

## Fruit News article May 2016

Springtime for me means searching for, hiring and training new employees. Finding employees that have a work ethic and aren't afraid to get their hands dirty for my seasonal business is challenging to say the least. Because of the smaller size of my farm, many of my employees are natural born citizens, but my best employees over the years have been new immigrants from countries such as Russia, Thailand, Mexico, Czechoslovakia and Guatemala.

I spent some time working with a natural born trainee last week. His first task as a new employee was to help thin peaches. We had not even completed the first tree and he asked, "Isn't there a machine to do this?" What I wanted to reply was, "Don't you realize that if there was a mechanical way, I wouldn't need you?" But I kept my opinion in my head and explained how we chemically thin apples and how we string thin peaches, but that there is still a lot of hand thinning work that needs to be done to ensure a valuable crop. He looked across the 15 acre block of peaches and said "I had no idea that it was this hard to grow fruit." Two trees later he mumbled, "I don't think this job's for me". To his credit he didn't quit on the spot like some before him, he even made it the whole week, but I don't expect he will be around long enough to help harvest the peaches from the trees he is thinning.

Every year those of us in agriculture wonder if this will be the year we can't find enough help to run the market, grow the crops and get them harvested. I sadly recall a year when my family couldn't get enough help to harvest our apple crop and thousands of bushels went on the ground. One of the blocks that wasn't harvested was a block of Golden Delicious right beside my house. The sea of yellow covering the ground under the trees was heartbreaking for me as a teen. I can't imagine how my grandfather, father and uncles felt watching their hard work go to waste - not to mention the loss of income.

After reading Brad Hollabaugh's well written opinion piece on immigration (Common Sense On Immigration - Gettysburg Times <http://www.gettysburgtimes.com/opinion>), I began to think about our industry and industries like ours that require employees who are willing to sweat a little. There are currently 30 million Americans looking for work, but very few of them are willing to get their hands dirty or possess the skillset and physical stamina to work in agriculture. Those of us who hire employees know that immigrants are not to blame for the unemployment rate. As a matter of fact, without immigration from different parts of the world for the past 200 years, America would not be the amazing country it is today. Immigrants built America and are the glue that holds it together. Whether they are slaughtering chickens, milking cows, landscaping or harvesting fruits and vegetables, they are the foundation and backbone of America. They do the jobs that natural born Americans won't do.

I wonder sometimes if the "threat" of immigration has less to do with the legality of some workers, and more to do with the embarrassment that so many immigrants are willing to sacrifice to make a living in a way that natural born citizens are not. Immigration is really an American identity crisis and the belief that hard work and dirt are things we have earned the right to avoid. And our government has created a whole gaggle of different programs to help avoid these jobs. If we think back in history, dirt used to be a badge of honor. Dirt used to represent work, pride and a living wage. Instead of being taught to respect those that work hard, children today are taught that a "good job"

doesn't involve hard work, sweat or dirt. Over the years, our society has scrubbed the dirt off the face of work and I don't see that changing anytime soon.

I guess this makes me sound like an old codger, but the Millennials were raised on video games and TV. When they became teens, even if they wanted to work they were excluded from the workforce by our coddling child labor laws. Millennials don't even play outside in the dirt. They don't equate dirt, sweat and hard work with making an honest living. In fact, they resent it. Unless we as a nation can magically re-emphasize the honor and dignity of hard work, we will need to continue to rely on immigrants. I hope the politicians can figure out a solution that is workable for those of us who need employees that aren't afraid to get their hands dirty, because without the skeletal immigrant backbone, America cannot stand.

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