

It's March, which means farms across the country are preparing for the arrival of foreign laborers. In this issue of the Dispatch, Alleah focuses on warmly welcoming new teammates, Lance takes a closer look at the valuable contributions of H2A workers, and Bill brings it all together with a lesson on God's instructions on caring for the vulnerable amongst us. As always, we welcome your comments.

Welcome! Welkom! Bienvenido! Hospitality in Agriculture

By [Alleah Heise](#)

Ask anyone about the endearing qualities of those who make up the ag sector and you are sure to hear phrases like: "they are so friendly," and "they would give you the shirt off their back," and "they will go out of their way to help you."

As we enter another busy season, we also enter another season of hospitality. More and more businesses are turning to various foreign visa programs to help fill the labor shortage. As diversity in the workforce increases, we hear questions about how to help people feel welcome while maintaining the employer/employee relationship. A few ideas to consider are:

- **Invite Employees to Church:** Every year there is usually some turnover on the team. Especially with new team members, employers would do well to invite their visa workers to attend church. Consider also providing a list of local churches as a way of integrating in the community.
- **Manage New Experiences:** Navigating banks and the DMV can be unnerving for a new worker. Your ability to managing their expectations of what happens at each location can set the tone for a productive interaction. Some employers go to the bank or the DMV with their employees while others provide a one pager on where to go, what ID to take, and what to ask/look for.
- **Provide the Necessities:** Arriving in a new country without understanding the lay of the land can make an immediate transition into work difficult. Setting up housing similar to a hotel (shampoo and body wash, a warm meal the night of arrival, and a few basic grocery staples) provides a considerate touch and gives new workers a few less things to worry about.

Agriculture has written the book on rolling out the "welcome" mat. Doing the little things to ease the uncertainty of a new place, to demonstrate grace during the tough times, or to remind ourselves and others why we choose to live here are just a few of the many reasons this industry maintains its sterling reputation for hospitality. "People will forget what you said, forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." - Maya Angelou

From Foreigner to Family Member: One Farmer's Story

By [Lance Woodbury](#)

For almost a decade, Mitchell Baalman ([@MBaalman](#)), a farmer in the northwest Kansas community of Hoxie, has been welcoming H2A workers from South Africa to his farm, [FDK Partnership](#). What started with a goal of bringing in help for more basic tasks has evolved into a full-year rotation of several key staff that fulfill more "technical and high-level roles," according to Baalman.

When I asked Mitchell about the value of his foreign helpers, he was quick to point out the following:



- Their experience and abilities with equipment and technology: They come to the US with some experience and are quick to learn new systems and jobs on the farm, transitioning into some of the most trusted positions.
- Their work ethic: They want to work hard and do well.
- Their cultural integration: They participate in building the team, they join in birthday parties and other social and family functions, and they hang out with the group.

As a testament to their importance, Baalman has even hired some family members of long-time workers from South Africa. “They’re now part of our family,” he told me.

In his article, Bill mentions the Biblical notion of *sharing the fruit of the harvest*. While there is a definite economic and charitable component to that directive, there is also be a cultural one. “Sharing” implies a togetherness, a membership between the foreigner and native, a bonding of people to one another through contribution. After our basic needs are met, all of us want to be part of something bigger than ourselves and to feel fulfilled. Mitchell’s approach, like many of those we know in agriculture, takes the notion of “sharing” to just such a level. In this case, the person from overseas becomes part of our team, our family.

Faith and Family Business:

Lessons on The Harvest in Ancient Israel (Lev 19:9-10)

By [Dr. Bill Long](#)

Of the hundreds of laws in the Old Testament, one of the most striking deals with the ancient Israelite attitude toward those who have rights to the product of the harvest. It was a terribly important issue, since ancient Israel was an agricultural society, and wealth was primarily measured by land ownership and productivity, as well as farm animals. The Book of Leviticus expressed the idea as follows: “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor gather the gleaning of your harvest... you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the Lord your God” (Lev 19:9-10).

Though ancient Israel tried to keep very clear distinctions between who was “inside” and who was “outside” of its community, it recognized that there were vulnerable classes of people in the land. Rather than exploit or ignore these vulnerable groups, the law recognized them and gave them a specific claim on the harvest. The two groups mentioned here were the “poor” and the “stranger.” Of course we don’t know fully how one qualified for membership in these groups, but what is striking about the latter category (the *ger* in the Hebrew) is that they were people who couldn’t acquire land in Israel. They were either recent arrivals or non-Israelites, and thus were at the mercy of those who were settled in the land.

The law, and the Lord, took special cognizance of these people by requiring the landowner to leave some of the land unharvested, and not to be too quick to pick up every last gleaning. These were to be harvested by the poor and the alien/stranger. There is no better way to foster loyalty among workers, as well as a sense of gratitude and hospitality among those with much, than to share in the fruit of the harvest. Israel didn’t think this was just a good idea: the final words of the quoted passage says it all: “I am the Lord your God.” God, it seems, also has a heart for the poor and the stranger.

