



# The Professional Match-makers in rural recruitment..

**Jenny Martin heads Outback Staff which has offices in Rockhampton, Sydney and Perth.**

**Their clients include large corporations and 'literally thousands of small operators' in a range of industries: cattle; sheep; grains/cereals; cotton; viticulture/horticulture; feedlots, and general small crops.**

The director of Australia's largest agricultural recruitment agency believes farmers could make recruitment a lot easier for themselves if they used more professional assistance. The agency has been in business for 14 years and has a client base which is absolutely Australia wide. Many farms have only one employee. But it is finding that one employee that makes all the difference.

Jenny recognises a reluctance amongst farmers to use agencies for recruitment, due to a widespread view that agents 'don't know a gum tree from a high rise'. However, finding the right worker is not easy for farmers and a lot have bad experiences with recruiting. Farmers often rely on the 'popping in to the local pub' method. However, Jenny points out that recruitment agencies have a much wider pool of employees to choose from and a level of professionalism in finding the right staff. The important thing is to find an agency which has sound experience in the agricultural industry.

One area where agencies can be particularly helpful is in writing advertisements for job vacancies. Jenny said farmers are sometimes reluctant to use descriptions which make the job sound attractive, and this can lead to a loss of potential applicants. For example, one ad, written by a farmer for a stationhand, listed duties such as horse riding ability, and facilities, such as a house. However, the assets of the house (eg: air conditioning, modern kitchen, ample accommodation etc) were not mentioned. Emphasizing the good features would have encouraged more applications.

Many farmers fail to understand the importance of the ad as a recruitment tool.

Jenny said that, before embarking on advertising, it is necessary to think carefully about:

- skills and duties of the position
- facilities available, and
- room for promotion and training

Another problem is in finding workers who will stay for the long term.

*"Everyone wants someone who will come and stay for ten years," said Jenny.*

However, Jenny points out that times have changed and there is a whole generation of people who change jobs constantly and don't necessarily stay in the rural industry long term. In fact, the diminishing rural workforce is a major problem and Jenny believes it is 'really, really crucial' to devise positive strategies for retaining staff.

*"Employers have to value and protect the current workforce. Primary producers have to entice people from the towns and cities."*

While it is important to recognise employees want good conditions and wages, many are also looking for a future in their rural career. Farmers need to recognise employees need the opportunity to improve themselves and that the position shouldn't be presented as a 'dead-end job'. The opportunity for agricultural

career promotion is of central importance and should be tied to training. Jenny's basic message for farm employers is:

- plan
- train, and
- retain.

All of this needs to be considered at the outset and is part of the package of benefits which the employer offers to the employee. Career development needs to be worked into the farm's business plan and should be used to attract people into rural careers.

One of the services Jenny's agency provides is in employer/employee communication, a skill Jenny sees lacking in many farmers. For Jenny, successful employment and effective communication go hand in hand - 'one doesn't work without the other'.

*"We hear millions of times – 'they didn't last the first day!'"*

One reason for this, according to Jenny, is that generally farmers are not good communicators. Jenny talks with both employer and employee throughout the probation period and beyond to ensure things are working out. She has found employees are often more comfortable when talking to a third party when negotiating issues such as work practices, especially where long term staff are concerned. It is having this third party that is one of the big advantages of using recruitment and human resource agencies. And it has proved to be a very successful process as Jenny gets 'a buzz' to see so many of the young people who found work through her agency now working as farm managers.

## **Jenny's Golden Rules for making the most of a recruitment agency**

*Identify an agency with good agricultural experience that can offer both recruitment and human resource support*

*Plan what is needed:*

- *staffing should be a part of your business plan*
- *think about the skills and main duties of the job*
- *plan to provide training and consider how you can provide promotional opportunities*

*Identify how you can offer attractive facilities and conditions to the employee*

*Talk to your recruitment agency so they can write an effective job description and advertisement*

*Use an agency that can help build a good relationship with your employee, an agency that will help you to communicate effectively with your new recruit and get things off to a good start*



◀ Bradley Labuschewski of Headingly Station is one of many workers to be matched with an employer via a rural recruitment agency