Hiring qualified individuals contributes to your farm’s overall strategic success. This step-by-step guide to hiring new employees will assure that the time invested in the hiring process is maximized.

In hiring the most qualified candidates for positions, follow this nine-step process. Forms referenced are part of the HR Tool Kit.

**Step One: Create or Update the Job Description**

A typical hiring mistake is to jump into the process without knowing exactly what one is looking for. Several candidates might appear to fit the bill. Without using a job description, one may run the risk of hiring someone based on a first impression, sometimes without getting to those behaviors that enable long-term success in the position.

A job description should be on hand for every position in the company. This job description will be used, not only for employment procedures such as selection and hiring, but also to determine appropriate compensation for the position, to identify and develop training needed for the position, and to assist in performance appraisal.

A job description should include:

- Duties and responsibilities of the position
- Information about working conditions, tools and equipment used
- Knowledge and skills required for the position
- Reporting relationships and interactions with other positions within the company

**Options for Assuring an Accurate Job Description**

**Option 1: Analyze the current job description for the open position. Revise the job description as necessary.**

It is advantageous to have a job description for the current opening already on hand. However, one should not assume it is an accurate reflection of the job. The best job descriptions are living, breathing documents that are updated as responsibilities change. Those responsible for hiring, as well as others in the company who have a supervisory or related role to a particular position should take time to look at the description closely based on the criteria above and current business needs. When interviewing for an opening, it is the perfect time to make changes in roles and responsibilities. Identify what is needed for the future and revise job descriptions accordingly.

**Option 2: Adapt a sample position from many already created in the HR Toolkit.**

This HR Toolkit contains several general job descriptions. When hiring for a position one may choose a job description close to what you are looking for and modify the description to create an accurate reflection of the job, again considering what you need for the future of the business.

**Option 3: Utilize a Job Analysis Form to gather the appropriate information and create a unique job description.**

Job analysis is a process to identify and determine, in detail, the particular job duties and relative importance of these duties for a given job. A template has been created to assist with this process. When using the job analysis form, gather input from those currently in the position and also from those who interact with the position. Again, this is a perfect time to stop and consider: “What would be ideal?” and, “What are our needs for the future?”

With an accurate job description in hand, the search for qualified candidates may begin.
Step Two: Search for the Best

Finding the best candidates for the open position is the company's primary goal. With the job description in hand, one has a good picture of what they are looking for in terms of a candidate's knowledge, skill, background and experience. Much of this information will be immediately available to as a candidate completes the application form.

Application

Before announcing the opening, an application form should be in hand. This form is completed by each individual as a means of applying for the open position. When completed, it provides the hiring party with a detailed overview of each applicants' work history, skills, interests, and education. The form also offers applicants an opportunity to describe themselves to the company and to outline unique abilities and experience. The template in the HR Toolkit may be used when the company does not have a standard application form.

For some positions, candidates may initially be requested to submit a resume. Each resume will have a style and content unique to the applicant. There will often be little consistency between them. The application form should then be completed at the time of an interview. The application form fills in gaps from the resume, providing the necessary information to move forward with the candidate, as well as enabling equal comparison of all candidates.

Recruiting Internal Candidates

When looking for candidates, the company should not overlook potential internal applicants. To retain the best employees, they should see their future with [company name]. If employees have intentionally been given development opportunities, they may be the best fit for the position.

Internal applicants should be provided an opportunity and, in fact, should be encouraged to apply. Even if someone is in mind for the position, it is best practice to open the position up for applications from others in order to determine additional interest in the opening. Open positions should be posted in a location where current staff can see the opportunities. If internal applicants do not qualify for the opening, there should be an opportunity for open discussion on ways that they can fill the gaps in their knowledge/skill/experience for future opportunities with [company name].

Recruiting External Candidates

As the company looks externally for new hires, representatives should consider recruiting options in addition to traditional newspaper and Internet advertising. In many cases, the alternatives may provide equal or, at times, a better group of qualified candidates. Some options include:

Find success with an employee referral program. Programs can be structured in numerous ways. Some offer incentives / rewards to employees for each referral resulting in a successful hire and a designated length of service (often six to twelve months.) Others focus their use to specific job openings, particularly those requiring a special skill set. However set up, the goal and practice of the referral program should encourage employees to refer individuals whom they view as some of the "best colleagues they've had the pleasure to work with."

Hire a third-party firm. Using its business name to advertise openings, the firm will also often screen out unqualified applicants. This method can be effective in some of the other hiring stages such as background checks, etc. Worthwhile firms should commit to regular communication and have a good understanding of the job position, qualifications, experience, etc., that is being sought after.

Develop your networking infrastructure. Utilize a network of agriculture associates, vendors, and organizations to get the word out that there is an open position. To add extra validation, prepare a packet for distribution to interested parties. Include basic company information, the job description, and contact information.
Consider partnering with educational institutions. Consider candidates from area high schools (and programs), and particularly area colleges that support agricultural programs. Direct hire or sponsoring student internships is a great way to take advantage of potential young talent and introduce new people to rewarding careers in the pork industry.

Go to Web sites where candidates are posting their resumes. For greater success, gravitate to ag-related sites (job boards) when the location or job position scope affords the opportunity. One should be prepared, however, to spend more time weeding through potential candidates. Generally, this method supports a search where candidates are being selected based on a list of core characteristics rather than on current swine experience.

Post opening in appropriate public locations. Work with vendors, partners, or local retail establishments that potential candidates may visit frequently to post job openings. Many such establishments will be happy to do this as a value-added item in their community relationship.

This approach should yield a variety of applications and resumes from which one may choose the best candidates. From here, candidate screening and then interviewing should begin.

Step Three: Screen Applicants

The process for narrowing a list of candidates to the most qualified is known as screening. Hiring parties will want to take time and care as they move toward selecting the best new hire possible. Screening a pool of candidates enables them to focus valuable time on the right individuals.

Thoroughly review all candidates’ applications and/or resumes before selecting candidates to interview.

- Look for those candidates who best match stated qualifications.
- Identify red flags such as unexplained long spans of time between jobs, frequent job changes in recent years, lack of references, or signs of questionable work ethic reflected in the application.

The applications and resumes should be divided into two piles to indicate level of interest in interviewing them. Keep all applications / resumes for later communication.

Once a pool of applicants has been screened, a good deal of time will be spent with this group moving forward in the interviewing and selection process. If to the list should be narrowed further, consider a brief phone interview with each.

- Utilize a phone interview form which will limit inquiries during that conversation to qualifications and abilities necessary to perform the job. Salary expectations may also be confirmed.

Step Four: Prepare for Interviews

A great deal of hiring is conducted based on nothing more than instinct. That very simply equates to hiring based on assumption and intuition. Therefore, one may be likely to see employee turnover because that instinct is not very accurate. The company wants to hire the person who will be most successful in his or her job. Prepare for the interview by doing the following:

Contact the best candidates and arrange for individual 30 to 45 minute in-person interviews. Prepare candidates at that time for the interview by briefing them on [company name] and the basics of the position. This allows time in the interview to concentrate on the important issues like determining if the candidate’s skills and qualities are a good fit for the company.

Determine who will be included in the interview process. Utilize an interview team, if appropriate. A team of no more
than two to three interviewers is optimal. Any more can be too intimidating for the candidate and feel more like an interrogation. While having one individual conduct the interview is acceptable, interview teams can bring great benefits.

- By nature, one decision-maker will tend to hire people similar to him or her. The team approach encourages a closer, more objective look at the skills and experience that goes along with the candidate’s personality.
- Interview teams are generally more prepared and can improve the casual process that an interview can sometimes become. Directed conversation is necessary and informative. “Getting chatty” or being too conversational may distract from getting answers to job-related abilities and could lead to legal trouble.
- The candidate’s would-be direct supervisor should be a member of the interview team whenever possible.

**Arrange an appropriate interview location.** Some place that is quiet and conducive to conversation is best for the formal interview process. Seating should be arranged so that the interviewer(s) and the candidate can easily talk without distractions. A tour of the operation or job-specific work environment may be a good follow-up to the interview.

**Prepare the basic interview questions ahead of time** to ensure that each is job-related. Focus on questions about past job performance, since past behavior on the job is the single best predictor of future job performance.

These questions should be good, probing (but legal) interview questions. Simply put, if the information is not needed, it should not be sought after. Consider how questions are worded in order to stay within legal bounds. For example, one cannot ask, “Are you a U.S. citizen?” However, they may ask, “Are you authorized to work in the United States?” Questions also should dig into details but remain within the acceptable lines of questioning when the qualifications sought require it.

- Team interview questions should also be decided upon ahead of time. They should also be discussed, and members should determine who will ask what.

Create the questions as a guide for the interview, with space for interviewers to take notes.

**Prepare a candidate evaluation form.** Again, to avoid hiring based solely on personal instinct, job expectations have been detailed and aligned interview questions have been created. After the interviews, candidates should be compared to one another. This form, completed after the interview, helps when evaluating each candidate on the same criteria. See the HR Toolkit for a sample form.

**Step Five: Interview the Candidates**

The interview process allows for a first impression of the candidate. More importantly, it allows for validation of the first impression. In the interview, hiring professionals can learn more about the candidate and their fit with the opening.

**Establish rapport.** Greet the candidate as he/she arrives. If interviewing as a team, make sure introductions are made. Make the candidate feel welcome and at ease.

Ask questions, focusing on past job performance. Begin the interview with a brief review of the job description. This may already have been done if a phone interview was conducted as part of the screening process. However, since past behavior on the job is the single best predictor of future job performance, questions should focus on what the candidate did in the past and how the person did it. The interview guide created in Step 4 follows this best practice.

**Additional tips for the interviewing process include…**

**Probe to clarify understanding.** There are times when the candidate does not give enough specific information to give a good indicator of their past performance. To probe, one should ask for more detail or an example. Use phrases to gather more information, such as:

- Tell me about a time…
- Describe a situation…
Tell me exactly how you dealt with...
Think of a specific time you… and then tell me about what you did.
This information about the past helps provide an indicator of future performance.

Allow silence. Candidates need time to think about their response to a question posed. Be comfortable with this break in the conversation. Do not rush to fill the silence with conversation or by moving to another question. Give them time to gather their thoughts.

Seek contrary evidence. When a candidate seems almost too good to be true, he or she might be. Your desire to find a perfect candidate can sometimes cloud judgment. You should consider asking a question such as this one in the interview: “It sounds like you have done a fantastic job in the past as an animal caretaker, but obviously we aren’t all perfect. Tell me about a time when things didn’t go as planned.” Conversely, if a person sounds as though he or she just does not fit, don’t give up too fast. Ask questions to make sure that judgment of the person is on target.

Allow the candidate to ask questions. Once the interviewer has completed his or her questions and has a good picture of the individual’s potential fit with [company name], the candidate should be given an opportunity to ask questions. Allow several minutes at the end of the interview for this.

Close the interview. Thank the candidate for his or her time and interest in the position. Ensure that the application form has been completed. Without making promises, inform him/her of the hiring timeframe and the next steps in this process. Escort the candidate to the exit as a courtesy and gesture of professionalism.

Complete the Candidate Evaluation Form. As a way to easily compare candidates later, complete this form immediately after each interview. Add to the notes on the interview guide, and capture as much relevant information as possible. As one moves from one interview to the next, it will become more difficult to recall details of conversations with individual candidates.

Step Six: Conduct Background Checks
Background checks are sometimes of great benefit. Keep in mind that no matter how complete an interview was, a job candidate may have only offered exactly what they thought the interviewer(s) would want to hear. Once a decision has been made regarding interest in hiring an applicant:
- Complete reference checks.
- Conduct background checks, as appropriate, and in accordance with state and local laws.
- Arrange for completion of pre-employment drug and alcohol screens, as appropriate, and in accordance with state and local laws.

For more information, see “Understanding Background Checks” in the HR Toolkit.

Step Seven: Select the Best Candidate
After completing the interview process, it is time to make a decision regarding which candidate to hire. Interview questions should have been developed with the job description in mind. Look back at interview notes and compare candidate evaluation forms.
- How have your candidates stacked up against the qualifications and traits required for the job?
- How does Candidate A compare to Candidate B?
- Who is the best qualified and is the best fit for the company?

Hiring professionals should delay hiring if they are not confident at this point. A bad hire will invariably lead to an unproductive employee or possible termination, and the cost of that turnover is extremely high. Turnover costs include
recruiting costs, the time to screen and interview new candidates, and the time and money to train the new employee, in addition to the cost of lost work time while all this is taking place. Costs can literally range from 35 percent to as much as 100 percent of the employee’s annual salary.

The company knows what it is looking for and should not settle for less.

**Step Eight: Extend the Job Offer**

Before extending an offer to the first choice candidate, make sure the process is complete. For example, is there an application in hand? Have references been checked?

Contact the candidate and extend the offer of employment and starting wage. Any offer made at this point should be made contingent upon satisfactory completion of required testing and background checks, if those checks are in process. Clarify this with the candidate.

- Identify a mutually acceptable start date for employment.
- Follow up with a letter confirming position and wage, as well as instructions for arrival on the new hire’s start date and his/her first day’s schedule.

Notify other applicants that the position has been filled. Frequently this is done with a post card or letter. For interviewed candidates, a personal phone call may be appropriate.

- Let all applicants know the company will keep them in mind for future openings that may fit their skill set and interests. Maintain a file of the resumes received. One never knows when you may have an opening and have information on the perfect person right in the system.

**Step Nine: Plan for Orientation**

On the initial start date, new employees will complete required paperwork and begin their orientation. Supervisors should complete the new hire checklist with new employees and go through the employee manual.