



STONELANE ORCHARD Steinbach, Manitoba

Overview

The Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC) was created to address human resource issues facing agricultural businesses across Canada. CAHRC works with industry leaders, governments, and education stakeholders to research, develop and communicate solutions to the challenges in agriculture employment and skills development.

CAHRC representatives visited and interviewed employers and staff at a number of agricultural businesses across Canada. Interview notes and observations were used to showcase farm profiles that highlight industry management practices to recruit and retain workers.

CAHRC is led by industry and funded by the Sector Council Program of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC). For more information about CAHRC, visit www.cahrc-ccrha.ca.

About Stonelane Orchard

Stonelane Orchard is located just east of Steinbach, Manitoba, and is owned and operated by Kim Shukla and Richard Whitehead. Kim and Richard work full time on the farm growing over 20 types of vegetables, numerous varieties of trees and shrubs and five different fruit crops. As an addition to the nursery product line, the farm also offers landscape planning and installations. Sustainable production and education are the mantras of the Orchard.

As a Professional Agrologist, Kim has the science and “know how” to make things grow, while respecting the environment. In addition to being an agrologist, Kim also has more than 25 years of experience in the agriculture and agri-food sector, in the areas of business management, project management, communications and marketing at the national and international level. Amongst her many duties on the farm, people are Kim’s key resource to find and nurture.

Stonelane Orchard’s Human Resource Management

Stonelane Orchard currently employs three full-time workers and approximately five to six seasonal workers. Due to the nature of the business, Kim and Richard are only able to offer seasonal work which makes it difficult to rehire the same people for the following season. The three full-time employees generally work from May to October; and the five to six seasonal workers join the farm in mid-July for the harvest of vegetables and berries. These workers also help out with any landscape installations during the summer.

While Stonelane Orchard does not have a formal human resource plan, they have developed job descriptions to use for their job postings. Kim ensures that the job descriptions are very specific so that potential employees are aware of the tasks involved with working on the farm. They have also developed a health and safety policy for the farm.

In terms of labour, Stonelane Orchard hasn’t experienced any difficulty finding workers for the season for two main reasons. The first reason is the location of their farm, only 1.5 miles from a city with a population of 15, 000; and the second reason is the growing population thanks to the



Provincial Nominee Program (PNP). The PNP has encouraged the settlement of Russian Germans into the area that generally have large families, with 6 children being the average (10 to 12 children is not uncommon). Also a large population of returning Canadians (those moving back from South America and Mexico after being away for many years or possibly a generation) come from rural agricultural communities and are familiar with the type of work Stonelane has available. Stonelane Orchard has had great success hiring newcomers to Canada including Mexican Mennonites, Russian Germans, and Filipinos. They have had the most success with workers in the age range of 35 to 55, and have had little success with Canadian born workers.

Stonelane Orchard does not hire any workers through the Government of Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP). Kim and Richard are open to the idea of hiring workers through the program; however, at this point in time they are fortunate enough to find workers locally. Should the need arise, they would be happy to participate in the program.

Recruitment Strategies

Stonelane Orchard recruits workers from the local labour market. The farm advertises job postings through local papers, uses local online job boards, the local settlement office, as well as the local chamber of commerce. Kim and Richard keep a close eye on how things are going on their farm so that they can anticipate how many workers they will need for the season. Though there are workers available in the community, it takes a fair effort to be able to find the right workers for the job. There are a number of newcomers to the area who work on neighbouring hog farms. Often they seek out additional employment in the evenings, on a part-time or casual basis. Stonelane Orchard is able to adjust their working hours to accommodate the availability of these workers.

Kim and Richard interview and assess new workers to measure their potential and performance. When hiring new seasonal workers, Kim and Richard often work alongside the potential employee for an initial period. This is helpful for them to get a sense of the worker's abilities and work ethic, and also to be able to provide on-the-job direction and guidance.



Photo Credits: Stonelane Orchard

Retention Strategies

Stonelane Orchard provides a very positive working environment for their workers. They pride themselves on providing training on the farm. When they learn new techniques for the business, they teach these to their workers, giving them the chance to upgrade their skills. Kim and Richard also provide attractive work schedules for their employees, including evenings and weekends off. Kim and Richard believe communication is very important on the farm. They encourage their workers to approach them if they have any suggestions for improvement, knowing a happy worker will be a hard worker.

There is limited room for advancement at Stonelane Orchard because of the size of the business; however, Kim and Richard offer competitive wages and rewards to their employees to demonstrate appreciation for their hard work.

Stonelane Orchard does experience a high turnover rate with their employees due to the fact that they cannot employ workers year round. Often the workers they had the previous season have secured full-time work and therefore cannot return the next year.

Human Resource Challenges

1. Given the difficulty of retaining seasonal workers year after year, Kim and Richard are interested in developing and implementing a system to encourage work sharing plans so that seasonal employees have work all year-round in two different working environments.
2. The image of agriculture among youth is still quite negative. Farmers and their supporters need to encourage youth to consider working on the farm and to promote the positive aspects of agricultural work.
3. It is very difficult to recruit youth due to the hiring process farmers must go through to hire a student, particularly for seasonal work. There is an opportunity to work with the provincial government to streamline the recruitment process to encourage farmers to hire students. Also the minimum wage standard applies to youth under the age of 16, which is a further deterrent to hiring youth when and adult with work experience can be hired for the same wage.



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