

AN EXPLORATION OF HIRING AND TRAINING BY A SMALL FARM OWNER

An Exploration of Recruiting and Hands-On Training Methods through a Critical Examination of  
Human Resource Theories from the Perspective of a Small Farm Owner

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ABSTRACT

The thesis of this paper investigates the value of exploring recruiting and hands-on training methods for a unique small farm, through a self-reflection of the author's perspective as a small farm owner and a critical examination of human resource theories.

This paper explores the application of theoretical frameworks in human resource management to hiring and training practices on small farms, emphasizing the integration of interactive workshops. Drawing upon Human Capital Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Expectancy Theory, and Identity Theory, the paper delves into how small farm owners can strategically approach the recruitment, selection, and development of their workforce through hands-on workshops. By understanding these theoretical perspectives and their practical implications, small farms can optimize their human resources while nurturing a culture of collaboration, growth, and shared purpose. The paper examines how each theory informs hiring and training practices, highlighting the role of workshops in enhancing employee engagement, skill development, and the identity of both the farm and employees. Through a comprehensive exploration, this paper provides insights for small farm owners seeking to leverage theoretical principles and workshop-based approaches to effectively recruit and train their human resources and drive sustainable success in agriculture.

The author concludes that there is value found in the creation of unique recruiting processes and hands-on training methods for a small farm, which is crafted from an integration of human resource theories and the small farm owner's perspective.

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## **1. Introduction**

In the agricultural industry, effective human resource management is paramount for the success and sustainability of all farms, including my small farm, Underground Greens (UGG). This paper explores the application of theoretical frameworks in human resource management to hiring and training practices on small farms, emphasizing the integration of interactive workshops. Drawing upon Human Capital Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Expectancy Theory, and Identity Theory, the paper delves into how small farm owners can strategically approach the recruitment, selection, and development of their workforce through hands-on workshops. By understanding these theoretical perspectives and their practical implications, small farms can optimize their human resources while nurturing a culture of collaboration, growth, and shared purpose. The paper examines how each theory informs hiring and training practices, highlighting the role of workshops in employee selection, engagement, skill development, and the identity of both the farm and employees. Through a brief exploration, this paper provides insights for small farm owners seeking to leverage theoretical principles and workshop-based approaches to effectively recruit and train their human resources and drive sustainable success in agriculture.

### **1.1 Background of the study**

Underground Greens (UGG) was established in 2015 as a small, sustainable, organic, year-round specialty-produce farm in New York State. Over the past decade, UGG has evolved from a startup venture to an established local brand, serving diverse revenue streams including direct-to-institution, restaurant, road-side-stand sales, and workshops. However, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic led to a significant setback for UGG, forcing it to suspend operations and revert to a hobby farm status to mitigate financial losses. As UGG prepares to resume business operations in May 2024, it faces the challenge of growing and expanding its operations, necessitating the hiring of staff to support its revitalization efforts.

### **1.2 Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to explore and analyze the application of theoretical frameworks in human resource management to the hiring and training practices of Underground Greens (UGG), a small-scale organic farm in New York State. By examining key theories such as Human Capital Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Expectancy Theory, and Identity Theory,

alongside the integration of interactive workshops, this research aims to provide practical insights and recommendations for UGG to effectively manage its workforce during its transition from a hobby farm back to a commercial enterprise.

### **1.3 Scope and significance of the research**

This research focuses on investigating the strategic approaches to human resource management in the context of small-scale agriculture, with Underground Greens (UGG) serving as a case study. The study encompasses the analysis of theoretical perspectives and practical applications related to hiring and training practices, considering UGG's unique organizational context, challenges, and opportunities. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the study, including time constraints imposed by the duration of the class. Due to these time constraints, the depth of analysis and scope of recommendations are constrained. Nonetheless, by examining the role of interactive workshops in enhancing employee selection, engagement, skill development, and organizational culture, this research aims to provide valuable insights and practical recommendations for UGG and other small farms facing similar challenges. The findings of this study hold significance for informing strategic decision-making for small farms and fostering sustainable growth and resilience in the agricultural industry, despite the limitations inherent in the research process.

## **2. Definitions**

2.1 Define key terms such as hiring processes, training methods, small farms, etc.

Hiring processes refer to the systematic procedures and steps involved in recruiting, selecting, and onboarding new employees to an organization (Raymond A. Noe, 2023). These processes typically include activities such as job posting, candidate screening, interviewing, reference checks, and job offer negotiations, and the goal of hiring processes is to identify and hire candidates who possess the skills, qualifications, and attributes necessary to fulfill job roles effectively and contribute to the organization's success (Raymond A. Noe, 2023).

Training methods encompass the various techniques, approaches, and strategies used to facilitate the learning and development of employees within an organization (Raymond A. Noe, 2023). These methods can range from traditional classroom-based training to more experiential and hands-on approaches such as workshops, on-the-job training, e-learning, and mentorship

programs (Community, n.d.) (Raymond A. Noe, 2023). The selection of training methods depends on factors such as the learning objectives, characteristics of the employee-pool, available resources, and organizational culture.

Small farms typically refer to agricultural operations characterized by relatively small land holdings, limited production scale, and a focus on sustainable and diversified farming practices. While there is no universally accepted definition of what constitutes a small farm, they are often distinguished by their reliance on family labor, direct marketing channels (farm-to-table or roadside stands), and close connections to local communities. Small farms play a significant role in supporting local food systems, promoting environmental stewardship, and preserving rural livelihoods.

### **3. Assumptions**

#### **3.1 Discuss underlying assumptions guiding the literature review**

Relevance of Theoretical Frameworks: The author assumes that theoretical frameworks in human resource management, including Human Capital Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Expectancy Theory, and Identity Theory, offer valuable insights into understanding hiring and training practices on small farms.

Practical Implications of Theoretical Concepts: The author assumes that theoretical concepts and principles discussed in the literature have practical implications for small farms seeking to optimize their human resource management strategies. It is assumed that by understanding and applying these theoretical frameworks, small farm owners can make informed decisions and implement effective hiring and training practices to support organizational goals and objectives.

Importance of Interactive Workshops: The author acknowledges the significance of interactive workshops as a methodological approach for enhancing employee engagement, skill development, and organizational culture (Why Hands-On Training Is The Key To Maximizing Job Success, 2021). It is assumed that interactive workshops offer a practical and experiential learning environment that can complement theoretical insights and facilitate the implementation of human resource management strategies on small farms (Marketing Strategy: Best Practices for Workshops, n.d.) (Zhihui Cheng, 2021).

Contextual Considerations: The author recognizes the importance of considering the unique organizational context, challenges, and opportunities faced by small farms like UGG. It is assumed that contextual factors such as farm size, production methods, market dynamics, and resource constraints may influence the effectiveness and feasibility of hiring and training practices, as well as the integration of interactive workshops.

Limitations of Existing Research: The author acknowledges the limitations of existing research on human resource management in the agricultural industry, particularly in relation to small farms. In particular, It is assumed that while the literature provides valuable insights and theoretical frameworks, gaps may exist in terms of empirical evidence, practical guidance, and applicability to specific contexts.

### **3.2 Address any potential biases or limitations of the study**

Time Constraints: One potential limitation of the study is the time constraints imposed by the duration of the class. Due to limited time, the depth of analysis and scope of recommendations are constrained. To mitigate this limitation, the study will prioritize key theoretical frameworks and practical insights relevant to the research objectives, while acknowledging the need for further research and exploration beyond the scope of the study.

Sample Size and Generalizability: Another potential limitation is the focus on a single case study, Underground Greens (UGG), as the primary context for analysis. The findings and recommendations of the study may not be fully generalizable to all small farms or agricultural contexts. To address this limitation, the study will strive to draw upon diverse sources of literature to provide a comprehensive understanding of human resource management strategies in small-scale agriculture, while also acknowledging the specificities of the UGG case study.

## **4. Highlights from the Literature Review**

### **4.1 Overview of human resource theories relevant to small farm operations**

Human Capital Theory:

Human Capital Theory, pioneered by Gary S. Becker, underscores the importance of investing in human resources to enhance organizational productivity (Ross, 2023). On small farms, interactive workshops can be employed in the hiring process to assess candidates' interest,

practical skills, and abilities relevant to farm operations. Additionally, training workshops can provide employees with opportunities to develop and refine their skills in a positive, supervised, controlled environment, thereby enhancing their human capital.

#### Social Exchange Theory:

George Homans' Social Exchange Theory highlights the dynamics of reciprocal relationships between employers and employees (Cherry, 2023). For small farms, workshops can serve as a platform for cultivating positive interactions and mutual trust during the hiring process. By involving candidates in group activities or team-based exercises, farm owners can assess compatibility and alignment of values, fostering a culture of trust and reciprocity within the work environment (Zhihui Cheng, 2021).

#### Expectancy Theory:

Victor Vroom's Expectancy Theory focuses on the link between effort, performance, and outcomes (Sutton, 2024). Interactive workshops can be utilized in the hiring and training process to reinforce the connection between employees' efforts and desired outcomes. By providing candidates with a realistic preview of job expectations and potential career paths, workshops help set clear expectations and motivate employees to achieve their goals on small farms.

#### Identity Theory:

Sheldon Stryker's Identity Theory examines the role of roles and statuses in shaping individuals' self-concepts (Stets, 2009). Workshops provide opportunities for employees to develop and express their professional identities on small farms. By engaging in hands-on activities that reinforce their roles and responsibilities, employees can enhance their sense of identity and confidence, contributing to overall job satisfaction and performance.

Expanding on identity theory, Dan P. McAdams' Narrative Identity Theory highlights the power of storytelling in shaping individuals' sense of self and belonging (McLean, 2013). Workshops can be integrated into hiring and training practices to craft and share compelling narratives that celebrate the owner, the employee, and the farm's history, values, and aspirations. By engaging potential candidates, current employees, and the owner in storytelling exercises or

group discussions, farm owners can inspire commitment, foster resilience, and build a strong organizational culture that aligns with the farm's narrative identity.

#### **4.2 Exploration of best practices for hiring and training in agricultural settings**

Hiring and training practices play a crucial role in the success and sustainability of agricultural operations, including small farms like UGG. Implementing best practices in these areas can help attract and retain skilled employees, enhance productivity, and promote organizational growth (Raymond A. Noe, 2023). Here are some key best practices for hiring and training in agricultural settings:

##### Targeted Recruitment:

- Identify the specific skills and qualifications needed for each job role on the farm (Raymond A. Noe, 2023).
- Utilize targeted recruitment strategies to reach potential candidates with relevant agricultural interest, experience, or training (Raymond A. Noe, 2023).
- Tap into local agricultural networks, educational institutions, and industry associations to source qualified candidates.
- Offer internships, apprenticeships, or job shadowing opportunities to UGG's public workshop attendees or social media followers to develop local talent.

##### Hands-On Training:

- Incorporate hands-on training methods, such as workshops, field demonstrations, and on-the-job training, to reinforce theoretical concepts and practical skills (Why Hands-On Training Is The Key To Maximizing Job Success, 2021) (Zhihui Cheng, 2021) (Food Saftey, n.d.).
- Provide opportunities for employees to participate in experiential learning activities, such as farm tours, equipment demonstrations, and crop trials (Why Hands-On Training Is The Key To Maximizing Job Success, 2021).

##### Continuous Learning:

- Foster a culture of continuous learning and skill development among employees (Raymond A. Noe, 2023).

- Encourage employees to pursue further education, certifications, or professional development opportunities related to agriculture (Small Harvest, Big Impact: Nurturing the Success of your Agribusiness, 2024) (Raymond A. Noe, 2023).
- Recognize and reward employees who demonstrate a commitment to learning and improvement (Raymond A. Noe, 2023).

Performance Feedback and Evaluation:

- Establish clear performance expectations and goals for each employee, aligned with the farm's objectives (Raymond A. Noe, 2023).
- Provide regular feedback and coaching to employees to help them track their progress and address areas for improvement (Raymond A. Noe, 2023).
- Conduct formal performance evaluations on a periodic basis to assess employee performance, identify training needs, and set development goals (Raymond A. Noe, 2023).
- Encourage open communication and dialogue between employees and supervisors to address concerns, provide support, and foster a positive work environment (Raymond A. Noe, 2023).

Safety Training and Compliance:

- Prioritize safety training and compliance with regulatory requirements to protect the health and well-being of employees (Raymond A. Noe, 2023).
- Develop and implement safety policies and procedures that address common hazards and risks associated with agricultural work (Raymond A. Noe, 2023).
- Provide thorough safety training to all employees, including proper use of equipment, handling of fertilizers, and emergency procedures (Raymond A. Noe, 2023).
- Conduct regular safety inspections and audits to identify and mitigate potential hazards and encourage employees to report safety concerns promptly (Raymond A. Noe, 2023).
- By implementing these best practices for hiring and training, agricultural operations, including small farms, can build a skilled and motivated workforce, improve operational efficiency, and sustain long-term success in a competitive industry landscape. (Raymond A. Noe, 2023) (Food Safety, n.d.)

### **4.3 Integration of the author's perspective as a small farm owner into the review**

The author is the proud owner of Underground Greens, a small farm specializing in year-round, soil-based, vertical, indoor, and outdoor cultivation and production of specialty plants. Despite facing production setbacks due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are gearing up to expand our offerings in the spring of 2024.

At Underground Greens, we take pride in offering our customers a diverse selection of plants and produce that are not commonly found in local stores. From vibrant microgreens to multi-colored tomatoes and peppers boasting a range of colors and heat levels—including rare crosses of varieties like the Trinidad Scorpion and Carolina Reaper—we strive to provide unique and high-quality products.

Our commitment to sustainability is reflected in our product lifecycle, which minimizes waste at every stage. Starting from seed, our plants are nurtured in our specially formulated soil mix, harvested, and either sold as produce or transplanted into our greenhouse or fields to continue growing. Any unsold produce is harvested for seeds, while leftover plants are repurposed into compost piles. These compost piles, enriched with leaves and worms, serve as a vital ingredient in our soil mix, closing the loop of sustainability.

The author's vision for Underground Greens extends beyond our current operations. She aspires to establish a second site dedicated to localizing food production, creating job opportunities, and sharing food knowledge through hands-on workshops. By developing a custom farm model tailored to the needs of upstate New York, she intends to build a regenerative, soil-based vertical farm within an old nuclear fallout shelter, situated alongside a picturesque canal in the heart of a food desert. Through this endeavor, she hopes to address food insecurity and empower the local community in Rome, NY, with access to fresh, locally grown produce and valuable agricultural knowledge all year-round.

At Underground Greens, our hiring philosophy will be rooted in our commitment to the local community and our vision of being part of the solution to food insecurity in the surrounding food desert and guided by human resource theories utilized in the form of workshops. We will prioritize hiring individuals from within the community who share our passion for addressing food scarcity and are eager to contribute to the local food ecosystem. We believe that

enthusiasm, dedication, and a desire to learn are more important than prior experience (Hersch, 1991). As such, we welcome individuals with varying levels of experience and expertise, providing training, mentorship, and growth opportunities to help them thrive in their roles. By empowering local residents to be part of the solution, we will not only create employment opportunities but also foster a sense of ownership and pride in the community's ability to address its own food security challenges.

Effective management of human resources is essential for the success and sustainability of small farms like UGG. By integrating theoretical perspectives with workshop-based approaches into their hiring and training practices, small farm owners can optimize their human resource management strategies. By fostering a supportive and inclusive work environment through interactive workshops, small farms can unlock the full potential of their workforce, driving innovation, growth, and resilience in the agricultural industry.

In the context of Underground Greens (UGG) preparing to resume operations in May 2024 and the subsequent need to hire staff, the integration of human resource theories such as Human Capital Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Expectancy Theory, and Identity Theory becomes crucial.

Human Capital Theory posits that investments in employees' skills and knowledge contribute to organizational success. As a small farm owner and prospective employer with a diverse professional and academic background and a commitment to professional development, I recognize the value of investing in employees' growth and capabilities. By creating a professional ePortfolio to showcase my own skills and experiences, I aim to set an example for potential hires and demonstrate the importance of continuous learning and skill development (Carambia, A Self-Reflection on Creating My Professional ePortfolio on Social Media through a Critical Exploration of ePortfolios, The Perspectives of Marshall McLuhan, Douglas Rushkoff, and David Sax, and My Experience as a Small Farm Owner: A Literary Review, 2021).

Social Exchange Theory emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between employers and employees, where both parties contribute value and receive benefits in return. Through mentorship, cross-training opportunities, ongoing feedback mechanisms, and hands-on workshops, UGG can foster a positive work environment where employees feel valued and

motivated to contribute to the organization's success (Zhihui Cheng, 2021) (Cherry, 2023) (Raymond A. Noe, 2023).

Expectancy Theory suggests that individuals are motivated to exert effort when they believe it will lead to desirable outcomes. By providing clear expectations, setting achievable goals, and offering opportunities for advancement, UGG can motivate employees to perform at their best and contribute to the farm's growth and success.

Finally, Identity Theory highlights the importance of how individuals perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others in the workplace. By creating a professional ePortfolio and encouraging employees to develop their own digital narratives, which would be published on UGG's website, UGG can foster a sense of identity and pride among its workforce, aligning individual values and goals with the organization's mission and vision (Stets, 2009) (Carambia, A Self-Reflection on Creating My Professional ePortfolio on Social Media through a Critical Exploration of ePortfolios, The Perspectives of Marshall McLuhan, Douglas Rushkoff, and David Sax, and My Experience as a Small Farm Owner: A Literary Review, 2021). Through the integration of these human resource theories, UGG can build a skilled and motivated workforce capable of driving its revitalization efforts and achieving long-term success in the agricultural industry.

Building on the author's previous research in interdisciplinary studies, she contends that workshops will serve as a conduit for knowledge-sharing, aligning with Human Capital Theory by enhancing participants' skills and expertise. Through workshops, Social Exchange Theory is manifested as participants engage in reciprocal interactions, exchanging ideas and experiences. Expectancy Theory comes into play as participants anticipate gaining valuable insights and skills, while Identity Theory is evident as individuals shape their professional identities through shared learning experiences. This collaborative exchange fosters innovation and knowledge co-creation, benefiting both participants and the broader small farming community by enriching understanding and driving new discoveries and innovations. By engaging in dialogue and interactive learning experiences through the workshops, participants will gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter while also contributing their own unique insights and expertise to the collective learning process. Ultimately, this collaborative exchange of knowledge

will benefit both parties involved, enriching their understanding, and paving the way for new discoveries and innovations in the arena of small farming.

## **5. Problems and Issues**

Small farm owners often face obstacles in implementing effective HR practices due to factors such as budget constraints, lack of training resources, and limited time. However, potential solutions for overcoming these issues include implementing flexible staffing arrangements to accommodate seasonal fluctuations and investing in technology and automation to farm processes. By addressing these challenges proactively and adopting innovative solutions, small farm owners can build a skilled and resilient workforce capable of meeting the demands of modern agriculture while fostering a culture of continuous learning and growth.

## **6. Best Practices and Guidelines for Small Farm Owners**

To support Underground Greens (UGG) and other small farms in implementing effective HR practices, it is essential to showcase case examples of successful approaches used by similar agricultural operations. However, the structure of Underground Greens (a year-round, indoor, soil-based, vertical farm) is relatively new to the agricultural industry, therefore examples are rare. Examining what works in organizations of comparable scale and structure is just not feasible at the current time.

## **7. Conclusion**

The paper has provided valuable insights into key theories and best practices relevant to hiring and training in small farms. Key findings include the importance of investing in human capital, fostering positive relationships between employers and employees, and leveraging interactive workshops for hands-on training. Moving forward, future research should explore unique hiring processes and training methods tailored to the specific needs and challenges of small farms, considering factors such as seasonal labor demands, resource constraints, and the evolving landscape of future farms in the agriculture industry.

After reflecting on personal research and experience, it is clear to the author that small farm owners can benefit from adopting proactive HR strategies, including targeted recruitment, comprehensive onboarding, and continuous learning initiatives. The main lessons learned

highlight the significance of prioritizing human resource management as a strategic priority for small farms, as it directly impacts productivity, efficiency, and organizational success. In closing, further research is needed to explore emerging year-round, indoor-farm trends and innovations in HR practices for small farms, with a focus on sustainability, resilience, and community engagement.

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