

Farmers Attitudes towards Employment Law

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Abstract

The objective of this research was to establish farmers current understanding and attitudes towards employment law legislation and determine if they would be willing to pay for a service to help them become and remain compliant. Recruiting and employing workers involves interacting and engaging with employees involves multiple responsibilities towards individuals and society alike.

As more changes are occurring in agriculture at present with regard to policy changes, increased commercialisation of farms and changing farm structures. The aim of this study was to explore farmers attitudes towards employment law in Ireland. The study involved an analysis of literature, a mixed method survey of farmers and a key informant interview. The number of people gaining employment is increasing and shows no sign of stagnation. As farms become more like small business entities, farmers are looking at farms from a business aspect instead of traditional family farm operations. Taking on the employer's role means for farmers means being subject both to formal statutory obligations and to regulations on wages, security and other aspects of working conditions.

Participants were selected for this survey on the basis that they were current employers and members of the Irish Farmers Association. A key informant interview was conducted with a Human Resource (HR) consultant to obtain a more in-depth understanding of farmers decision making process.

The study found that farmers currently have a limited understanding of employment law legislation. The majority of farmers agree that HR management is an important aspect of their businesses however many do not have basic HR practices and processes in place such as contracts and handbooks. **Just over half (51%) of respondents have contracts in place for staff and only 23% have corresponding handbooks in place.** Farmers currently source the majority of their HR information from accountants and solicitors instead of HR specialists. **Over half (54%) of respondents sourced information from their solicitor or accountant in the past if a problem arose compared to just 21% who sourced information from a HR specialist.**

In relation to farmer attitudes, the overall picture suggests that most farmers are not unduly stressed at this stage but there is an appetite for a proposed service. **When asked if they would be willing to pay for a service, 63% of respondents were in agreement that that would be willing to pay for a service to help them become compliant.** The study also found that willingness to pay for a service may be correlated to the level of awareness of the implications of non-compliance. Many farmers have limited experience as employers or employees. **There is a clear void for a need creation piece in relation to employment law legislation in agriculture.** Awareness building is a prerequisite to creating demand for any service and appears more important than economic incentives.