

Our Agribusiness Partners

CARGILL ZIMBABWE

During privatization of the Government's cotton marketing board, Cargill purchased twenty percent of the operations. The company buys high quality cotton from small holder farmers at thirteen stations in the communal areas, gins it, moves it twelve hundred miles by truck to the port of Durban and sells it around the world.

The company employs some 2000 workers; a small proportion are permanent, the rest are seasonal contract workers with more limited benefits and rights. By law, all workers are unionized. Salaries and working conditions are negotiated for the entire sector at one time by the companies and the unions. Labor laws are favorable to workers, but enforcement is lax. Cargill pays slightly more than union negotiated minimum wages, and pays serious attention to worker health and safety issues.

Cargill's company code of conduct also commits them to equal opportunity employment. Although the marketing board limited women's employment to a few office jobs, Cargill also employs women as laborers. In 1999 with half the nations work force unemployed, nearly 15% of Cargill's contract workers and 20% of the permanent workers were women. These women were young and educated, most through O level (7 years). Workers lived with their families in nearby areas. About half of the women had one or two children. Most contract workers also farm, and engage in the informal sector during other times of the year.

Best Practices

- Equal opportunity policies included:
 - transparency in hiring for both office jobs and manual labor.



- equal pay for men and women at each job grade.
 - equal access to training.
 - equal access to promotion
- Protection from sexual harassment
 - Free condoms and company workshops on AIDS prevention.

For women farmers, Cargill's policy of immediate cash payment at point of sale gave them more control over the proceeds. Because the marketing board had paid several months later in larger towns far from the farms, husbands usually collected the proceeds, even if they did little of the farming. Historically, female suicide rates were highest right after cotton payments were issued.

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CARGILL SUN VALLEY THAILAND

Sun Valley Thailand (SVT) begun in 1990, is a fully integrated poultry production system which raises, slaughters, and processes chicken products for both domestic consumption and export. Operations are in a peri urban area, and the work force, which is 80 % female, is primarily rural in origin. Most of the women are young, have 6 or more years of education, and many have one or two children.. Workers in the processing plant are organized in teams of 30/40 members, with one or more supervisors. Floor workers received minimum wage, with some premium for experience, while supervisors received somewhat higher pay. Pay for women and men at each job grade was equal.

Because chickens are vulnerable to disease, and food safety is crucial to product acceptance, the farms, the processing plants and the workers themselves were subjected to a rigorous regimen of disinfectants and cleanliness. The processing rooms are kept very cool, and processing is not intrinsically pleasant work. Many women faced family demands for help during harvest, or care of sick children. For all these reasons, by 1995, SVT was facing an employee turnover rate of 100% pr year, and high work absences. Because it takes six months for a worker to develop full productivity, the high turnover was constraining profitability.

Over the next five years SVT instituted a series of policies which reduced the turnover rate to 20% annually, and substantially



reduced absenteeism. The fundamental change was to develop a company culture based on Thai ideas of family, and to emphasize the pi-none relationships of big sister/brother and little sister/brother who take care of one another. Flexibility in meeting the family needs of the workers was particularly stressed.

In addition to equal employment opportunity practices, policies to promote retention included:

- bonuses for high group attendance, and for low poultry mortality rates
- raises for experience
- flexibility in leaves for family needs
- pregnancy reassignments to lighter work
- free transport to and from work
- tuition assistance for children, and some scholarships.
- partial health care
- monthly parties with major door prizes (refrigerators, TVS, etc.)
- on-site classes for completion of high school and junior high together with overtime payment for attendance

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LAND O LAKES POLAND

This section will be approximately as long as the other two cases.

to explore women's participation in production, processing and distribution of dairy products.....

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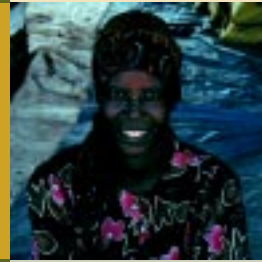
Lessons Learned

FOR COMPANIES: Good employment practices are feasible in developing countries, and serve to enhance company productivity and stability as well as worker satisfaction.

Company Codes of Conduct are an important element in the employment practices of many multinational companies, and provide an important policy lever in improving the working conditions of women in these companies.

FOR WOMEN: At its best, multinational agribusiness can provide jobs with decent salary and working conditions as well as respectful treatment.

Women's education matters; the women employed had least five years of education, and additional education increased their access to supervisory and administrative jobs.



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Project Support

Funding for the case studies has been provided by the US Agency for International Development, Office of Women and Development (G/WID), Global, under Award No. LAC-C_00-98-00062-00. The opinions expressed are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the US Agency of International Development. Personnel time and in kind contributions have been provided by the University of Illinois and our partnership companies.

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The Gender and Agribusiness Project (GAP) is an activity of the Program on Women and Gender in Global Perspectives at the University of Illinois. Project members include faculty from the Colleges of Agriculture, Consumer and Environmental Science (ACES); Commerce and Business Administration (CBA); Communication; and the Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations (ILRI).

Background of the Project

- Direct foreign investment is increasing rapidly in the world's globalizing economies, at the same time that official donor assistance flows are dropping in developing countries.
- There are some 600 million women (Sivard, 95) working in both local and multinational firms in developing countries, and for them, even more than for men, working conditions are often not good; low pay, long hours and unhealthy surroundings are common.
- Although there is increasing documentation of the working conditions of urban women and those in enterprise zones, very little is known about the conditions of rural women in formal employment.

The GAP Project seeks to draw a clear and detailed picture of the best employment practices of a small number of multinational agribusiness companies operating in rural areas, in order to provide a realistic benchmark of what is possible.

Our goal is to improve the conditions of women's employment in agribusiness through research and dissemination of practices that contribute to worker productivity, stability and satisfaction.

Project Activities

Our primary strategy has been the creation and dissemination of teaching cases documenting the best employment practices of multinational agribusiness operating in developing countries. In order to do this we:

- create model partnership agreements with international agribusiness firms.
- document company operations at sites selected by the company to represent their best practices in the employment of women.
- synthesize the lessons learned from these cases into brief reports and discussion papers.
- present these case studies and the lessons learned in professional and business conferences and publications.
- maintain a web site which makes the cases available to trainers and researchers worldwide. The site also contains research tools, project reports and discussion of lessons learned, as well as hot links to other relevant sites.

Benefits to Partnership Companies

Use of the cases in university management training can attract outstanding graduates to the company, and are also helpful in company training programs. Practices that simultaneously benefit worker and enhance company performance demonstrate good citizenship to host countries as well as the home country, and also demonstrate good management to shareholders and the larger business community.