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## Employee Engagement at AgHeritage

The old adage that you can't fix what you don't measure stands true, as AgHeritage Farm Credit Services learned last year when they conducted an employee engagement survey.

"It had been five years since our last survey. Our previous survey scores were consistently high, and we've historically had one of the lowest employee turnover rates in the System, so we thought we could wait a couple of years. Then the pandemic hit so we waited a little longer than we would have liked," says Greg Cole, AgHeritage CEO.

In the five-year interim between engagement surveys, a lot changed: AgHeritage had grown financially, added a number of employees, including new graduates, and made impactful leadership moves, not to mention managing through the uncertainties of the pandemic.

"The survey results revealed the dynamics and expectations of our team members had transformed in a more engaging way during that five-year time period, making this kind of periodic survey essential to keep up with shifting team dynamics," says Greg.

Once FCCS delivered the results of the engagement survey to AgHeritage, including a comprehensive report, they decided more investigation was needed to better understand the results and formulate more specific actionable plans. The organization turned again to FCCS' Vice President of Organizational Development Jay Lux, who facilitated a series of focus groups to explore a more in-depth approach to the survey.

"Our engagement survey gathers a lot of data, and sometimes finding a way to dig a little deeper is helpful," says Jay. "Using the focus group approach allows for a deeper understanding into what's driving engagement and clarify key issues. It also allows for a participative style of solutioning that incorporates input from staff."

Speaking confidentially with two groups of diverse employees and one group of managers – with the option to also email him privately with additional thoughts – Jay explored themes identified within the survey.

"With Jay facilitating, our team members trusted the process and shared good information beyond what can be learned through a survey," says Leslie Brown, Vice President Chief Human Capital Officer with AgHeritage. "This helped us identify actions we could take to address specific feedback, and ultimately help with engagement to retain staff longer, which is a big focus for us in this challenging talent market."

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— **GREG COLE**  
CEO, AGHERITAGE

As a result of the employee engagement survey project, AgHeritage launched four programs:

- More flexible work schedule including some remote work capability
- Dress for Your Day program
- Created a Manager's Committee team to help facilitate consistent communication
- Added more job granulation to certain positions

"We learned through the survey and focus groups that, among other things, job titles and structure are important to our team members, so we are now recognizing development and progression within roles in a way we hadn't before," says Leslie. "We also learned that our team members actually want more responsibility, training and development, and a clear career path."

With these new initiatives in place, AgHeritage is planning a short pulse survey later in the year to gain feedback on the success of the new programs.

"The engagement survey process provides a very organized tool for us to identify and quantify the expectations and dynamics of our workforce and allows us to proactively implement good HR programs to ensure we have the highest possible engagement," says Greg. "Doing the survey shows you care, but doing something about the results, or even explaining why you can't, is critical to avoiding employee disengagement. You can't ask the questions and then do nothing."

For more information about FCCS Engagement Surveys, contact [Jay Lux](#) at 651.982.4568.