

GREGORIO BILLIKOPF  
University of California  
*Labor Management in Agriculture: Cultivating Personnel Productivity*  
(c) 2003 Regents of the University of California  
All Rights Reserved  
gebillikopf@ucdavis.edu, (209) 525-6800



LABOR MANAGEMENT IN AGRICULTURE:  
CULTIVATING PERSONNEL PRODUCTIVITY

2<sup>nd</sup> Edition





LABOR MANAGEMENT IN AGRICULTURE:  
CULTIVATING PERSONNEL PRODUCTIVITY

2<sup>nd</sup> Edition

GREGORY ENCINA BILLIKOPF



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
AGRICULTURAL ISSUES CENTER  
ANR PUBLICATION 3417

## LABOR MANAGEMENT IN AGRICULTURE: CULTIVATING PERSONNEL PRODUCTIVITY (2<sup>ND</sup> Edition)

---

**Library of Congress Control Number: 2001092378**

© 1994, 2003 by *The Regents of the University of California*

Agricultural Issues Center

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Printed in the United States of America. All rights reserved.

ISBN 1885976062

ANR Publication 3417



This publication has been anonymously peer reviewed for technical accuracy by University of California scientists and other qualified professionals. This review process was managed by the ANR Associate Editor for Human and Community Development.

Printed by Parks Printing and Lithography, Modesto, California. Cover design by Harrison Aquino. Cover photos and photographic effects by Gregory Encina Billikopf.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the written permission of the publisher and the author. Printing or reproduction of photographs in any form, except as part of complete chapters as indicated below, is strictly forbidden. There is no implication that the people or farms depicted in the photographs were involved in the incidents recounted in the text. The photos were taken by the author unless otherwise indicated. Printing of this book, or complete chapters of this book, is permitted for personal, non-commercial use as long as the author and the University of California are credited, and this copyright notice is included. University faculty, educators, consultants, or others who wish to adopt *Labor Management in Agriculture* as a text for their course or seminar, may obtain permission to make copies for course participants as long as: (1) the author and the University of California are credited; (2) no changes are made in the text without written authorization; (3) this copyright notice is included; (4) there is no charge to students or participants for the materials (beyond the costs of duplication); and 5) you send an E-mail request along with your name, University affiliation, and course title to Gregory Encina Billikopf (at [gebillikopf@ucdavis.edu](mailto:gebillikopf@ucdavis.edu)).

Second edition, 2003

First edition, 1994

### **Internet Release**

This publication is posted at the *Agricultural Labor Management* Website:

<http://www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/>

### **Hard Copy**

To order this publication in hard copy, contact:

University of California

3800 Cornucopia Way #A

Modesto, CA 95358-9492

<http://www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/>

(209) 525-6800

The University of California prohibits discrimination against or harassment of any person employed by or seeking employment with the University on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, physical or mental disability, medical condition (cancer-related or genetic characteristics), ancestry, marital status, age, sexual orientation, citizenship, or status as a covered veteran (covered veterans are special disabled veterans, recently separated veterans, Vietnam era veterans or any other veterans who served on active duty during a war or in a campaign or expedition for which a campaign badge has been authorized). University policy is intended to be consistent with the provisions of applicable State and Federal laws. Inquiries regarding the University's nondiscrimination policies may be directed to the Affirmative Action/Staff Personnel Services Director, University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources, 300 Lakeside Drive, 6th Floor, Oakland, CA 94612-3550 (510) 987-0096.

*To those who work in agriculture*





## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

---

Gregory Encina Billikopf was born and raised in Chile's Central Valley. His interest in agriculture and farm labor issues has been developing since his youth, part of which was spent in his family's vineyard in San Javier. Billikopf obtained a BS in plant science with emphasis in production agriculture at the University of California, Davis, and a MA in labor management from California State University, Stanislaus. Before coming to the University of California in 1981, he worked in migrant education and farm worker training programs.

Billikopf's agricultural extension research and teaching efforts have focused on such topics as employee selection, compensation, performance appraisal, discipline and termination, supervision, interpersonal relations, conflict resolution, and negotiation skills. Gregory has been a frequent national and international speaker in the field, and has had the opportunity to give presentations in Russia, Canada, México, Uganda, and Chile. He is also the manager of the international agricultural human resource electronic forum, *AG-HRnet*, and the electronic newsletter *People in Ag*.



## CONTENTS

---

Acknowledgments **viii**

Preface **ix**

Chapter 1 - Managing People on the Farm	<b>1</b>
Chapter 2 - Practical Steps to Employee Selection	<b>9</b>
Chapter 3 - Validating the Selection Process	<b>29</b>
Chapter 4 - Promotions, Transfers and Layoffs	<b>41</b>
Chapter 5 - Helping Workers Acquire Skills	<b>49</b>
Chapter 6 - Performance Appraisal	<b>59</b>
Chapter 7 - Internal Wage Structure	<b>75</b>
Chapter 8 - Incentive Pay	<b>91</b>
Chapter 9 - Supervisory Power	<b>111</b>
Chapter 10 - Empowerment and Delegation	<b>123</b>
Chapter 11 - Conducting Effective Meetings	<b>131</b>
Chapter 12 - Interacting with Employees	<b>137</b>
Chapter 13 - Conflict Management Skills	<b>157</b>
Chapter 14 - Discipline	<b>175</b>
Chapter 15 - Termination	<b>191</b>
Chapter 16 - Employee Turnover	<b>203</b>
Chapter 17 - Policies and Handbooks	<b>209</b>
Chapter 18 - Creative Negotiation	<b>217</b>

Index **235**



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

---

Many farmers, farm managers, farm labor contractors and farm workers have contributed to this work by participating in research efforts—as well as in the photographs. I am particularly thankful to those who were willing to pioneer new organizational interventions and concepts, and share the difficulties and challenges as well as successes they have encountered along the way.

I feel a need to acknowledge those who helped with the first edition, the fruits of which have carried over to this one. Foremost is Howard R. Rosenberg, mentor and friend, who devoted endless hours to earlier drafts. Subsections of chapters 4, 7, 10, and 17, are based on trade journal articles we co-authored. I thank Howard for his support and encouragement. Linda Marsing Billikopf, my wife, did much to improve the overall logic of the presentation within chapters.

The second edition was prepared with the able editorial help of Marcia Kreith and Gary Beall of the University of California Agricultural Issues Center. Special thanks go to all those who

reviewed the book or provided feedback along the way. I am grateful to University of California and Fundación Chile colleagues who donated photos. Jack Kelly Clark, from UC DANR Communication Services, and I went out on several photo shoots together. Jack took many of the photos and gave me the confidence to begin to take my own. My daughter Cristina helped match photographs with the pull-out quotes. Will Suckow, also of DANR Communications, answered innumerable questions about page layout, formatting, computerized photo quality and drawings. I am intensely indebted to Elizabeth Resendez who, with superior skill, proofread the manuscript almost as many times as I revised it, helped me keep track of the multiple facets of the project, and updated the Web version of the book.

The author takes responsibility for the opinions expressed as well as any errors that may remain. I am especially appreciative to the University of California for the opportunity I have had to dedicate my work efforts to labor management in agriculture and the writing of this book.



## PREFACE

Research shows worker output is not a constant. As a farmer or labor contractor you can play an important role in shaping work outcomes. My intention with this book is to present sound theory and practices hopefully leading to a better understanding of worker performance and output—and improved management of human resources on the farm. The emphasis of this publication is in areas most critical to the productivity of personnel on your farm.

Besides teaching and research, an important part of my job as farm advisor is to work directly with individual farm employers, helping them with challenging issues they face. This second edition has been substantially revised and tested in the field. Some of the changes are subtle, such as the order in which to approach a problem. Perhaps the greatest change has been the addition of numerous examples of how farm employers have dealt with many of the issues. Some of these examples have been altered but others stand essentially as they happened.

This book was written on the premise that those who read it will want to maximize farm output as well as long-term profits. For labor management to be successful, it must benefit both farmer and worker in the long run. I hope this will be a useful reference for years. The emphasis is on management principles whose importance transcend geographical and cultural backgrounds, rather than on legal requirements. It is imperative, then, that a qualified local labor attorney is consulted, before implementing many of the suggestions found herein.

Human resource management must do much more than foster good relationships between management and personnel. It must also provide farm employers with more creative and cost-efficient ways of managing agricultural labor. I have tried to present material that draws out alternatives and corresponding consequences.



Jack Kelly Clark

There are benefits to reading *Labor Management in Agriculture* sequentially, but it is also meant for individual chapters to essentially stand alone. Farm employers can focus on topics of special interest to them. Some topics are more technical in nature, while others are more people oriented, dealing with supervision and interpersonal relations.

An overview of the field of human resource management is given in Chapter 1. It warns against trying to solve every problem with the same set

*Research shows worker output is not a constant.*

of management tools, and suggests that farm employers can really affect organizational results. Chapters 2 and 3 promote a selection process in which practical tests play a specially critical role. Who is hired is one of the most important decisions a farm manager will make. In agriculture, as in so many other types of organizations, employers often select people based on first impressions, or insufficient data. Issues related to movement of employees within the organization, including the role of seniority vs. merit are addressed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 5 provides tips on training employees, and establishes parameters for training partnerships with public or government organizations. Chapter 6, contributes a new approach to performance appraisal, one that leans heavily on effective negotiation strategies. Compensation is the subject of Chapters 7 and 8, dealing with internal wage structures and incentive pay. Wage structures deal with equity issues in terms of what people get paid in contrast to others, both within and outside the organization. While compensation is not the only reason people work, it is important to understand how compensation affects employee motivation and morale, as well as business viability. A number of incentive pay strategies are discussed. A persistent lack of understanding in the area of incentive pay management has frequently kept agricultural employers from benefiting from this immensely powerful tool.

Supervisory power is the subject of Chapter 9. Power can only be maintained when it is not abused. Abuse of power can take different forms, such as favoritism, dishonesty, and sexual harassment. Chapter 10 sets the stage for more effective delegation. Employees often have much to contribute in terms of creative thinking

and solutions to challenges, and this potential is seldom tapped to its potential. Conducting effective meetings is the subject of Chapter 11. Decision-making meetings can tap into the creative potential of employees. Chapter 12 focuses on day to day issues of interpersonal relations, and includes topics of special interest to farm employers with a multi-cultural workforce. Interpersonal contact can lead to conflict, and that is the topic of Chapter 13.

Chapter 14 helps supervisors separate and deal with performance problems. Suggestions are provided for ways of approaching employees so the problem is not compounded. Terminating employees without stepping on their dignity is the topic of Chapter 15. When employees leave, management often loses a valuable asset. Chapter 16 considers what employers can do to reduce unwanted turnover. Personnel policies and handbooks are considered in Chapter 17. A sick leave policy is used as an example of how employees can turn a policy that encourages people to be sick, to one where employees feel an incentive to come to work.

Chapter 18 is new to this edition. It is a bit of a review, and also provides a test of people-management skills, through the use of various scenarios. Because of its importance, much of the book deals with negotiation principles in one way or another. The essence of effective negotiation is understanding that long-term solutions are more likely when the needs of all the participants are considered.

This book is meant to stimulate and structure positive action. Some ideas seem unique, and no matter where I go, someone will say, "That won't work here." Yet almost invariably someone else will comment "It works, and we are already doing it."