

The issue I will be reporting on is the **difficulty of successfully recruiting and retaining seasonal workers.**

ABC Fruit Packers is a small fruit packing business located in [rural area of New Zealand]. They are the only kiwifruit pack house in the region. Here they pack green and gold varieties of mostly organic kiwifruit for export through Zespri International. ABC is an example of a business that relies on seasonal workers and has had issues in the past with finding enough staff to match the work. Owner of ABC, Ms X previously advertised a job for an administration worker. She received over 200 applications but only two were suitable for the job. ABC need seasonal staff all year round however demand for them vastly increases between March and June which is the peak picking season. Seasonal workers are imperative to ABC as they fill in the holes that are created when demand for work is greater than the supply of staff. Employing a large number of seasonal workers saves businesses like ABC money as it is cheaper to hire seasonal staff than hire a permanent employee who will be entitled to more employee benefits and to whom the firm will have more legal obligations. When demand for workers exceeds the number of staff available, ABC loses productivity. That is, if ABC Fruit Packers does not have enough seasonal staff to harvest the huge amount of kiwifruit that is produced in peak kiwifruit season, overall profits decrease due to fewer fruit picked and packed. As a result, less are sold and the surplus product is wasted.

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The well-known supermarket Pak'nSave is a business that also understands the importance of recruiting and retaining seasonal staff. The ZZZ branch of Pak'nSave typically requires seasonal staff during holidays, especially Christmas. Just like ABC they rely hugely on seasonal workers and for similar reasons. I interviewed the human resources manager at ZZZ Pak'nSave's, MH, who informed me that they do not have any major issues when it comes to hiring seasonal staff because "there are always people waiting in line to get a job with us". But I think that this is just a result of Pak'nSave being a large corporation which happens to be right in town with relatively easy work, compared to a small business requiring hard physical work that is located in a rural area.

Unlike Pak'nSave which is in a fortunate position of easily being able to recruit seasonal workers, **Plentiful Pipfruit** is an apple and fruit orchard in Nelson. From my email correspondence with the owners W and G, I learned that their experience is very similar to Ms X at ABC Fruit Packers. They offer a range of roles throughout the year but cannot employ enough workers during the peak harvest season. The seasonal workers they employ are almost all tourists/backpackers so every season there is an almost complete turnover of staff with no continuity of experience.

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There are many perspectives about the cause of the lack of seasonal workers. Unpleasant and undesirable work is the first cause. It is human nature for a person to try to avoid something that is unattractive or unpleasant. For example, people may not like the cold or not like physically demanding work or sitting in an office and because of that they simply won't apply for certain jobs. An unpleasant job will always have less potential staff than a pleasant one unless another factor outweighs the negatives of the job, which brings us to the next cause, not enough pay.

The level of pay is a huge if not the best motivator for workers. It can determine whether an employee just drags along and does the job, or does it extremely well. In this particular case the workers are not getting paid enough, which is the reason firms are having difficulty with the recruitment and retention of seasonal workers. People are reluctant to work at a particular business if the pay is perceived as too low compared to the work that is being conducted. Take a paper run for example. The average paper run is between 100 and 200 papers, taking roughly an hour for each delivery, through rain and shine and pays a mere 2.5 cents per paper, with an overall total of \$25 to \$50 per delivery. The reason the paper run is so undesirable to many people is because of the amount of physical effort that is demanded and the fact that it must be done regardless of the weather. The negatives of the job clearly offset the positives.

The next cause is location which is a significant factor that needs to be considered when it comes to looking for seasonal staff. Workers care about how far they must travel to work because it costs time and money. People who travel a fair distance to get to work have to forfeit a portion of their pay to cover petrol or public transport costs. Having a fair distance to drive also means sacrificing time spent on other things such as sleep, relaxing or spending time with family or friends. It would cost more money and time if a seasonal worker at ABC Fruit Packers had to drive from [nearest city], than a worker who lived in [the rural location]. It is more likely that a person will take a job close to home, such as at Pak'nSave.

A large reason firms find it difficult to find adequate seasonal workers is because some of the applicants lack basic work skills. For example, Ms X from ABC has come across workers who lack basic skills for the workforce, such as critical thinking and communication. This makes things difficult because they are unable to complete the work that needs to be done and they operate at a slow pace.

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Another problem seasonal employers, especially ABC Fruit Packers, face is the fact that the majority of available and willing workers are either still in high school or are studying at university. The students are only available to work when they are on study break and holidays. So it is easy to find enough workers during the Christmas holiday period

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because school and university is out, but once the academic year starts there is a big drop in seasonal workers. Ms X has found that most students have the right attitude and mind-set for holiday packing work as they are used to being occupied and organised and they are usually highly motivated and have a very clear purpose, to earn as much money as they can to fund their study, their living or their fun. This is also the case for tourists or backpackers but for those people Ms X has to check they have the right visas to legally work. In Ms X's experience those who have been unemployed for a while can take a long time to settle into the work as they need to re-establish good work habits and may see the work as a filler until better work comes along.

The consequences of not having enough seasonal staff on board are that less product is sold overall, generating less income for the business. There are many consequences which occur due to a lack of seasonal staff, however those that are most detrimental to the company are those that have a negative impact on production, productivity and motivation. Understaffing means that customers' demand for fruit cannot be met so these customers might buy the competitor's product. Workers who are overworked or feel they are under pressure due to understaffing may become resentful and less careful in their work. An attitude of 'why bother' may fill their heads.

Solutions

- 1 The firm could find out what makes their jobs unappealing and add/remove or alter an aspect of the job until it is more appealing than before, to the point a person would no longer be repelled by it. For example, if work at ABC Fruit Packers was unappealing because the work location was too hot or too cold, workers could be provided with drink bottles, sunhats, glasses etc, making it easier for workers to cope. Ms X should take care that environmental conditions comply with the Health & Safety at Work Act 2015. Consultation and communication are important for good workplace relationships. Ms X could consult with some long-term seasonal/casual workers to get their feedback on how the job could be made more appealing to potential workers. 3
- 2 A response to pay being perceived as too low – alter the existing pay or conditions to make the work more attractive. The pay rate might be able to be increased or other strategies such as offering bonuses or extended paid work breaks, could be introduced to appeal to seasonal workers. For example, a firm could offer to pay for petrol costs and offer light meals for packers who have to travel a certain distance to and from work. 4
- 3 A solution for workers' lack of basic skills could be on-the-job training so that new workers can develop the skillsets required for their jobs. For example, a worker at ABC Fruit Packers would have an experienced staff member allocated to them as part of the induction process to teach safe and appropriate work practices, including how to use technology. 4
- 4 The living wage movement supports paying higher than the minimum wage to address the growing gap between the rich and the poor as poverty increases. Adopting the living wage could be a solution for some employers of seasonal agribusiness workers. If they are being paid the hourly living wage workers may be more motivated and have a better work ethic as they will be less stressed through coping with living costs. Companies like The Warehouse can see the value of paying a living wage as their employees feel more valued and are now much more likely to be fully productive. That's what ABC is trying to achieve. If ABC were to pay the living wage it might attract a much higher calibre of applicants for seasonal work.
- 5 There is a fruit picking company in [region] that has been hiring church members who are saving to go on mission and service projects. This could be a solution because it fills the gap of seasonal workers and also provides employment for the church members. As the workers have a common goal the employers could have more confidence that work ethic will be high and the work will be performed well. Another alternative is to market to recruit overseas travellers and backpackers. In this case employers would need to make sure that non-NZ residents who are already in New Zealand on student or visitor visas have successfully applied for work visas so that they may legally be employed to do seasonal work in the horticulture industry. 4

Conclusion

I recommend ABC Fruit Packers adopt the living wage for their employees as it is a sustainable yet rewarding solution that will increase the level of motivation and productivity. This will help with the retention of present staff and the recruitment of new workers. It will also result in happy employees who can afford to cover their living costs without an added amount of stress that can affect their work ethic. Although this solution increases the firm's staffing costs it will benefit the business through increased productivity, sales and profits. 4

All sources cited, interview notes provided as an appendix, and a bibliography provided.