing the employee the proper steps of each task and explaining the importance of doing the task can help the employee perform the job better.

Content of Training

Training of farm market workers involves four kinds of learning: knowing, doing, combinations of what is known or can be done, and combinations of knowing and doing. Learning implies:

1. Knowing something intellectually or conceptually one never knew before. Two examples of this kind of learning are: (a) Apples bruised during harvest will be unmarketable coming out of storage. (b) Some apples are better suited for baking than eating raw.
2. Being able to do something one couldn't do before. Two examples are: (a) Operate a cash register. (b) Change the oil in a truck.
3. Combining two knowns into a new understanding of a skill, piece of knowledge, concept, or behavior. Examples are: (a) Knowledge about apple varieties

and knowledge of how cider is made being combined to select apples for cider versus apples for fresh market. (b) Knowledge of which chemicals can damage eyes and knowledge of what can happen to liquid under pressure combined to always wear protective goggles.

4. Being able to use or apply a new combination of skills, knowledge, concepts, or behaviors. Examples are: (a) Combining the skill of being able to back a trailer with a tractor and the knowledge of the gears in a new semi-tractor to be able to back a semitrailer up to a loading dock. (b) Combining mechanical skill, attention to detail, knowing what to listen for, and superior hearing to recognize when a belt needs tightening.

All four kinds of learning should be part of a training program as appropriate. Training must be

more than teaching employees how to do things. Helping them understand the importance of the job, the principles behind the job, and how they can use what they already know are important.

Each farm market should have a plan for training. The plan should include creation of a positive environment for learning. Reinforcing the following assumptions in each trainer and employee helps create an ideal learning situation:

- All employees can learn.
- Learning should be made an active process.
- Learners need and want guidance and direction.
- Learning should be sequential.
- Learners need time to practice.
- Learning should be varied to avoid boredom.
- Learners gain satisfaction from their learning.
- Correct learner behavior should be reinforced.
- Learning does not occur at a steady rate.

Training Objectives

An employee training program should have three distinct phases: (a) orientation, (b) learning to do the first job, and (c) preparation for future tasks and responsibilities. Orientation is limited to answering immediate questions and providing essential information for a new employee to get off to a good start. Some of the orientation will have been done during

the application and interviewing process. Written job descriptions, an employee handbook, a written employer-employee agreement, and openness to questions also are important to orientation.

Sensitivity to immediate information needs and postponing the nonessential information to the second phase of training are the keys to successful orientation. Where to park the car, what to wear to work, location of the bathroom, names of co-workers and to whom to go with questions are essential to orientation. The details of a retirement program and procedures for arranging which week to take vacation are not.

Training the employee to handle the first tasks logically follows the orientation. Preparation for future tasks and responsibilities is a continuous process based on the employee's skills and aspirations, and changes in the farm market.

The relative amount of time devoted to orientation, training for the first job and preparation for future responsibilities varies with the type of employee. Temporary workers may receive only orientation and training focused on the seasonal job, e.g., harvesting and loading apples. Long-term key employees may continue to receive training for both immediate and future tasks and responsibilities for as long as the employment lasts.

Job instruction can be divided into getting ready to train and training. Trainers in farm markets are often so experienced in what they are teaching that taking time to prepare for training seems like a waste of time. "I don't have time to prepare" or "I know this job so well I don't need to think about how to teach it" may be foolish attitudes. Muddled and confused instruction increases the time spent on training and causes frustration for both trainer and employee.

Two important questions guide preparation for training. What is the objective of the training? Define specifically what the

learners are to know or be able to do at the conclusion of the training. An acceptable level of performance and timetable for the training should be established.

What are the principal steps in the task and in what sequence should they be done? Analyzing each task can be helpful. Develop tips on how the job can be made easier, done more quickly or done with less frustration for the employee.

Having answered these two questions, the trainer is ready to prepare equipment, materials, learning aids and the work place for the actual training. Looking for equipment or supplies during training leaves the learner suspicious that the teacher is careless or incompetent or both.

The actual instruction can be aided by a five step teaching method:

1. **Prepare** the learner. Learners are prepared when they are at ease, understand why they need to learn the task, are interested in learning, have the confidence that they can learn and the trainer can teach. The most important part of learner preparation is creating a need to know or desire to learn on the part of the trainee. It helps to show enthusiasm for the task, relate the task to what the learner already knows, help the learner envision being an expert in the task, have the learner explain how the task will relate to success at the farm market, add fun and prestige to the task when possible, and associate the task with respected co-workers.
2. **Tell** the learner about each step or part of the task.
3. **Show** the learner how to do each step or part of the task. In demonstrating the task, explain each step

emphasizing the key points and more difficult steps. Remember the little and seemingly simple parts of the task. Get the learner involved by asking questions about what is being shown.

4. Have the learner **DO** each step of the task while being observed by the trainer and then without the trainer observing. Ask the learner to explain each step as it is performed. If steps or parts of the task are omitted, re-explain the steps and have the learner repeat them.
5. **Review** each step or part of the task with the learner, offering encouragement, constructive criticism and additional pointers on how to do the job. Be frank in the appraisal. Encourage the learner toward self-appraisal.

“Training must be more than teaching employees how to do things.”

—Bernard L. Erven
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Improved training for both new and experienced employees offers farm market managers a way to increase employee success. Training programs rarely change quickly and easily. Deciding what can

be accomplished through better training is a good starting point. Create a good environment for learning. Prepare before jumping into changes in training. Learn and use a five step method, Prepare-Tell-Show-Do-Review, to steer both trainers and employees toward greater success.

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