



Supervising, managing, and communicating with employees: *Using Ag Help Wanted*

By James Sedman and John Hewlett

Production agriculture has its share of risk. Fluctuating markets, rising input costs, and weather surprises are just a few examples of production and price risk producers deal with daily.

People involved in agriculture also represent a source of risk. Managing these risks is just as important as managing other sources of risk and, in some ways, is far more complex. In Wyoming, finding and keeping quality employees is an even greater challenge due to competition from other industries.

A tool is available to assist producers learn more about managing human resource risks – *Ag Help Wanted: Guidelines for Managing Agricultural Labor*. The book is published by the Western Farm Management Extension committee and can

be found at AgHelpWanted.org. A previous article on *Ag Help Wanted* covered how to begin planning and incorporating employees into a business, the roles of the employer and staffing the farm business. This article will focus on helping employees learn to supervise, work toward proper employee compensation, and important communication and problem solving techniques.

Supervising

Supervising employees, either directly as an owner/operator or via managers, can be an extremely challenging part of any business. Often what makes it challenging is an ill-defined position. When a manager or supervisor is used, job descriptions and duties must be as clearly defined as possible to get the results desired. The book presents real-life examples that show good and bad techniques

for supervising employees. Delegating authority and control should be handled the same way as defining jobs for employees – with clearly defined expectations. Managers too involved in day-to-day operations can be just as much a problem as a manager who is not in control.

Managing Employee Performance and Communicating

Ag Help Wanted discusses the broad array of topics included in managing employee performance. It is important to remember most people want to do a good job, and poor performance can usually be traced to specific reasons. Ways to motivate employees and enhance performance are discussed as well. Another useful section of this chapter describes incentive-based pay structures with examples of various alternatives.

Probably the most important chapter covers communication and problem solving. Anyone with employees knows this can be a vital part of maintaining a good relationship with employees. The chapter looks at formal or legal communication that is part of most businesses, as well as the more delicate area of interpersonal communication. Active listening, body language and speaking techniques are presented with real-life examples. The chapter deals with giving and receiving criticism and strategies for moving from resistance to problem solving. This chapter reemphasizes the underlying theme of the book – good, clear communication between managers, owners, and employees is key to a successful business.

For More Information

To access *Ag Help Wanted*

online, go to AgHelpWanted.org. Here, managers can learn new or different approaches for examining and planning their labor needs. The entire book may be viewed online. It is also available in hardcopy for \$25 or on CD for \$10 per copy. E-mail information@aghelpwanted.org for more information.

For additional information on this and other risk management topics on the Web, visit the Western Risk Management Library online at <http://agecon.uwyo.edu/riskmgt>.

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Winter annual weeds pose control challenges

By Sandra M. Frost

Winter annual weeds, both grasses and broadleaves, are a small percentage of the weed species in the western United States, but are well worth discussing due to potential problems they may cause.

A winter annual weed is a weed that germinates in fall or winter, grows throughout spring, and sets seed and dies in early summer. In Wyoming, jointed goatgrass, downy brome (cheatgrass), prickly lettuce and tumble mustard are common winter annual weed problems.

Most winter annuals are capable of germinating and completing their life cycles as annuals or biennials as well (Table 1). Winter annual weeds are especially challenging to control because of their ability to germinate at different times of the year and to produce mature seed in varying amounts of time. They are opportunists that can avoid or escape control measures by germinating after control measures are taken.

Winter annuals that mature in spring and early summer directly compete with crops for resources during crop establishment. For example, jointed goatgrass and downy brome compete with winter wheat for resources, and mustards and downy brome compete with alfalfa. Downy brome on rangeland provides good early spring forage, but is undesirable when the plant matures. Characteristics that enhance germination and survival of winter annuals include: a short afterripening (ageing) period for seed that allows fall germination, and rapid germination in response to precipitation.

Weed management and control of winter annual weeds is challenging due to multiple life cycle possibilities. Fall-applied pre-plant and pre-emergence herbicides control fall-germinating weeds if applied before weed germination. Growers who plant Roundup Ready

crops and rely on post-emergence applications only may experience an increase in winter annual weeds in the spring. Winter annual weeds may also germinate in the spring or early summer, depending upon water availability. There will probably be multiple “flushes” of winter annual weeds that must be controlled. Check fields for winter annuals often in spring and treat weeds while small. Contact a University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service (UW CES) office or a county weed and pest control district office near you for more information. CES contact information is at <http://ces.uwyo.edu/Counties.asp>.

Table 1. Examples of winter annual weeds in the western United States. (Whitson, T. et al, Weeds of the West, 9th edition, 2000)

Weed	Life cycle
Jointed goatgrass	WA
Medusahead rye	WA
Downy brome	A/WA
Japanese brome	A/WA
Horseweed	A/WA
Wild mustard	A/WA
Clasping pepperweed	A/WA
Tumble mustard	A/WA
Common chickweed	A/WA
Persian speedwell	A/WA
Plumeless thistle	WA/B
Musk thistle	WA/B
Prickly lettuce	WA/B
Redstem filaree	WA/B
Dyer's woad	A/WA/B
Yellow sweetclover	A/WA/B

WA = winter annual; WAA = either WA or annual; WA/B = either WA or biennial; A/WA/B = either annual, winter annual, or biennial. Order of plant preference is not noted in this table.

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Big Horn basin growers explore remote sensing to benefit operations

The University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service (UW CES) and Wyoming Geographic Information Science Center (WyGIS) in the UW College of Agriculture have partnered to use mapping and spatial analysis to help ag producers increase their bottom line.

Through a U.S. Geological Survey-funded program called WyomingView, UW CES and WyGIS are working with ag producers to promote remote sensing technology, education and research. Facts about WyGIS, including contact information, are available at www.wygis.uwyo.edu/.

Ramesh Sivanpillai, WyGIS remote sensing scientist, is working with UW CES Educator Jim Gill and three farmers located between Worland and Manderson, Wyoming. These farmers grow sugar beets, malt barley, corn, and alfalfa hay. Gill services Big Horn, Fremont, Hot Springs, Park and Washakie counties.

Gill said the producers were very interested in the trends they were seeing in their fields from the first viewing of their images.

“They hope to use the imagery to make management decisions such as adjusting nutrition supplementation for a given crop and assessing disease problems early especially in the sugar beets and much more,” according to Gill.

The growers were hit particularly hard by a virus disease in their sugar beets called “Curly Top” in the 2006 growing season. The imaging technology will be used to see if any patterns of infestation of the beet crop from this type of disease can be detected with these grower fields.

Sivanpillai spent last summer visiting with the growers and compiling satellite images of fields growers identified as potential sites of interest. They were provided through the Upper Midwest Aerospace Consortium based in Grand Forks, N.D., of which UW is a member.

These services are free to producers who simply file a request with WyomingView for particular overhead images of their property. WyGIS is the state's largest repository of geospatial data used by industries, state and federal agencies, non-profit organizations and private citizens.

“The really cool part of the program is the fact there is remote sensing imagery going back at least five growing seasons to work with,” said Gill. “These will be used to compare and look for trends in the fields these growers are interested in.”

Sivanpillai and the growers have begun pinpointing specific areas they want more refined photographs of to develop zone maps. These maps help growers assess trends for cropping patterns in their respective fields.

The really exciting thing about remote sensing using infrared imagery is it can detect things going on with a crop long before the human eye can, and that's what we hope to be able to show the growers,” Gill said.

“Ultimately, it is these guys and gals who are making a living from the land who will determine how useful this technology will become in the state,” Gill added.

For more information, growers can contact Sivanpillai at (307) 766-2721 or sivan@uwyo.edu, or Gill in Worland at (307) 347-3431 or jrgill@uwyo.edu.