Over the course of his career, AgCareers.com’s Eric Spell has honed his recruiting skills and kept his finger on the pulse of rural employers, including farms and ranches. That experience has led to tips for employers looking to fill open positions.
**Recruit early.** Many businesses have a policy that they won’t take first-year students as interns. Spell said that’s a mistake. "Only a small number of students head back to their hometowns following college. That means you have to reach the ones that do want to come back ... and reach them much earlier," he said. "There are an awful lot of jewels of first-year students; you can already tell who has their act together."

**Know the cost.** "Find your competition city, and look at the living cost," Spell recommended. Play up the advantage of living in Pacific Junction, Iowa, as opposed to Des Moines. "Employees will have more expendable income in rural settings."

**Show off your employees.** When bringing in prospective employees, Spell recommends introducing them to young, shining examples of employees who have walked a similar path.

**Build a community.** "Hold a local leaders brunch, and invite community leaders," Spell said. Reach out to high school principals, veterans, superintendents, technical educators and the town’s religious community leaders. "Just tell them: 'We appreciate you coming. Here are roles we have high demand for.' That works really well," said Spell, who used this tactic when he served as director of recruiting and training for Smithfield Foods-Murphy Farms Inc., in North Carolina. "And, it's a good community-revitalization tactic."

**Offer opportunities.** "I believe one thing all employees value is professional growth opportunities," Spell said. Even a local tractor-supply store can work with a local community college to help provide leadership trainings. "Identify someone you want to invest in, and do it," Spell said. "That really means a lot to people."