

# Catering to Careers

*New app to tackle agricultural workforce shortages.*

*by Megan Silveira*

To be catered to, doted upon, provided for. To have exactly what you crave brought directly to you. While the idea of catering is often applied to meals, the agricultural industry is learning the benefits of being served more than just food.

What if there was a way to have jobs served to you like a meal? AgButler is an upcoming smartphone app capable of doing just that.

“AgButler is a mobile application designed to help users overcome the challenges of agricultural workforce shortages,” says Kevin Johansen, creator and team lead of the AgButler app. “We are creating a two-way portal for farmers and ranchers to post jobs they have coming up and for individuals to list themselves in a certain radius they would be willing to travel to do a job.”

## Recipe for success

Johansen comes from an agricultural background, and while spending time working in a tractor, he says podcasts became his favorite way to pass the time. Two years ago, in between the commentary of businessmen and start-up company owners, Johansen says he was struck with the idea of creating a program where jobs could be easily shared in the industry.

While the app’s initial creation was “slow but progressive,” Johansen says he is eager to watch AgButler

become a fully fledged service application capable of giving back to the agricultural industry.

The app is currently in the product development stage, but Johansen says the last eight months have gave way to a lot of progress. Johansen says he is working to build partnerships in the industry and gather funds to take the app to the public.



AgButler is currently working as an operating demo, which Johansen explains allows it to serve as a visual for how the finalized app would look and operate. The next step is to work with a couple beta testers and see how the public receives the app, he added. Johansen says the app is set to

be launched in its entirety by the fall of 2020.

Johansen says it is important to ensure the app can handle a large influx of user traffic and create connections between laborers and farm owners.

“Our goal is to enable farm productivity, one click at a time while also revitalizing rural communities and showcasing the potential for jobs,” Johansen says.

In this development stage, Johansen says several companies and organizations have backed the AgButler app, taking on a crucial role in the app’s production and development. One of these key groups is the National Center for Beef Excellence. Tanya Amen, executive director of the National Center for Beef Excellence, says she and her team connected Johansen with technology experts to program the app and provide grant writing for funding. Future assistance will come in the form of customer and office services.

“One of the core missions of the Beef Center is to drive communication and technology use in the industry,” Amen says. “AgButler hits on both of those missions in a very unique way.”

Amen says the app has the ability to connect supply (skilled workers) with demand (farmers, ranchers and agribusinesses) through a web-based, mobile platform.

“AgButler will enable those seeking work to find temporary, or in some cases, permanent employment,” Amen says. “It will enable them to gain experience and to augment their incomes, perhaps allowing them to stay in their rural communities to establish their own operation.”

This app also gives power back to aging farmers, she says. Elderly farmers and ranchers will be able to extend the longevity and viability of their operations, Amen says, as it helps connect them with skilled, qualified workers in the area.

The app will have a rigorous vetting process for any laborers using the program, Johansen says. Several qualifications will have to be met before individuals can use AgButler to search for work. Johansen says the positive reception of the app from ranchers stems from this opportunity for connection.

In a survey of 200 cattlemen and women from across the country, Johansen says 82% were eager for the chance to put the AgButler app to use on their operation. The surveyed individuals said they were currently investing considerable time and money to meet the labor needs of their ranches and look forward to having a more efficient and cost-effective method of meeting those labor needs.

## Secret ingredients

Besides serving as an outlet for farmers and ranchers, Johansen says the production of the app has



Kevin Johansen, creator and team lead of the AgButler app, says its development has been a family effort. Pictured (from left) are Kevin, daughter Harper, and wife, Jaime, holding Ivey.

been a family project. His brother, Dustin, is covering operations and lining up meetings and relevant industry events while his wife, Jaime, and sister-in-law, Joanna, have been marketing the app through various promotional and design elements via their company Honey Creek Media.

“It’s been a true family affair,” Johansen says. “We’ve been taking our own roles and working on it collectively. We all know what our strengths and weaknesses are.”


Johansen says he feels blessed to have been able to turn his vision into reality and credits much of AgButler’s success to the hard work and support his family has supplied.

With the technology-centered world we live in today, it should be

no surprise the Johansen family’s app is being well-received by the agricultural community — even those outside of the cattle industry. Johansen encourages those interested in staying up to date on the app’s progress to join their first service list and be one of the first to utilize sign-up as an employer or skilled laborer. On the horizon for the app are several key contests Johansen says he and his team are excited for.

AgButler is one of the top 10 semi-finalists for the American Farm Bureau Federation’s Ag Innovation Challenge and a finalist for Farm Credit Services of America’s Innovation Pitch Contest at the Iowa Power Farming Show. Both competitions will be hosted at the beginning of 2020.

These competitions serve two major purposes for the AgButler app, Johansen says. In addition to creating a greater following for the app, Johansen says he hopes future success can bring in more funding to further product development.

“We’re now switching our gears from actively laying the groundwork to actually presenting our ideas,” Johansen says. “We’re putting our minds together to fully showcase what we perceive the AgButler platform to be and what it can do.” 

*Editor’s note: Megan Silveira is a freelance writer from Denair, Calif.*