



Developing Effective Job Descriptions for Small Businesses and Farms

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Expectations in recent years have changed in regards to the formality of job descriptions in farm, family, and small businesses. In some instances, businesses are no longer keeping up with today's standards. There is a clear and obvious need to develop fitting, fair, and concise job descriptions in any business, regardless of business size and if the employees are related. Let's examine some scenarios.

Example 1: Danny works in the family's printing business alongside his father. He worked part-time for some extra money throughout college, but has since graduated and has entered the firm fulltime. While Danny was in college, he performed odd jobs around the printing business such as sweeping, tidying up the storefront, restocking products, and cashing out customers. He assumed that after he graduated, he would take on

more of a management role. Danny wants to consult with customers and design products for them, especially since he got his degree in graphic design. However, he finds his father asking him to do more menial tasks such as tidying up and operating the cash register; these were responsibilities that Danny had as a part-time employee in college. No job description was developed, but a salary was agreed upon when Danny entered the firm fulltime. He now feels as though he has no ground to stand on when discussing his frustration with his father.

Example 2: While walking through the finishing barn one day, the owner stopped to inform Rita that she was neglecting to properly monitor the feeders. The owner also added that she would need to stay late to finish a project another employee had started but did not have time to complete. Rita was shocked. Because she had

never been told that monitoring feeders was one of her responsibilities, she didn't know why she was being blamed for not doing it. This was the third additional duty she had been assigned in her first week on the job, and now she was also being asked to work well past what she had been told was the normal quitting time for the third day in a row. Rita wondered, "Why didn't they tell me when they hired me what my job really was? If this how I'll be treated in this business, maybe I should begin looking for employment somewhere else."

Unfortunately, the previous examples are not unusual. Difficulties with defining and communicating job expectations occur frequently. Developing effective and pointed job descriptions is critical, no matter where you work. The communication of job expectations is especially critical when adding employees. In the hiring process, besides helping you communicate job expectations, clearly written job descriptions can help you attract well-qualified applicants and make it easier to eliminate applicants who will not perform well on the job.

Job descriptions are also useful beyond the hiring process. A well-developed job description identifies the position's essential tasks. Combining these tasks with performance standards can provide criteria useful in reviewing an employee's performance. Your chances of successfully attracting and keeping a new employee will be much greater if you have given careful thought to the duties of the job and communicated these expectations to a prospective employee. Written job descriptions are an important aid to this communication. This publication explains the components of effective job descriptions and provides a suggested format for a job description and a few examples to illustrate how completed job descriptions might look.

Job Analysis and Design

A written job description can take many different forms. The purpose of the job description influences what will be contained in the document. If it is being used for an employee's existing position, it will likely contain a position title, a summary of the position, the responsibilities or duties of the position, the areas of authority, and supervision. If the job description is to be used to hire a new employee, it will likely contain these items plus information about

the working conditions, the qualifications required to succeed in the position, and the compensation (range) provided for the position.

Job Analysis

Job analysis is the process of developing a thorough understanding of the various attributes of the position. You can use Worksheet 1, Job Analysis Form (pp. 6-9), to help guide the job analysis process and organize your results. A complete job analysis should provide you with information on the:

1. Duties or responsibilities of the job: those tasks that are performed, the types of decisions the person in the position will make, and responsibility for record-keeping.
2. The qualifications needed to carry out the work: the physical abilities; general skills; previous experience; and special training, knowledge, or licenses required.
3. Work environment: the location and work conditions under which the job is performed and supervision and contacts with other business personnel, customers, and input suppliers.

Discussing the position with current employees, if there are any, can often be a useful way to gather job analysis information. In doing a job analysis, be sure to think in terms of what work needs to be done, not just the work that is currently being done.

Job Design

As you develop a job description, you also need to consider how the position will relate to other positions in the business. This is part of the job design. In addition to considering how the position relates to other positions in the business, job design also addresses the organization of the work flow, how the position will help meet your business requirements, and the personal needs of the job holder. As you think about job design, ask yourself questions such as:

1. Can you find ways to make the flow of work more efficient?
2. Is more than one person capable of performing

a critical job?

3. Can you find a way to make jobs more rewarding or give employees a greater sense of accomplishment?
4. Is there a way to organize work so that employees can vary activities according to personal needs, work habits, and the circumstances in the workplace?
5. Is there a training program that helps employees understand what they need to know in order to satisfactorily perform their duties?
6. Are there changes that can be made to address any negative stereotypes associated with the position?

Answering these questions may result in tasks being eliminated or moved from one position to another.

Components of a Job Description

Using information from your job analysis and job design, you will be in a better position to develop a short (usually one to two page) job description containing the following components:

1. Title
2. Job Summary
3. Job Tasks, Responsibilities, and Authorities
4. Job Qualifications
5. Supervision
6. Working Conditions
7. Salary and Benefits

Worksheet 2, Job Description Form (pp. 10-12), will help you to organize your job description. Remember, a job description can take many forms. These categories are ones generally used.

1. Job Title

Be sure that the job title is something that an employee can be proud of. The job title is often the first thing a prospective employee sees. Whatever title you select must accurately reflect the duties of the job and should indicate the skill level of the employee (i.e. senior or assistant). Be aware of your verbiage. For instance, there is a difference in undertone between the titles of “herdsman” or “herd manager” and

“secretary” or “office manager”, even though the jobs’ descriptions might be identical.

2. Job Summary

The job summary should be limited to four or five sentences containing essential duties, specific skills or licenses needed, special equipment used in the position, and physical abilities necessary to perform the job. The summary may also include information about interactions with other business employees as well as the kind of customers or suppliers with whom the employee will likely interact.

The job summary is often used when advertising for new employees, so it should be concise and clear. Summaries can be easier to write after completing other sections of the job description.

3. Job Tasks, Responsibilities, and Authorities

So, what exactly will each employee do? In the job responsibilities section, state the major tasks and sub-tasks that are essential for the position. You may also want to indicate the amount of time or percentage of an employee’s time that may be devoted to each of the major tasks.

Tasks are observable actions. The list of tasks usually starts with the most important or most time-consuming task. For example, if the position requires maintaining financial records for the business, you would expect to observe that employee entering receipt and expense data into the accounting program. Providing percentage estimates of the time to be spent on important tasks can give employees a sense of how to prioritize the different components of their job.

From your job analysis, you may have developed a long list of tasks and responsibilities. Group like tasks together by responsibility. Once grouped, there should be no more than eight main responsibilities. Any more than this number can result in an overly complicated document that could potentially confuse future and current employees. Each major responsibility can have sub-duties, but limit these to four.

Describe each task in a short statement. Beginning each statement with an action verb makes the responsibilities seem more real to potential candidates. Examples of action verbs include: performs, drives, cooks, coaches, monitors, plans,

Table 1. Examples of Specific Language for Use in Job Descriptions

Too General	Better
Keeps the Books	Enter revenue and expense transactions; prepare income statements, balance sheets, and projected cash flows
Keeps Machinery in Good Working Order	Conduct regular inspections of farm equipment, make needed repairs, and provide advice on replacement of machinery
Handles	Receive, sort, and file monthly personnel action reports

inputs, supervises, recommends, analyzes, paints, weeds, answers, changes, trains, verifies, sells, organizes, files, plays, examines, and orders. Using specific language will help you and the employee define the job. For examples, see Table 1.

Again, keep the list of duties focused on the major tasks. Including a statement such as “assists with other duties for the good of co-workers and the business” as one of the duties provides flexibility to adjust the job description at any time.

In areas of authority, list the areas in which your job analysis indicates that the person will have decision-making power. For example, a person may have the authority to make purchases for repairs totaling \$500 or less.

4. Job Qualifications

In this area, indicate the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics that an individual must have to perform the job duties. Knowledge is factual or procedural information that is necessary for successfully performing a task. A skill is an individual’s level of proficiency at performing a particular task. Ability refers to a more general enduring capability that an individual possesses. Finally, other characteristics might be personality traits such as one’s motivation, persistence, work ethic, or willingness to be a team player. Licenses and certifications should also be listed under job

qualifications.

To help you write the job qualifications section, refer back to your job analysis, and ask yourself what knowledge, skills, or abilities and what work experience are required. You do not need to include every possible qualification, but you do need to be clear about what is essential.

If there are special physical requirements needed to perform the job, job qualifications would be the place to note them. As an example, it is often necessary for a farm employee to be able to lift such things as sacks of seed, fertilizer, feed, or bales of hay. Therefore, one of the tasks that the person must be able to perform is to lift 50 pounds. Another example could be that the job requires standing for long time periods. This should be indicated as well.

5. Supervision

In this section, indicate how this position is supervised. Indicate to whom the person in this position will report. If applicable, this section can also include whom reports to this employee (i.e. if he or she is in charge of supervising other employees).

6. Working Conditions

Here, give applicants an idea of the hours of work and overtime requirements, how much work is performed inside or outside, and the type and condition of equipment and machinery to be used. Also included could be any out-of-the-ordinary conditions in which an employee may work, such as a hot mill or in freezing temperatures. In this section, include the working relationship expected with other employees. Is this position part of a broader team, like a sales team? Also, are there special circumstances that may require work at night or on holidays?

7. Salary and Benefits

If you are using the job description to fill a new position, you will need to determine what you feel the job is worth to your business. There continues to be a debate about including salary as part of a job description. Setting a salary or other rate of compensation is a delicate process. Using the term “starting salary” implies that employees will obtain raises as they acquire time on the job. Including the statement “salary is negotiable” without giving

a pay range may waste the time of both employer and applicant if their wage expectations differ considerably.

Some employers do not like to advertise that a starting salary is negotiable because they feel doing so may encourage applicants to ask for higher wages. On the plus side, however, if the starting salary is negotiable, you have the flexibility to adjust the pay to the qualifications of the applicant. Many job descriptions advertise “salary commensurate with qualifications.”

The salary and benefits section should also detail information about benefits such as paid vacation, sick leave, personal days, health insurance coverage, possible bonuses and retirement programs. Any special benefits provided should also be noted. For example, housing is often provided to farm employees. The location and condition of any housing provided should be described. Other benefits might include opportunities to participate in additional training, leadership development, or even tuition assistance for higher education.

Final Comment

When putting together a job description, focus on what the position needs to be in light of your business’s current needs and long-term objectives. Each job task should contribute to the achievement of a desired goal or output. Note that the job you describe must be doable. When combining tasks into a job description, make sure a job has not been created that is unfillable.

A job description is generally regarded as a legal document, so anything that is seen to be discriminatory based on religious preference, sex, race, age, nationality, or physical or mental disability is illegal. This does not mean that you are required to hire someone who cannot do the job. The job description’s status as a legal document also makes it important to keep your business’s job descriptions up to date. Do not wait until you are recruiting new employees to update them. Also, do not forget your own position, as business owner or manager, when you are writing or updating job descriptions. Finally, Worksheet 2, Job Description Form (pp. 7-8), can provide guidance in organizing the material for your job descriptions. Use those sections that will help solve the problem at hand. The example job descriptions at the end of this publication illustrate

various ways that job descriptions can be organized. As these examples illustrate, it is not necessary to have something for every section of the Job Description Form to create useful job descriptions.

Finally, Worksheet 2, Job Description Form (pp. 10-12), can provide guidance in organizing the material for your job descriptions. The example job descriptions at the end of this publication illustrate various ways that job descriptions can be organized. As these examples illustrate, it is not necessary to have something for every section of the Job Description Form to create useful job descriptions.

References:

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WORKSHEET 1 - JOB ANALYSIS FORM

Name _____ Job Title _____

Department _____ Job Number _____

Supervisor's Name _____ Supervisor's Title _____

1. SUMMARY OF DUTIES: State in your own words briefly the main duties. If the position is responsible for filling out reports/records, also complete Section 8.

2. SPECIAL QUALIFICATIONS: List any licenses, permits, certifications, etc. required to perform duties assigned to the position.

3. EQUIPMENT: List any equipment, machines, or tools (e.g., computer, motor vehicles, lathes, fork lifts, drill presses, etc.) normally operated as a part of the position's duties.

<i>MACHINE</i>	<i>AVERAGE NO. HOURS PER WEEK</i>
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4. REGULAR DUTIES: In general terms, describe duties regularly performed. Please list these duties in descending order of importance and percent of time spent on them per month. List as many duties as possible and attach additional sheets, if necessary.



WORKSHEET 1 - JOB ANALYSIS FORM CONT.

5. CONTACTS: Does position require any contacts with other department personnel, other departments, outside companies or agencies? If yes, please define the duties requiring contacts and how often.

6. SUPERVISION: Does position have supervisory responsibilities? YES NO

If there is responsibility for the work of others but no direct supervision, please explain.

7. DECISION MAKING: Please explain the decisions the person in this position will make while performing the regular duties of the job.

What would be the probable result of making (a) poor judgment(s) or decision(s), or (b) improper actions?



WORKSHEET 1 - JOB ANALYSIS FORM CONT.

8. RESPONSIBILITY FOR RECORDS: List the reports and files the person would be required to prepare or maintain. State, in general, for whom each report is intended.

REPORT

INTENDED FOR

FILES MAINTAINED:

9. FREQUENCY OF SUPERVISION: How frequently must the person confer with a supervisor or other personnel in making decisions or in determining the proper course of action to be taken?

FREQUENTLY

OCCASSIONALLY

SELDOM

NEVER

10. WORKING CONDITIONS: Please describe the conditions under which the person in this position works: inside, outside, air-conditioned area, etc. Be sure to list any disagreeable or unusual working conditions.

11. JOB REQUIREMENTS: Please indicate the minimum requirements necessary to perform satisfactorily in the position.

EDUCATION:

Minimum Schooling _____

Number of Years _____

Specialization or Major _____

EXPERIENCE:

Type _____

Number of Years _____

Type _____

Number of Years _____

REQUIRED LICENSES:



WORKSHEET 1 - JOB ANALYSIS FORM CONT.

12. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Please provide additional information, not included in any of the previous items, which would be important in a description of the position.



WORKSHEET 2 - JOB DESCRIPTION FORM

JOB TITLE _____

SUPERVISOR _____

1. JOB SUMMARY:

2. JOB TASKS AND RESPONSIBILITIES REGULARLY PERFORMED:

3. AUTHORITY/DECISIONS MADE AS PART OF REGULAR DUTIES:



WORKSHEET 2 - JOB DESCRIPTION FORM CONT.

4. JOB QUALIFICATIONS:

a. Education Background:

Field _____ Number of Years _____

Field _____ Number of Years _____

b. Experience:

Type _____ Number of Years _____

Type _____ Number of Years _____

c. Special Training or Licenses:

d. Physical Requirements:

5. SUPERVISION:



WORKSHEET 2 - JOB DESCRIPTION FORM CONT.

6. WORKING CONDITIONS: Describe the conditions under which the work will be performed—inside, outside, air-conditioned area, etc. Be sure to list any disagreeable or unusual working conditions.

Work Hours: _____ Average Hours Per Week: _____

Days Off Per Week: _____ Holidays Per Year: _____

Overtime: Never Seldom Often Pay

Work Environment: _____

7. SALARY AND BENEFITS:

Beginning Salary \$: _____ per _____ Range _____

Other Benefits: _____

EXAMPLE JOB DESCRIPTION - MECHANIC

General Description of Job

General maintenance and repair of all equipment used in the business. Includes the servicing of vehicles, shop equipment, and machinery used.

1. Essential Duty (40%): Maintenance of Equipment

Tasks: Keep a log of all maintenance performed on equipment. Replace parts and fluids according to maintenance schedule. Regularly check gauges and loads for deviations that may indicate problems with equipment. Perform non-routine maintenance as required. May involve limited supervision and training of operators performing maintenance.

2. Essential Duty (40%): Repair of Equipment

Tasks: Requires inspection of equipment and a recommendation that a piece be scrapped or repaired. If equipment is to be repaired, mechanic will take whatever steps are necessary to return the piece to working order. This may include a partial or total rebuilding of the piece using various hand tools and equipment. Will primarily involve the overhaul and troubleshooting of diesel engines and hydraulic equipment.

3. Essential Duty (10%): Testing and Approval

Tasks: Ensure that all required maintenance and repair has been performed and that it was performed according to manufacturer specifications. Approve or reject equipment, as being ready for use on a job.

4. Essential Duty (10%): Maintain Stock

Tasks: Maintain inventory of parts needed for the maintenance and repair of equipment. Responsible for ordering satisfactory parts and supplies at the lowest possible cost.

Nonessential Functions: Other Duties as Assigned

Qualifications: Experience in vehicle and machinery maintenance

EXAMPLE JOB DESCRIPTION - CROP PRODUCTION ASSOCIATE

Physical Requirements: Must be able to lift at least 50 pounds on a regular basis.

The main goals of this position are as follows:

- I. Perform all field operations in the most timely manner possible.
 - II. Keep crop production costs within the established budgets.
 - III. Maintain all equipment in top working order.
 - IV. Keep stored grains in top quality. Keep storage losses less than ____ %.
1. It is the overall goal of this position to perform crop operations in the most timely, cost-effective and efficient manner possible.
 2. Do your part to provide an atmosphere of teamwork, camaraderie, and an enjoyable work environment for everyone at the operation.
 3. Manage any employees in your area in accordance with guidelines established by the management.
 4. Follow all operating procedures and policies established by the management.
 5. Monitor quality of stored grains throughout the year.
 6. Spring and Fall operations are particularly time sensitive—a) Have equipment ready ahead of time, b) Remember that every delay in planting and harvesting results in yield losses, c.) Be prepared to work longer hours to accommodate weather, breakdowns and other factors that are beyond our control.
 7. Equipment maintenance is one of your highest priorities—a) Keep safety shields in place, b) Keep fluids at the optimum levels, c) Perform maintenance procedures on time. Lubricate, change fluids, check tire pressures, watch for unusual wear, fix minor problems before they become major expenses, d) Use off-season time to do major maintenance and repair, e) Have all equipment ready for the field ahead of time. Planters and harvesters are particularly time sensitive and need thorough preparation ahead of their season.
 8. Safety is extremely important—a) Maintain safety equipment, b) Use goggles, gloves and other body protection when using chemicals, c) Use support stands and jacks when working under equipment, d) Wear safety glasses and other protective gear when working around torches, welders, drills and other equipment that creates heat, sparks or projectiles, e) Be extremely careful around PTOs and other chains, gear, belts, etc.
 9. Remember that in crop production, there are many factors beyond our control—weather, breakdowns, market swings, etc. As a result we must do everything we can to perform our best in the areas within our control.
 10. Perform all data collection and record-keeping duties as defined by management.
 11. Keep waste to a minimum and be constantly evaluating additional ways to reduce costs.
 12. Keep facilities neat and presentable.
 13. Show respect to any and all visitors and/or customers of the operation.
 14. Enjoy what you do and provide suggestions to make working here more satisfying for everyone.

The Manager reserves the right to make any necessary changes to this job description and to request that the Crop Production Associate perform additional duties as the need arises. These additional requests will be reasonable and respectful of the Crop Production Associate's time and abilities.

Signed Employee _____ Date _____

Signed Supervisor _____ Date _____

Adapted from Tyler (2001).

EXAMPLE JOB DESCRIPTION - SECRETARY/OFFICE MANAGER

- A. TITLE: Secretary/Office Manager
- B. AREAS OF PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY (Management reserves the right to change at any time.)
 - 1. Manage corporate payroll
 - a. Weekly labor payroll
 - b. Monthly benefits to employees
 - c. Monthly Social Security, Medicare, unemployment (federal, state) payments and reports
 - d. Monthly payments for federal and state taxes withheld from employees
 - e. Worker's compensation
 - f. Prepare and send W-2 records at end of calendar year
 - g. Prepare and send all federal and state labor tax forms
 - h. Prepare annual wage benefit reports for each regular employee
 - i. Keep records of vacation time, sick leave, personal time for all employees
 - 2. Assist bookkeeper with:
 - a. Entering data, verifying printouts, analyzing monthly printouts with farm manager, filing reports
 - b. Sending farm records to CPA
 - c. Preparing records for comparative analysis
 - d. Preparing records for Farm Management Consultant
 - e. Assist bookkeeper in preparing financial statements for corporation
 - 3. Assist with grain enterprise
 - a. Entering data concerning yields, drying charges, storage charges, inventory records
 - b. Keep daily record or as necessary for managers' use on:
 - i. Inventory and locations of landlords' and corporation's grain contracted
 - ii. Corporation's and landlords' grains yet unsold
 - 4. Banking
 - a. Cross check canceled checks
 - b. Bank reconciliation
 - 5. Consult with corporation's Board of Directors
 - a. Set and implement farm goals and objectives
 - b. Set and implement personal short-, intermediate- and long-term goals and objectives



EXAMPLE JOB DESCRIPTION - SECRETARY/OFFICE MANAGER CONT.

C. AREAS OF SECONDARY RESPONSIBILITY

1. Prepare job descriptions
 - a. Annually for review
 - b. Assist farm manager in completing for new employees
2. Observe and learn corporate tax regulations
3. Responsible for writing farm goals, employees' objectives annually for board approval
4. Assist with errands during busy seasons

D. AUTHORITY

1. Sign corporate checks
2. Sign bank loans and repay them

E. IMMEDIATE SUPERVISOR: President/Farm Manager

President/Farm Manager _____

Secretary/Office Manager _____

EXAMPLE JOB DESCRIPTION - PRESIDENT/FARM MANAGER

- A. TITLE: President/Farm Manager

- B. AREAS OF PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY
 - 1. Responsibilities in grain production enterprise
 - a. Planting
 - b. Supervise post-emergent spraying of chemicals and sidedress ammonia
 - c. Combine beans
 - d. Manage grain handling system
 - i. Maintenance of bins, scale, dryer, elevator
 - ii. Oversee all handling of stored grains
 - e. Transport grain from field to drying or storage centers
 - f. Transport seed grains from field to grain company
 - g. Supervise all field work
 - h. Determine and order all inputs for crops
 - 2. Responsible for health and comfort of livestock
 - a. Maintain communication with Livestock supervisor
 - b. Liaison officer between consulting veterinarian
 - c. Do Sunday feeding every 4th and 5th week
 - 3. Manage swine enterprise
 - a. Authorized to purchase all inputs of swine operation
 - b. Planning the swine production enterprise
 - c. Selection and purchase of breeding and/or feeding stock
 - d. Marketing of all livestock; pricing, transporting
 - e. Feed formulation and determining rations
 - f. Consult with Asst. Manager on operating plans, capital purchases
 - g. Determine profitability of swine enterprise at regular intervals
 - h. One year in advance, plan rotation of holiday feeding schedule
 - i. Take inventory of livestock quarterly
 - j. Meet with Feed Rep. quarterly and relay information to Asst. Sec.
 - 4. Responsible for maintenance of equipment and farm buildings
 - a. Feed center
 - b. Outbuildings and improvements
 - c. Portable equipment for livestock enterprise
 - d. Shop facilities
 - 5. Responsible for Corporate Budget
 - a. Complete final fiscal budget by Jan. 15; preliminary by Dec. 1

EXAMPLE JOB DESCRIPTION - PRESIDENT/FARM MANAGER CONT.

- b. Approve budget for the next year between Jan. 15-30 with Board of Directors
 - c. Maintain monthly reports: actual, year-to-date versus budgeted
 - d. Meet with Board of Directors to revise budget
6. Responsible for ordering and purchasing farm tools and equipment
7. Responsible for employee locating, training, and supervision
- a. Hiring, firing and training
 - b. Evaluation semi-annually; reports to be filed with Board of Directors (secretary will assist with this)
 - c. Salaries, incentives, benefits
 - d. Meet annually with Board of Directors
8. Responsible for monthly inspection of all grain storage bins on all farms
- a. First day of the month
 - b. At weather changes or times of stress
9. Consult with officers on the following:
- a. Operating plans
 - b. Purchase of new equipment
 - c. Replacement of equipment
 - d. Short, intermediate, and long-range planning
- C. AREAS OF SECONDARY RESPONSIBILITY
1. Joint responsibility for grain marketing
- a. Discuss market trends on regular basis with bookkeeper
 - b. Approve marketing strategies
 - c. Help plan long-range grain marketing program annually
- D. AUTHORITY
- 1. Responsible for day-to-day operational decisions
 - 2. Authorized to sign corporation checks and bank loans
 - 3. Authorized to purchase all inputs of swine enterprise, with budgeted limits
 - 4. Authorized to market grains and livestock
- E. IMMEDIATE SUPERVISOR: Board of Directors

Board Chairperson _____

President/Farm Manager _____