



Black Belt Harvesting

When I started as a white belt in Taekwondo, I felt like a bumbling klutz - forming a proper fist and putting my hips into a punch didn't come naturally, much less trying to move my left leg in a sidekick. Four years later, I don't require the kind of careful instruction for every new move that I did for those first kicks, punches, and knifehand strikes. My body understands how the different moves all fit together, and what once felt like advanced fumbling has become second nature.

The motions of vegetable farming require a different set of motor skills than texting, driving, and typing, and many employees don't arrive on the vegetable farm with a ready ability to adapt. If you are able to harvest quickly yourself - and I hope you are! - pay special attention to exactly how to do it: put your thumb here, position your wrist this way, slice towards/away from you. Then share that information with your crew, explaining that this is exactly how to do the job at hand. As your people learn the fundamentals of bunching, cutting, and trimming, they will find their own unique styles and be more able to adapt to new crops.

Some hints for moving faster, whether you are just starting out or want to refine your skills:

- Drag containers rather than pushing them.
- If the last motion of harvesting leaves the crop in your left hand, you should be working from left to right, so that your left hand is trailing you.
- Keep the container near the hand that the product ends up in, and never cross your body with your hands.
- Keep supplies like twist ties and rubber bands right at hand, next to the hand that grabs them.
- Don't set down your tools; if you are putting a twist tie on a crop that you cut with a knife, learn to hold the knife while you put the tie on.
- Keep tools sharp; if you can feel the knife when you cut yourself, it isn't sharp enough (but don't bleed on the produce).
- Track progress from week to week throughout the season where employees can see it; that will provide an reinforcing feedback loop for your team.

