

## Research

### Competitor Analysis

Research was conducted on direct competitors such as AgHires and AgCareers. Their business models were tiered weekly or monthly packages. The lowest price was \$225 to post one job for 60 days. You can pay more for “Featured” status. On the high-end, there was an option to pay up to \$3000 to post 1 job for 1 month; listing as “Elite Talent”. Indeed.com has a pay-per-click option, and a pay-per-hire recruiting service that’s free until someone gets hired.

### Shared Economy

Research was also done on shared economy sites such as Wag!, a dog-walking site. Dog walkers get roughly 60% of what the customers are charged, Wag gets the other 40%. Care.com has free membership and lets you view some info - premium subscription gives you full access starting at \$39/month, \$26/month if you pay for 3 months, or \$13/month yearly. AirBnB is free to sign up and use, Airbnb keeps 20% of booking fee. Service fees charged to guests goes straight to airbnb.

### Interviews

We conducted interviews with 9 participants: 5 farmers and 4 workers. Two of the farmers had also worked on other farms. The farmers ranged from 3rd generation with thousands of acres and the need for hundreds of workers seasonally, to relatively small size farms needing only the occasional help. The workers ranged from seasonal laborers, to skilled young workers just coming out of college with agricultural degrees.

## Farmers

### Findings

We conducted interviews with 5 farmers, ranging in size from a couple hundred acres to thousands and thousands of acres. We received a lot of feedback on the topic of hiring workers. Based on the size of the farm, that feedback was widely varied. The common patterns were that word of mouth seems to be the most prominent method of communication for the midsize to smaller farms. Farmers are very protective of their farm info because the land is their livelihood.

It's different than finding a job in a city, where technical know-how and years of experience can be all that one needs to land a job. Farmers are not necessarily looking for numbers and years of experience. They want to know what kind of work ethic they bring. Ok, they're skilled, but will

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they show up on time, and what kind of work will I be able to get out of them? We found that farmers would like to know ahead of time that the labor they are hiring is not only the right fit, but will be dependable, will catch on quickly, will know what to do in the face of ambiguity, will not waste time, and will troubleshoot the problem until it is solved.

## Recommendations

Based on findings and feedback, we recommend **limiting the public info** that Farmers have to provide in order to find laborers. As one participant put it: “My nosy neighbor down the road could set up a dummy worker profile, do a job search, and find out all about my operation, the size of my farm, where I’m lacking, and what I need help with.” And another said “Asking a farmer how many acres they have is like asking how much money they have in their checking account”.

Narrowing it only to the basics of what the farmer is looking for might be the best way to establish trust. In addition, **gathering testimonials** and submitting **reviews** from satisfied farmers who have used the site to find workers is going to help establish that trust factor. Producing a three-fold result: a happy farmer, a happy worker, and further established website reputation.

When we asked farmers if it would help to gain trust if they saw testimonials from other real farmers (even if they were far away such as in another state) the overwhelming majority said yes. We recommend using real farmers and their testimonials.

**Responsive views** will make AgriKnect more mobile-friendly. A vast majority of farmers said they use their phone much more than their desktop computer. One farmer also suggested the option to receive **notifications when a potential worker applies** for a job or is a good match with their job posting.

For payment structure, a majority of farmers were either luke-warm about a subscription based method or were not interested. Some of their feedback was that they didn't want to sign up for monthly membership then forget to cancel when they no longer needed help. That also would be a factor in deciding to re-use or re-subscribe. We therefore recommend that AgriKnect considers a “**payment based on success**” pricing structure as a starter model - charging after farmers fill out worker reviews.

Again, providing that three-fold solution: trust from farmers, quality laborers, and website reputation. This will entice the farmers to get the word out about AgriKnect, and the Farmer looking to hire is insured quality worker(s).

Likewise AgriKnect is more likely to get a positive recommendation, both on the site and through word of mouth. This could be a temporary payment model until AgriKnect is established as THE

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premiere site when you want the best workers. After the trust-building phase, a different pricing model could be considered, such as **monthly membership or pay-per-click**.

Additional notes:

- A few farmers liked the **google login feature**, and asked if a **Twitter sign-in** feature could be added.
- A farmer may have a **prioritized (or weighted) skill need**. For instance the farmer might post a job looking for someone that can drive a combine and fix fences. That farmer needs both skills but may have an 80% weighted preference in a combine operator and a 20% weighted preference in fence fixing. However a worker with only one of those skills would show up as 50% match.

## Workers

### Findings

We conducted interviews with 4 different workers and 2 farmers who had been hired to work on other farms. 3 of the 6 had grown up on farms. One was just out of college who started with a degree in environmental studies and then a masters degree in urban and regional planning from the University of Minnesota. And a worker that was doing gig operations and had some farm experience.

Based on their feedback, we found commonalities in the specific expertise that each worker brought to the table...they wanted to make sure that their specific qualities were called out on the website. One participant commented "I have experience with Urban Ag, Vertical Farming, Hydroponics, or Aquaponics....but also customer service". All specific qualities that should be considered beyond the main goal of connecting skilled workers with large-term farms. Because of the broad scope of the agriculture industry, and the potential that it holds, it is our recommendation that AgriKnect **keep the job skills section open-ended**. To do so will invite more skilled workers with a wide range of skills that farmers may be looking for.

Many Ag workers starting out are trying to make a name for themselves. They want to establish trust and demonstrate dependability. Reputation, as we found, goes a long way in the agricultural industry. You do a good job for a farmer, he's going to put in a good word for you to the other farmers they know.

### Recommendations

Based on worker feedback, we recommend a way to **filter by compensation, housing, and a bonus** if they complete the season. Also a way to filter by insurance offering, if offered. They also wanted to make sure their resume was not going to be distributed to other sites.

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As far as an app, the feedback was to include location of farm, experience, compensation, accommodations, bonus if you complete the season, and insurance or assistance.

They also look for trust, transparency, clear values, upfront info on payment, and a detailed description of the work they will be expected to perform from an employer. In addition, workers don't want to have bad experiences with employees - and would expect the platform to be properly **vetting & verifying the job posters**.

## Further Recommendations

### Analytics

As soon as you have a developed website, start thinking about search engine optimization (SEO), as well as an on-site search function and running Google Analytics (or similar) to keep track of what pages are being visited and where users are going on your website.

Think of it as watching people browse a retail store. If prospective customers stop at a particular point in the onboarding process, it will be easily viewable and more quickly attended-to.

### Content Strategy

If Agriknect intends to maintain open lines of communication with users and with the public, a **content strategy framework** is essential for managing language, structure, and more across multiple communication channels. What this does is create the sense that the same entity is marketing services on the website, handling tech support, and whatever else you may want to include. Lists under the following categories are examples only.

#### Channels

How do you communicate with users? Social media? Email? Website updates?

#### Types

What is being communicated via those channels? Social media updates? Tech support?

#### Technology

*All* of the technology involved. The content management system (CMS) for the website. Google Drive/Dropbox/Any file sharing utility. Information databases. Survey sites. *All* of it. If it's a different website, or program, make a giant list of it here

#### Workflows & Processes

i.e. content production, farmer/worker onboarding. Determining responsibility for content and how it's being produced will ensure that the message you intend to convey is being received

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### Products, Services, Brands

The Agriknect Press Kit. logos, branding, descriptions of the services provided - think of this as your trade show booth in a knapsack.

### People

Employees of Agriknect; their job titles, their divisions, and the audience(s) addressed by the content

Use this in combination with a regularly updated information architecture diagram (a visual representation of the pages, links, content and redirects on the web app) to track what content lives where, when it was last updated, if it's still relevant, if it's still providing the right message, and so on. It's obvious to visitors when a web app feels dated, or part of it seems off-brand.

## Features

### Prototype

Stock images were taken from Unsplash, and are royalty-free for commercial use. Icons are from The Noun Project (<https://thenounproject.com/>) and are royalty-free **with accreditation**, or annual subscription to The Noun Project. The font used is Hind Varobara from Google Fonts, and is free for all use, including commercial.

### Website

Consider a website section on links and resources. Include a redirect to H-2A for convenience, consider tying in other services used by farmers, i.e. AgTalk forum; AgriTalk show/podcast; links to find local agronomists.