Managing Employees With a Busy Family
Red Granite Farm Background

- Farm approximately 3 acres of vegetables
  - 30’x96’ high tunnel
  - 1 acre of sweet corn, 1 acre of pumpkins, 1 acre of mixed other annual summer/fall veggies & fruits
- Sell mostly at a farmer’s market, but also have on farm hours
- Small amount of wholesale/delivery
- Culinary Classes
High Tunnel Production
Field Production
Red Granite Farm Background

• Full Service Garden Center specializing in Perennials, Shrubs, Succulents and Seasonal Annuals
  • Landscape Design Consulting Services
  • Potting Parties/ Succulent Pumpkin Classes
  • Junk Jaunt Vendors
Garden Center
Red Granite Farm Background

• Flock of 400 laying hens turned over each year, so have roughly 800 in the summer months
  • Most eggs are sold wholesale, requiring 3-5 deliveries per week
  • Majority of egg business is done by owners, not employees
Business Growth + Growing Family

• Started RGF in 2007 with small market garden, 2 full-time off farm jobs, Child #1, almost 2 years old

• In 2008 & 2009 we grew more and expanded each year, still 2 full-time off farm jobs, added child #2

• I quit my full-time job in 2010 with birth of child #3, and in spring of 2011, I started growing perennials, so we could sell product for entire 6 months of market
Farmer’s Market in the beginning
Growing Business, Growing Children

• 2013- first growing season in the high tunnel and by Fall of 2013 the burn out was real

• We hired our first employee- didn’t care what it cost, I needed my sanity

• Another student in 2014 for the season

• In 2015 we hired 2 employees- allowing more time for me to spend with the kids on summer break
It’s all about BALANCE

• Hired 3 part time seasonal employees in 2016, 2017, 2018 & 2019
• Quit hauling perennials to the market in Spring 2017, started having more farm hours
• Expanded farm hours for Spring in 2019- once again hired 3 seasonal employees for 2020
Farmer’s Market now
Growth is good...right??

Work Smarter, not harder
Game changing business decisions

• Need to go to less markets, but make more $$ at each market
• Need more help to accomplish this
• Need a packing shed to have better quality and more product to sell (less waste)
• If I’m paying someone to harvest and make it market ready, it needs to sell
• Exploring other sales avenues
When to add an employee

Answer these questions:

• Will they be kept busy enough?
• Will we be more efficient?
• Will we be able to offer them an educational experience? (especially if looking for a student intern)
• Will profits offset the expense?
• How much is your sanity worth?
• Can my aging body handle the physical demands of the farm?
Duties of Employees

• Water
• Weed/ Hand Cultivation
• Plant
• Transplant
• Help customers
• Monitor Irrigation
• Harvest Produce
• Clean and Package Produce

• Scout for insects, diseases
• Trellis and Prune Tomatoes in High Tunnel
• Display Garden Maintenance
• Restock Sales Area
• Perennial Maintenance
• Farmers Market set up and tear down
• Farmers Market Sales
Duties of owner/manager

• Chicken chores and egg washing/delivering
• Invoicing of Egg Wholesale Customers
• Accounting
• Marketing including social media & advertising
• Chemical Application
• Cultivation and Planting done with the tractor
• Ordering of plant material for garden center
• Landscape designs and consultations
Some considerations before hiring

• Can you give them guaranteed hours?
• Seasonal workers can be harder to get to come back year after year—make sure it’s worth the extra effort
• Can you keep someone employed through the winter?
• Do you have appropriate facilities?
  • Public Bathroom
  • Break Room for eating lunch, place to cool off in the summer
Where to find employees

- Local Universities or Community Colleges
- High School Students- check with FFA chapters
- Post a job on Facebook
- Post a job with agencies that specialize in recruitment
- Ask your customers- some of my best “fill-in” employees were customers first
  - Perks to these “fill-ins” include that many will work for plants/produce
  - They can be there when you need “extras”, but don’t have to promise them a certain number of hours
Interview Process

• We take advantage of being so close to ISU and their students
• Attend Horticulture Career Night to gain resumes and talk to students
• Hand out a list of expectations of employees and an overview of RGF so they know what to expect
• Arrange time to interview them on campus
• Try to have everyone hired by January
Orientation/Training

• Expectations are outlined and provided to employee in writing
• Lots of learning by doing, side by side with me
• Food Safety Training is a priority for 2020
• Daily tasks are written out each day
• Weekly harvest schedules are posted each week
• Keeping one main person in charge of watering the garden center is ideal
• Harvesting is done by everyone, but usually I assign tasks based on efficiency
Keeping Employees Engaged

• Let them be a part of the decision making process
• Don’t helicopter over them
• Reward with praise
• Make birthdays or other life events special
• Create special projects they can take ownership of
• Find out what their passion is and help fulfill it
Keeping Records and Evaluations

• Timecards are filled out daily by employee
• Paid every two weeks
• Evaluations (Mostly verbal-nothing fancy) every month in the summer
• Usually a raise towards the end of the summer to entice them to stay on into the fall
You can start working ON your business instead of working IN it

• As a manager/owner I now can assign tasks and walk away
• Trust employees to work on their own and take ownership of their work
• Frees up my time, so I can do tasks only a manager/owner can do- in my case marketing and accounting
• Analytics- our % growth Gross Income keeps going up, while the same equation for labor goes down
In our experience...

• 4 hands get 4+ times the amount of work done

• When you have paid employees working all day, you are going to fill the day with worthwhile work

• I’m more disciplined with quitting time

• Some jobs don’t feel so time consuming when you have someone working with you

• At the end of the day, I am less burnt out, because we accomplished more and were more efficient
Never Get So Busy Making A Living That You Forget To Make A Life