

Opportunities for **Labour**

Strategic Labour Opportunities for Small Farms

1: Addressing Skills Gaps

Recommended Action: Conduct a Self-Assessment

Timeline for implementation: Immediate

Key partners: Farm business operators

Resources required: Time and meaningful discussions amongst partners

Knowing what skills you bring to your business is critical in understanding what types of additional training you might need, how you allocate tasks amongst existing business partners, or what kind of skills you should look for in employees, volunteers, contracted help or new business partners.

KEY RESOURCE: The GoForth Institute provides one of the most in depth entrepreneurial skills assessment at no charge. Download the self-assessment and make sure all partners in the business complete it.

Recommended Action: Engage in Training

Timeline for implementation: Immediate, once annually

Key partners: Farm business operators, employees, educational institutions, industry associations, business development organizations

Resources required: Time, travel, tuition or registration fees, availability of relevant training

Managing any business requires a broad set of skills and experience. Managing a primary agriculture business also requires great technical knowledge and know-how. No farm operator will ever start out with all the knowledge and skills they need; moreover, the knowledge and skills required will change over time. Farm operators should plan to make professional development a regular part of their business operation. Virtual learning technologies, such as webinars, make professional development more accessible than ever. Watch for webinars from organisations like Farm Management Canada, Small Business BC, and the National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service.

Business and agricultural training are provided locally by the Community Futures Cariboo-Chilcotin office, the Thompson Rivers University (Kamloops) and by various business and agricultural associations, such as the Bella Coola Valley Sustainable Agriculture Society and Bella Coola Valley Learning Society.

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Subscribe to the relevant organizational email list to stay up to date on the latest training and learning opportunities. Plan to attend at least one training course every year. Set time aside to make use of the local public library for their books on agricultural production and business management.

For more intensive training, consider a formal program such as a horticulture certificate or master gardening designation. Most of these intensive training programs will require travel outside of the region. The new Applied Sustainable Ranching Program offered by TRU provides an opportunity for intensive agricultural training.

Recommended Action: Apply for Training Grants

Timeline for implementation: Immediate for eligible businesses

Key partners: Farm business operators, employees, training partner, Provincial and Federal Government

Resources required: Time, financial commitment, application and reporting paperwork, third party trainer

The Canada-BC Job Grant is available to businesses that want to invest in the skill sets of their employees. If you are an employer, the grant could cover up to 2/3 of the costs of training for your employees. You must contribute 1/3 of the costs and use a third-party trainer.

LINK: <https://www.workbc.ca/Employer-Resources/Canada-BC-Job-Grant/Informationon-the-Canada-BC-Job-Grant.aspx>

Recommended Action: Engage new business partners

Timeline for implementation: 2-5 years

Key partners: Farm business operators, potential business partners, business development organizations, legal advisors

Resources required: Time, networking, relationship building, legal advice, partnership agreement

A farm is a very difficult operation to manage alone. A diverse set of skills are required to manage a farm. Employees, interns, contracted professionals and volunteer help may offer temporary solutions to a skills gap, but partnerships offer a longer-term solution. Entering into a partnership can be a long and a complex endeavour, but the Williams Lake area does offer many advantages to skilled farm managers interested in investing in a farm business, including affordable land and housing opportunities. Many farm partners begin as interns or employees on the farm, but may grow into full partners as their skills and working relationships with the business develop. Other partners may be brought into the business more quickly based on strong expertise and capital investment.

Many resources exist online and at local business support agencies on developing partnership agreements. Finding partners requires a personal approach. Networking within the broader regional business community and connecting to agricultural communities outside of the local region is an important step to building relationships that may eventually lead to partnerships.

MUST DO: In all potential partnership situations, ensure a partnership agreement is drafted and given legal review.

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2: Hiring Help

Hiring employees is a major step in the development of a business. Employees can free up valuable time and allow a business to be in two places at once, but also represent a significant financial investment. Managing employees also requires an additional set of human resource management skills that can take a lifetime to develop. Despite the potential challenges associated with hiring and maintaining employees, the addition of hired help represents a critical juncture between the start-up and growth phases of a small farm business.

Recommended Action: Prepare a Job Creation Plan

Timeline for implementation: 1- 6 months

Key partners: Farm business operators, WorkBC and other employment offices

Resources required: Time, business planning, employee management skills, job description and employment contract

Hiring an employee will require significant financial analysis and business planning. Don't bank on finding quality help for the lowest cost; the general minimum wage in BC is currently \$10.45 an hour, but most employers will tell you that attracting quality employee requires higher wages. The living wage is the hourly rate at which a household can meet its basic needs. The living wage in Prince George is \$16.82/hour, and \$17.95/hour in Kamloops. Additional employee incentives such as performance bonuses, housing, free produce, training and advancement opportunities and transportation options can also improve your competitiveness as an employer.

Hiring employees will require management and leadership skills, as well as clear job descriptions and role assignments. WorkBC offices across the Province offer resources to potential employers. The local WorkBC office in the Bella Coola Valley is run by the Bella Coola Valley Learning Society. The BC Ministry of Agriculture also offers several guides to assist with preparing for employees, including how to prepare an employee handbook, understanding basic human resource management concepts and practices, and even a guide on how to farm with family.

LINK: <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/agriculture-seafood/farmmanagement/farm-business-management/running-a-farm/human-resources>

Recommended Action: Partner with another farm

Timeline for implementation: 1- 6 months

Key partners: Farm business operators, partnering farm(s), employees, WorkBC and other employment offices,

Resources required: Time, financial commitment, business planning, employee management skills, clear job description, partnership agreement, employment contract

Many small farms find themselves in a position where they are unable to hire a full-time employee, but find it difficult to attract a quality worker for a part-time position. In such cases, partnerships with neighbouring farms may yield a valuable opportunity. By partnering with another farm and sharing a full-time employee, an individual farm can access a part-time worker, and share in the responsibility of

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training and managing an employee. An employee may also find benefit in this type of position, with a wider variety of tasks and training opportunities than would be available on a single farm operation. This type of arrangement has proved valuable in balancing the seasonal ups and downs of farm labour. For example, in a partnership between a cattle farm and a produce farm, a worker may spend an entire week on the cattle farm during haying season, and then balance this out by spending the next week on the produce farm. At other times, the worker may simply spend 20 hours a week on each farm.

A partnership agreement should be established prior to entering into this type of arrangement. One of the partnering farms will need to assume primary responsibility as the legal employer, as well as ensuring employee paperwork is properly managed and that Labour Act standards are being followed. The lead partner may also apply for wage subsidies listed on the next page. Careful consideration should be given to how all of the costs and benefits of this type of partnership are balanced fairly between partners.

Recommended Action: Apply for Grants

Timeline for implementation: Immediate for eligible businesses

Key partners: Farm business operators, employees, Provincial and Federal Governments, WorkBC and other employment offices

Resources required: financial contribution, application and reporting paperwork

Canada Summer Jobs Program

If you're planning to hire students to help out at your small business next summer, this wage subsidy could help you pay up to 50% of the salary to an eligible full-time student. The value of the subsidy is based on the minimum wage in your region. Not-for-profit organizations are eligible for 100% of the student's salary.

LINK: <http://www.canadabusiness.ca/eng/program/2052/sgc-59/>

Get Youth Working

The application period for 2016 is from January 4 to February 26. To help offset hiring costs, you could receive a \$2,800 incentive to hire eligible youth between the ages of 15 and 29. As an employer, you may receive an additional \$1,000 to purchase training for newly hired youth.

LINK: <http://www.canadabusiness.ca/eng/program/4203/sgc-59/>

Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities

If you are an employer who would like to hire someone with a disability, you could qualify for funds. The funding can cover a portion of the salary. Projects must normally involve a minimum of 8 participants.

LINK: <http://www.canadabusiness.ca/eng/program/2082/sgc-59/>

Skills Link

You could get up to \$50,000 to hire and train youth between the ages of 15 and 30 for projects that last up to 30 weeks. Your project can be either local or regional. You need to hire youth who are registered

with this program and who are at risk of not finding a job. You should be able to provide experience that will help the youth to find work later on.

LINK: <http://www.canadabusiness.ca/eng/program/2512/sgc-59/>

Recommended Action: Contracting Professionals

Timeline for implementation: 1- 6 months

Key partners: Farm business operators, contracted professionals

Resources required: Time, financial commitment, service contract

You can't do it all. At some point, your business will need to rely on contracted professionals to get the job done. Most farms will typically contract professional service providers for book keeping, accounting, and legal services. There exist, however, other opportunities for professional help depending on the type of service providers in your area.

For some tasks, digital technology increases the availability of contracted help. For example, many small businesses are contracting professionals to handle their marketing. This includes graphic design for logos, ads, and brochures, as well as ongoing social media management. It's good community building to rely on local professionals, but these digital tasks can be performed from anywhere in the world. Fencing, haying, tilling and other such services can often be contracted out to avoid expensive equipment purchases, but this may be largely dependent on the availability of local services.

Almost any aspect of a farm business could be contracted out if quality, financial, and time-saving incentives exist. When considering contracted services, ask yourself three important questions:

1. Will contracting out the service save me money?
2. Will contracting out the service allow me to spend my time on higher priority tasks?
3. Will the contractor do the job better than I could?

If you answer yes to all three, your decision should be a no-brainer.

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3: Volunteer Labour

Recommended Action: Enlist volunteers

Timeline for implementation: 2 weeks to 1 year

Key partners: Farm business operators, volunteers networks and organizations, volunteers
Resources required: Time, training and scheduling, management and leadership skills, volunteer agreement, lodging, food and transportation options

Volunteers are the backbone of every community, and they often arrive in times of greatest need; however, volunteer labour is not a part of a long-term business plan. It should be used sparingly and only in extreme circumstances. Small farms typically rely on volunteer labour in three ways:

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1. Friends and family: Rule of thumb suggests that you should rely on the volunteer labour of family and friends no more than one day per month. Provide as much notice as possible to allow them to plan their own schedules around your needs. These volunteers may be the most committed to seeing you succeed, but straining these relationships could affect your personal life.
2. Work bees: These group volunteer events typically consist of friends, customers and members of the community interested in a 'farmer-for-a-day' experience. They often involve families and children. Plan to provide plenty of refreshments and time to socialize. Set realistic expectations of what an untrained group of city slickers can accomplish in a day. Limit yourself to 2-3 work bees in a season.
3. WOOFers: Also known as World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms, this popular global network allows travellers to explore farms around the world by providing volunteer labour in exchange for accommodations and experiences. Reviews from local farmers on their WOOF-hosting experience are mixed. Only the most committed and hard-working WOOFers will provide a return on your investment. The rest require more time, energy and groceries than they contribute.

As with all volunteer strategies, have realistic expectations going in. Expect 25% not to show up at all. Plan to remain alongside the volunteers most of time instead of leaving them largely on their own. Recognize that volunteers are untrained, and mistakes are likely to happen.

Never allow volunteers to handle machinery, equipment or large livestock without thorough safety training. Check with your insurance provider to understand what volunteer activities are covered under your insurance. Always have First Aid available on your farm. Take special precautions if your volunteers are from out of country: they may have to pay for any medical treatment they receive in Canada.

Recommended Action: Offer an Internship Position

Timeline for implementation: 1- 2 years

Key partners: Farm business operators, mentors, internship networks and organizations, interns

Resources required: Time, intern training and work plan, management and leadership skills, intern agreement, lodging, food and transportation options

An internship on a farm can be a very rewarding aspect of the business. Training an intern often leads to future business partnerships and can instill a sense of pride in your operation. Internships are critical to farmers considering retirement and succession options, as they will connect committed future farmers to your business in a hands-on way. As with any mentoring relationship, the mentor may have as much to learn as the mentee. Having an extra set of eyes and extra pair of hands on the farm can relieve some of your farm labour burdens, and provide some new perspectives on your operations. However, be warned: there is no such thing as free labour.

Interns are not simply unpaid employees. Legally, you must pay an employee the minimum wage; interns cannot replace this. Instead, an internship must offer training and experience that is both deeper and broader than an employment position. An intern volunteers their time so that they have access to an intensive learning environment. As such, you will be spending a lot of hands-on time with

an intern and training them on a wide variety of tasks. Many farmers who have hosted interns suggest they spend 50% of their time working directly with their intern. In addition to time, financial investment will also be required; volunteer interns typically expect to be provided meals, transportation and even accommodations.

Some small farms have developed a system of internships in which they hire interns as employees, paying minimum wage, but also charge them a room and board fee as well as plot rental fee if the employee would like to experiment with a plot of their own on the farm. This helps provide clarity and structure for both parties, while reducing the costs of a formal employment position. Plan to spend several months preparing training manuals and an internship plan before taking on an intern. An internship agreement should also be in place so that both parties' expectations are made clear before the internship begins.

Once you have determined that an intern may be a good fit for your farm, internship networks such as SOIL or Young Agrarians can help you find the right intern. Interns are unlikely to come from within the local community, and you may struggle to find a willing participant to fill the position.

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3: Mechanize and Digitize

Recommended Action: Conduct a technology needs assessment and cost recovery analysis

Timeline for implementation: 1- 6 months

Key partners: Farm business operators, technology and equipment suppliers Resources required: Time, research, analysis

Farmers have always sought new ways to do their jobs more efficiently and effectively. The key is having enough time to test and develop new technology, and to know what technologies have the most to offer. Before investing or committing to new technology or equipment, conduct an assessment to determine if the technology will a) provide a return on investment, b) address the priority needs of the business, c) function on your particular farm.

For example, if online marketing is critical to your business growth, but your farm does not have cell service or a high speed internet connection, it may be wiser to contract out to a social media manager in town, rather than investing in satellite communications. These experts may provide a higher quality service in a fraction of the time than you could trying to set up your own technology without much experience or training. Love Central Coast BC is a cost effective platform to gain some online presence with a minimal up-front time commitment.

If you are eyeing up a new tractor, carefully evaluate whether it is critical to the business or would it just simply be nice to have. A new tractor may save you an hour or two of labour each week, but it may require thousands of hours of work to pay it off. Don't neglect to include the time you will spend maintaining, repairing and learning how to use the equipment in your analysis. Conversely, equipment such as a push seeder may save you dozens of hours over hand seeding each season. If you value your own time at the minimum wage, you may see a return on this \$200-\$500 investment in less than a year.

Some of the best technologies for small farms are free or low cost and make short work of paperwork systems. Freshbook, Quickbooks, Square, Farm At Hand, and FarmSoft are just a sample of some of the great management tools available at low cost to small farm businesses.

LINK: For guidance on a technology self-assessment and a list of helpful digital farm tools. Check out <http://beyondthemarket.ca/blog-using-small-technologies-on-yourfarm/>

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4: Plan for Physical Shortfalls

Recommended Action: Create a safety and wellness plan for the farm

Timeline for implementation: 1- 6 months

Key partners: Farm business operators, employees, WorkSafe BC, AgSafe BC

Resources required: Time, research, planning, meaningful discussion

Injury and disability can destroy both business and family in an instant. The effects of chronic exhaustion, stress, and fatigue may set in more slowly, but can be just as damaging. Farming is a high risk physical activity and the hazards should not be ignored. There are two ways of addressing risks in any environment: 1) reducing the likelihood of occurrence, and 2) reducing the severity of the impact. Preparing a safety and wellness plan for the farm will address the former.

AgSafe BC (formerly FARSHA) offers training, toolkits, and advisory services to help create and implement a health and safety plan for the farm. They even offer safety certification that can help reduce your WorkSafe BC premiums.

LINK: <http://www.agsafebc.ca/>

Recommended Action: Purchase personal optional WorkSafe Protection

Timeline for implementation: immediate

Key partners: Farm business operators, WorkSafe BC

Resources required: Financial commitment, application and reporting paperwork

Wearing personal protective equipment and following WorkSafe procedures can reduce the severity of accident, but may not go completely ensure your safety in many cases. You should always carry insurance to cover a worst-case scenario. WorkSafe protection is a mandatory requirement for all employees, but owner/operators are not covered by this legislation. Instead, owner/operators can enroll in a Personal Optional Protection Plan provided by WorkSafe BC.

Personal Optional Protection Insurance will cover lost salary and medical expenses if you are injured on the job, or if you contract a disease as a result of your work. This coverage may be your only source of income if you are unable to work due to a work related injury or disease. The cost of this insurance will depend on the risk of your business and your compensation rate.

LINK:

http://worksafebc.com/insurance/registering_for_coverage/personal_optional_protection/default.asp

Recommended Action: Create a Will

Timeline for implementation: 1- 6 months

Key partners: Farm business owners, family members

Resources required: Time, research, meaningful discussion, legal advice

Talking about death with your business partners and family can be a daunting challenge. However, dealing with the sudden or unexpected loss of a member of the team will be far more traumatic, and made worse without a will or pre-existing conversation to help deal with this worst-case scenario. A will provides a clear chain of custody and course of action in uncertain times. Not only does a will reduce potential conflicts between family members and business partners, it can also designate clear decision making authority that will allow a farm business and its assets to be managed on the absence of one of its partners. A local farm operator describes the challenge of managing the farm after the sudden loss of one of her partners: she recalls years of legal strife before all matters were completely settled. The process almost split the family apart.

LINK: <http://www.agsafebc.ca/>

SUMMARY – Opportunities for Labour

Supports and Contacts

Central Coast Regional District Economic Development Service

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BC Innovation Council

BC Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training

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Community Services

Bella Coola Valley Learning Society (WorkBC)

BC Ministry of Environment

Education and Training

Thompson Rivers University

North Island College

Agriculture

BC Association of Farmers' Markets

AgSafe BC

BC Ministry of Agriculture

Bella Coola Valley Sustainable Agriculture Society

Stewards Of Irreplaceable Lands (SOIL)

Community Futures Mountain Waddington

Business Development Canada

Farm Credit Canada

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Regulatory

Worksafe BC

Vancouver Coastal Health

Canadian Food Inspection Agency

Investment Agriculture Foundation

BC Agriculture Council

Certified Organic Association of BC

Young Agrarians