



AGRICULTURAL APPOINTMENTS

Finding the right people since 1979

DIY RECRUITMENT

The Pro's Guide to Recruiting for Agribusiness Jobs





It might be tempting...

As a former Managing Director of Rhone-Poulenc Animal Nutrition ANZ, General Manager of Supercoat Petcare, General Manager of Ridley Aquafeeds, CEO of the NSW Farmers Association and CEO of Genetics Australia Co-Operative, I've overseen the recruitment of a lot of people.

I've also looked at the costs to the bottom line, of having an in-house human resources department as well as using external recruiters.

There's no doubt about it, whichever way you go, hiring people is expensive. It's expensive in terms of hard cash out the door, as well as management time. What's even more expensive though, is getting it wrong.

In these COVID-challenging times, it may be tempting to handle your own recruitment. You may also struggle to see the real value that an external recruiter provides. As a previous hirer of agribusiness executives and middle managers and now agribusiness recruitment company owner, I've seen both sides.

To help your recruiting decisions, we've shared our 'pro' tips for recruiting in-house. We've also made the case, I hope, for the value that good, specialist agribusiness recruiters can add to your business, and the risks and opportunity costs they help you avoid.

I invite you to consider all of that, when you decide you need a new hire, at whatever level in the business.

Ray

Dr. Ray Johnson. B. Sc. Agr. (USYD), M. Sc. Ag. (USYD) Ph.D (UNE)
Managing Director and Senior Agribusiness Consultant

Recruitment: what happens and when

Recruiting is not as simple as putting an ad on Seek. It's a far more involved process than that, to get it right. It takes on average, about 100 management hours and three months, to recruit each role.



100 hours & three months

PLANNING WEEKS 1-2



Meetings & HR discussions



Position description preparation & review



Ad writing & review

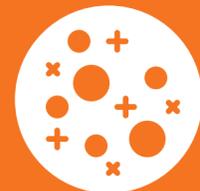
SEARCH & SELECTION WEEKS 3-6



Outreach & targeted search



Screening responses & replies



SCREENING WEEKS 6-8



Interview candidates



Prepare & review shortlist



Interview shortlist



OFFER WEEKS 9-12



Follow-up discussions



Reference checking



Candidate selection & offer

PLANNING TO SUCCEED

Why it pays to know who you're looking for

It's easier to find the right candidate if you start with a good position description. Ideally, it will outline what the role is there to achieve, the important milestones the successful candidate will need to meet and the KPIs they'll be judged by.

The relevant line manager is usually the best person to provide this information. Talking through the responsibilities of the role – financial, leadership, marketing, new business development, compliance and administration – will help you put together a comprehensive but succinct document.

It's worth taking the time to ensure your position description provides the right amount of information and detail. Very often, it will be a candidate's first impression of your company and the way in which it operates. A poorly written document which doesn't make it clear what the job entails and the skillset you're looking for may deter good people from applying.

How to avoid irrelevant applications

In today's times, most advertisements for agri-business jobs attract dozens or even hundreds of responses. While it's good to hear from a broad range of contenders, sifting through a stack of unsuitable applications can be very time consuming.

Unless you're in the position to offer sponsorship, eliminating those from foreign nationals living abroad is a good way to reduce the pile.

After that, a broad knowledge of the agricultural sector in Australia should



“Although it may not be directly stated in their application, candidates who’ve grown up on the land or in the regions are very often a good bet.”

allow you to quickly assess candidates' potential suitability, based on their employment history. Looking at the companies they've worked for, and where those jobs were located, should give you a good feel for how well they're likely to cope in a regional or rural location. Although it may not be directly stated in their application, candidates who've grown up on the land or in the regions are very often a good bet.



TALENT SEARCH AND SELECTION

Why it pays to be well connected

Finding candidates who aren't looking for work

Research has shown that around **80 per cent of successful professionals won't respond directly to a job advertisement**, but they will respond to opportunities when approached directly.

Therefore, proactively connecting with them is essential, if you want to give your organisation the best shot at securing an outstanding employee. Reaching out to your network personally, and via platforms such as LinkedIn, can help you tap into a talent pool of passive candidates with the attributes and experience you're looking for.

If you don't have a large network, going along to conferences and forums is a great way to build one. Professional agri-recruiters typically attend dozens of industry events each year, to build and maintain connections with established and emerging leaders from across the sector.

Augmenting your search with advertising

While many candidates are found via indirect channels, there's still a place for advertising. Listing your position on Seek and LinkedIn will broaden the talent pool and ensure you don't miss anyone. Many industry specific web sites, such as the Australian Technical Millers Association, have their own job boards. Advertising on these outlets makes sense if you're looking for a candidate with specific experience, or niche skills.

Like a position description, a job advertisement is a sales document and potential applicants are the customers. Written well, it should capture their interest and motivate them to respond.

Your ad should give a concise overview of the position and highlight aspects of the role candidates will find challenging and rewarding. For finance professionals, for example, mention of mergers and acquisitions will probably be more exciting than stocktakes and end of month reconciliations.

It's also important to use appropriate language. Every industry has its own jargon and demonstrating you're familiar with it will add credibility to your ad.



Cropping Farm Manager

Agricultural Appointments
[More jobs from this company](#)

THE CLIENT

Our client's winter cropping enterprise consists of a group of 5 properties situated approximately 25km South East of Gulargambone, 45km north of Gilgandra town and 110km north of Dubbo City. Total land area owned and under management is 3650 hectares all of which comprises a productive dryland farming operation.

The area is serviced by sealed roads and a bus service to good local schools of which there is a choice at Gulargambone and Gilgandra.

THE ROLE

An honest, self-motivated and enthusiastic working manager with prior dryland cropping experience is required to manage this high performing winter cropping enterprise. The incoming manager will report to the owner but will take over the day to day management of the farm supported by the owners' involvement as demanded by seasonal activities.

THE REQUIREMENTS

- A high level of experience in all aspects of winter crop production;
- Experience in GPS broadacre, controlled traffic cropping and zero till farming systems;
- Mechanically minded and a hands-on management style;
- The ability to work effectively in a team environment to ensure all aspects of cropping are carried out in a timely manner;
- Minimum HC Truck Licence.

REMUNERATION AND LOCATION.

“A job advertisement is a sales document and potential applicants are the customers.”

Sorting out the shortlist

There's a little bit of art and a little bit of science to deciding whether or not an applicant should make it onto the shortlist. Understanding their motivation in applying for the role is vital, as it can help to determine if they're likely to remain engaged long-term, or will be looking for their next opportunity in a few months' time.

Whether they'll be a good cultural fit is another important consideration. Unfortunately, it's not always easy to tell on paper. Often insight and questioning will reveal more about a candidate's fit, than their written resume. That's another reason why sourcing candidates via a professional network or through a recruiter can be a safer bet than finding them on the open market.



HOW TO ASSESS A RESUME IN 60 SECONDS

Agricultural Appointments agri-recruiter Dave Compton says there are three things to look for when you're sifting through a pile of applications in search of the perfect candidate:

- **Their core skillset** – if you know the agri-sector well, the places they've worked will tell you a lot
- **How often they've changed jobs** – if it's every year or more, that's a red flag
- **Who they've reported to in the past** – helpful for obtaining an insightful reference if it's someone in your network.

After a couple of decades of experience, it becomes easy to do this at speed, Dave notes.

“Most agri-businesses want to see demonstrated experience, rather than transferrable skills. An experienced recruiter can take as little as 30 seconds to scan a resume and decide whether a candidate should proceed to preliminary interview stage.”



SCREENING THE SHORTLIST

How to separate the wheat from the chaff

A good initial interview should give you a feel for two things: whether an individual has the skillset and experience to do the job they're applying for, and whether they'd be a good cultural fit for your organisation.

By establishing a strong rapport with candidates, you can find out those things and much more. It's best to start the conversation with an informal chat about their personal background and interests before moving into a discussion about the role – what it entails and how it has come about.

Asking a candidate to talk you through their career journey in detail will help you to understand who they are, where they're from and what's driving their decision making and career choices.

Some people tend to talk up their previous positions, at least a little, and give you the rosier possible view of their achievements. It's your job to drill down and ask some hard questions – how much of a role was actually administration work, for example, and how much involved making significant financial decisions or managing a team.

Finding out what motivates candidates and where they're aiming to go career-wise is also important. Asking them about the jobs they've found most satisfying, what's lacking in their current role and the reason yours appeals should tell you where they're at and whether what's on offer will challenge and engage them long term.

Requesting candidates share their strengths and the attributes that set them apart from other candidates can also be enlightening but you'll need to be aware that some seasoned agri-professionals will find these questions tough to answer. The sector has a culture of not 'talking yourself up' and well-credentialed individuals may not be comfortable blowing their own trumpets.

“The sector has a culture of not ‘talking yourself up’ and well-credentialed individuals may not be comfortable blowing their own trumpets.”



As you talk, be on the lookout for red flags. Common ones include unexplained gaps in the CV and a candidate who is unwilling or unable to talk about why they left one organisation for another. This can be a clue that personality issues are a factor, or that the candidate has difficulties working in a team.

Talk about money should be saved until towards the end of the interview. If you've advertised your role with a salary range, or discussed the candidate's expectations when you set up the interview, you should be roughly on the same page. At this stage, recruiters often ask candidates to share details of their current package, including base salary, whether a vehicle is included and if bonuses are paid.

If your organisation is willing to pay relocation expenses, you should outline exactly what assistance will be on offer.

The best interviews are face to face but, in COVID times, they're harder to arrange. If you're vetting a candidate via Zoom or Teams, it can be tricky to get a handle on who they are, in the space of a single session. You might choose to conduct a follow-up interview or run some psycho-metric testing to help guide your decision making.



HOW AN EXPERT DOES IT

Behavioural interviewing can be an effective way to get a handle on how a candidate operates and whether they're likely to be a good fit for the role on offer. The term refers to the use of questions focusing on how someone handled specific situations and challenges in previous roles.

As Agricultural Appointments agri-recruiter Dr Ray Johnson explains:

"Rather than talking to them about their skills, you might ask something like, 'how do you respond when your supervisor says no to a really good idea?. It's a useful approach because past behaviour is generally a good indicator of future behaviour. And if they're uncomfortable and try to dodge the questions, that can be insightful too."



MAKING THE OFFER

Why haggling over money is always a mistake

When you're confident you've got your person, it's time to secure their services. Calling to let them know an offer is imminent provides an opportunity to confirm salary expectations and other housekeeping details, such as their notice period and whether they have any holidays planned or booked in the upcoming months.

It's not uncommon for companies to haggle over the remuneration package at this point but it's almost always a mistake to do so. A candidate who feels they've been done down on salary will start the job with a sour taste in their mouth.

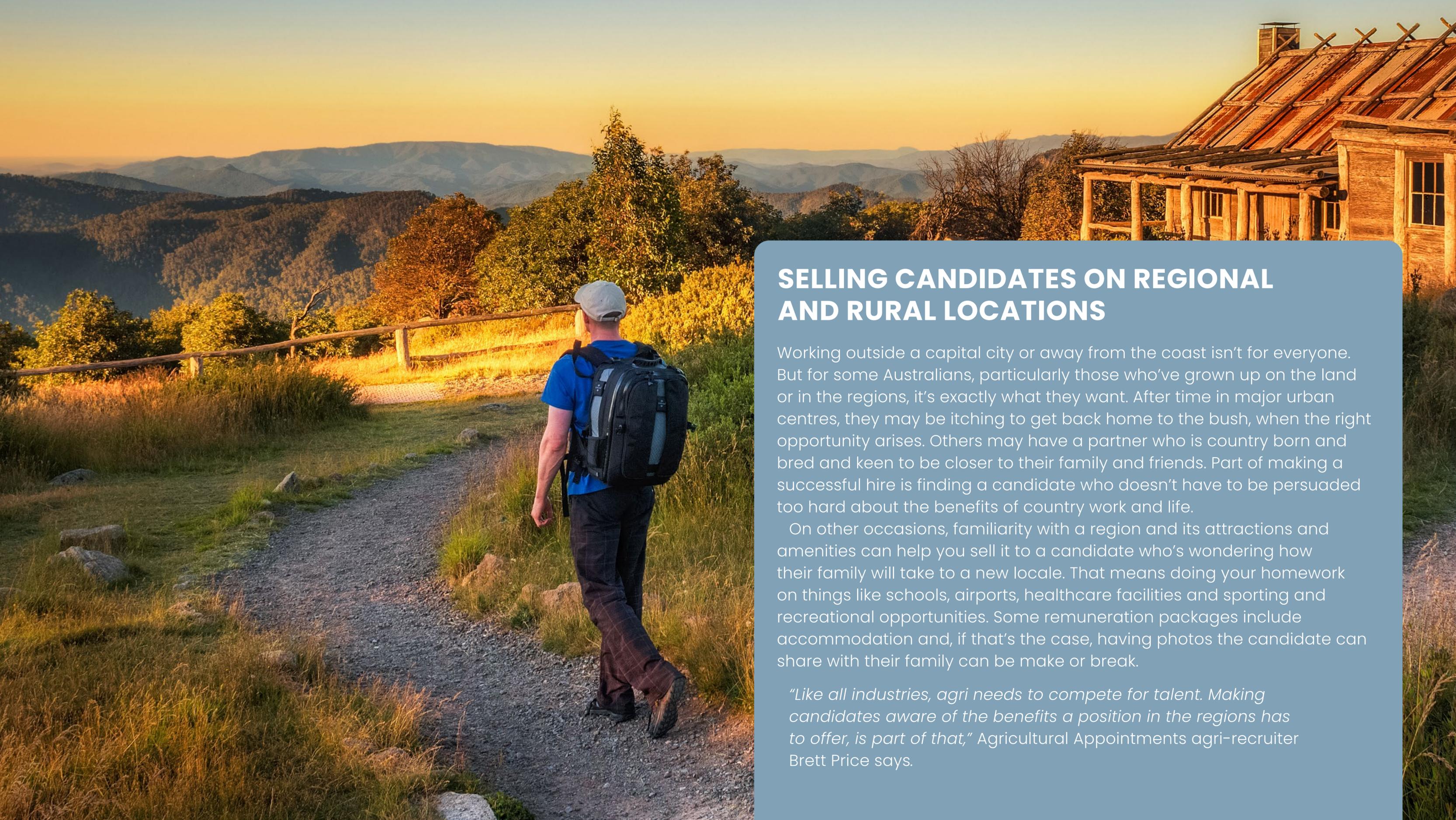
If the position entails relocating their life and family, it's doubly important they feel appreciated and respected from the outset.

Once you've agreed on all the particulars, sending them a written offer provides them with clarity and certainty and gets the ball rolling for them to join your organisation as soon as possible.

HOW USING A RECRUITER SOLVES THE CONFIDENTIALITY PROBLEM

Australia's agri-business sector is tight knit. Everyone knows everyone. That can make it tricky for individuals who are considering a move but don't want their current employer to find out they're in the market. Fear their name may pop up on the radar can deter them from applying directly to a business or organisation, particularly if it's in the same small town where they currently live and work.

Using a recruitment agency can solve this issue for potential candidates. It allows them to have frank conversations about what they're looking for, where they're headed long term and whether a position might be a stepping stone to help them get there. If a role does tick their boxes, having a third party managing the process gives them comfort they can apply in confidence.



SELLING CANDIDATES ON REGIONAL AND RURAL LOCATIONS

Working outside a capital city or away from the coast isn't for everyone. But for some Australians, particularly those who've grown up on the land or in the regions, it's exactly what they want. After time in major urban centres, they may be itching to get back home to the bush, when the right opportunity arises. Others may have a partner who is country born and bred and keen to be closer to their family and friends. Part of making a successful hire is finding a candidate who doesn't have to be persuaded too hard about the benefits of country work and life.

On other occasions, familiarity with a region and its attractions and amenities can help you sell it to a candidate who's wondering how their family will take to a new locale. That means doing your homework on things like schools, airports, healthcare facilities and sporting and recreational opportunities. Some remuneration packages include accommodation and, if that's the case, having photos the candidate can share with their family can be make or break.

"Like all industries, agri needs to compete for talent. Making candidates aware of the benefits a position in the regions has to offer, is part of that," Agricultural Appointments agri-recruiter Brett Price says.

Why DIY recruiting can be a bit like a DIY reno...

It's tempting to think that a few tools, mates and YouTube videos, are all that's needed to successfully do a DIY reno. However, after budgets have blown out and defects have been fixed, it's often the case that people say, 'ah, now I see why a builder should do it. It's not as simple as I thought'.

We think recruiting is a bit similar. It looks deceptively easy, but the reality is far more complex. And just like a defective reno, when a new hire goes wrong, it can have a far bigger impact than you expect. Let's consider for a second, what we outlined at the beginning. It takes on average, about 100 management hours and three months, to recruit each role. **Even if you do it yourself, that's a potential hard cost to your business of at least \$8,500.**

If you use a recruiter like us, the management and expensed cost together, may be greater, but the risks will be less.* In addition, a specialist agri-recruiter is able to use a deep knowledge of the market and what a good candidate looks like relative to others, and have candid conversations with candidates about their decision making and career choices. That's not always possible when an internal person is driving the process.



*WANT US TO RUN YOU THROUGH THE NUMBERS?

"If you're a business of 50 people, and you reduce your attrition rate from 10% to 5%, for example, then the profitability increase to your business could be worth over \$300,000," says Dr Ray Johnson. "If you use specialists like us, we can help you reduce these costs, and the risks."

Want to run through the numbers? Check out our Recruitment Calculator.

What is the real cost of DIY recruitment?

1. MANAGEMENT COST

100 hours and three months to recruit each role. Typically, that's about \$8,500.

2. OPPORTUNITY COST

What is the value to your business, of 100 management hours spent doing something *other* than recruiting?

3. CULTURE COST

It's easy to damage your company culture with a bad hire. Repairing it can take months or even years. Remember the adage: people leave bad managers, not bad companies.

4. BRAND COST

Getting it wrong and going back to market can damage your company's image.

5. ATTRITION COST

When you get it wrong, you need to rehire. Not only has it cost you management time, but it's also cost you relocation and training expenses, as well as lost productivity. If your new hire has been there for three months and then leaves, you need to start all over again, getting your next new hire up to speed.

At Agricultural Appointments, we've been finding the right agribusiness people since 1979.



WE'RE TRUE
AGRIBUSINESS
SPECIALISTS



WE HAVE A
TALENT POOL OF
OVER 200,000



WE COVER ALL
AGRIBUSINESS
AND FOOD
INDUSTRIES



AND WE COVER
ALL ROLES –
FROM CEO TO
ENTRY-LEVEL

In agribusiness recruiting, the right people don't usually come to you, they're found. Let us find yours.

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