AGRICULTURE
STRONGER THAN THE STORM

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C-SUITE CRISIS

Why Finding the Right Leaders is Ag's Biggest Challenge

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2025 ADJUVANTS, INERTS & CROP PROTECTION CONFERENCE

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Introduction

- Background
- Leadership Vacuum in Agriculture – How did we get here?
- Drivers of C-Suite Shortage
- Cost of Poor Leadership
- What companies need to do
- Call to Action and Discussion

Who Is K&R

The team at Kincannon & Reed makes up the largest global executive search and leadership development firm exclusively serving organizations within the food and ag industries.

With over 40 years of experience across diverse sectors as trusted advisors, K&R serves organizations that feed the world and keep it healthy.

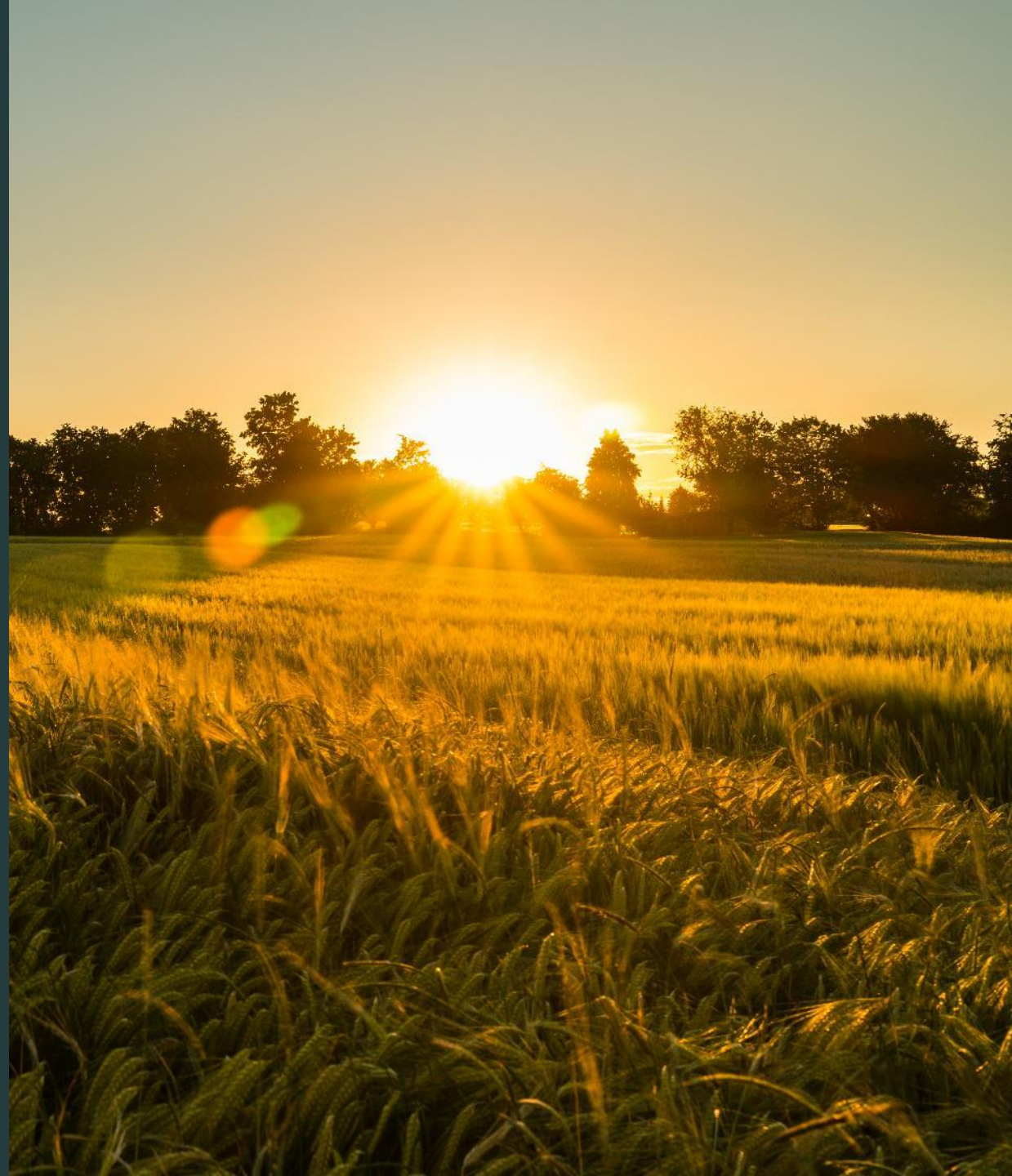
OUR FIRM BY THE NUMBERS

250k+
Executives in our proprietary database

600+
Global executive placements since 2019

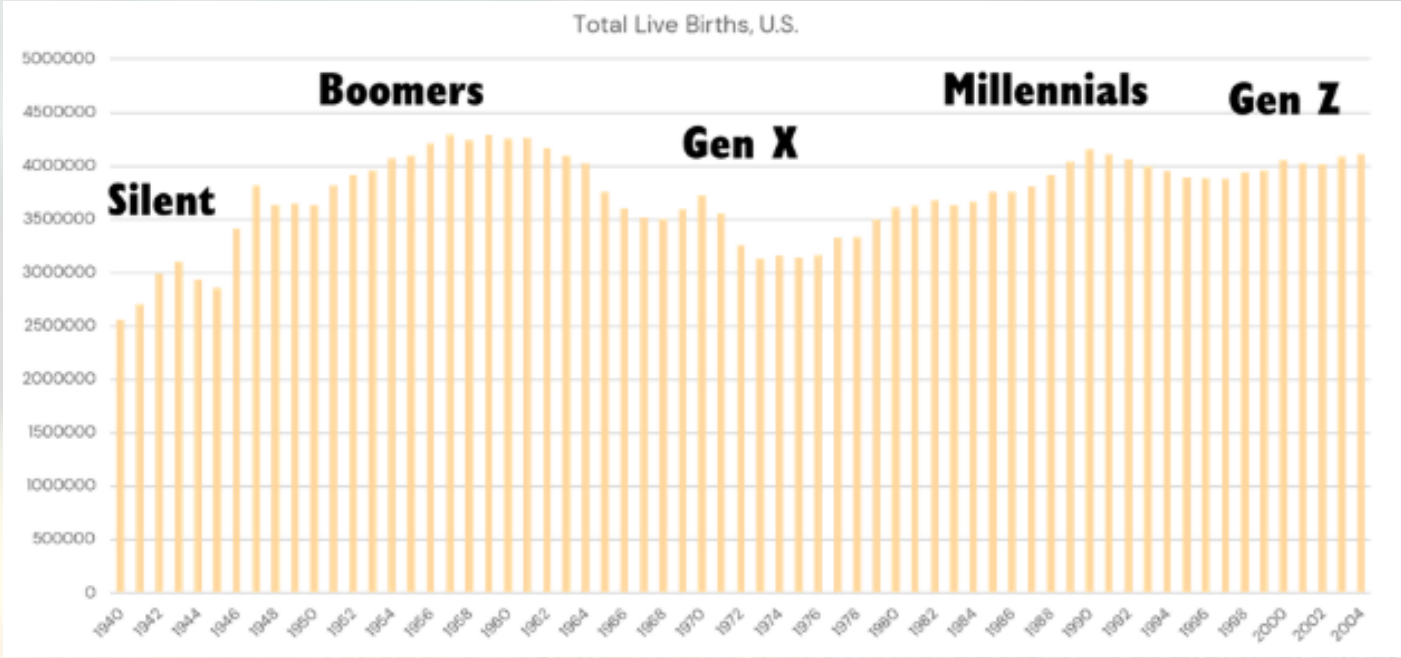
70+
Principals, associates, & staff globally

“We are moving from a 40-year period of very stable senior leadership of farms, agribusiness, and ag organizations, into a period where the pipeline of "farm-grown" leadership is scarce, and organizations will be required to look to younger leaders or outside the traditional talent channels. New perspectives, new strategies, and new ideas will fill executive leadership teams from "farm to fork" - leadership more likely to take risks, chart bold new directions, and rethink long-held assumptions. If you're a fan of change, this coming decade is for you.” Seth Derner, Vivayic



The Talent Vacuum: An Aging Population

- 2025 will set a record globally for the number of people turning 65.
- For every potential leader between 35-50 years old there are two leaders preparing for retirement.
- Senior leadership talent isn't going to just be an issue for agriculture; it's an issue across all industries.



graph of U.S. live births, data from CDC

How did we get here? The Farm Crisis of the 1980s

- Many young people were dissuaded from being part of the Ag industry because of their community's experience.
- While nearly 7% more of the population was going to college between 1980 and 1990, enrollment in these three colleges fell by almost 37%.

For U.S. agriculture, it's not just an issue of a smaller Generation X, it's the issue of fewer late Boomers and Generation X in the rural Midwest choosing a career in agriculture.

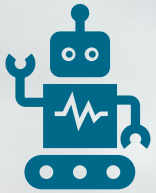
Generational Cohort	Age at start of Farm Crisis, 1982	Age Today, 2025
Silent and early Boomers (pre-1951)	30+ Adults already established in the industry	74+ Retired (mostly)
mid-Boomers (1952-1958)	24-29 Young adults just getting established	67-73 Retired (mostly)
Late-Boomers (1959-1964)	18-23 In college or in first job	61-66 About to retire
Early Gen X (1965-1970)	12-18 In middle school and high school	55-60
Late Gen X (1971-1976)	6-11 In elementary school	49-54
Xennial (1977-1982)	1-5 preschool	43-48
Early millennial (1983-1989)	No direct experience/memory	36-42
Late millennial (1990-1996)	No direct experience/memory	29-35

The Leadership Vacuum

- How agriculture is evolving with technology, sustainability, and market shifts.
- The impact of retiring industry veterans and the knowledge gap left behind.
- The difficulty in finding leaders with both business acumen and ag expertise.
- Examples:
  - Technology Disruptions & the Leadership Gap – John Deere
  - Retirement of Industry Veterans & Knowledge Loss – California Central Valley

What's Driving the C-Suite Shortage

Demographic shifts: Aging workforce and lack of succession planning.



Skillset evolution: Demand for digital, financial, and sustainability expertise.

Competition for talent: Other industries offer more attractive career paths.

Cultural fit challenges: Need for leaders who understand rural economies, farmer relationships, and agribusiness cycles.

BY THE NUMBERS

- **Retirement Wave:** Broader sector trends suggest a majority of agricultural leaders could retire by 2035, driven by an aging workforce.
- **Succession Planning Deficit: Only 30%** of ag companies have formal succession plans in lace. Farm Progress
- **Tech Adoption in Ag:** Precision agriculture and automation are projected to grow by **12% annually** through 2030. Grand View Research
- **Finance & Investment Need:** Global agribusiness M&A deals worth **$76 billion in 2024**, requiring leaders with financial expertise. Research and Markets
- **Job Market Growth:** Agribusiness job openings are growing **3% annually**, but tech and finance industries offer **10%+ growth rates**, drawing top talent away. Purdue, Bureau of Labor Statistics
- **Seasonality Understanding:** New executives from outside the industry struggle with ag-specific business cycles, impacting decision-making and profitability.

The Cost of Poor Leadership

- Missed innovation: Resistance to digital transformation.
- Operational inefficiencies: Supply chain disruptions and poor decision-making.
- Talent retention issues: Weak leadership leads to high employee turnover.
- Financial consequences: Ag companies struggle to adapt to shifting markets.
- The Wrong Captain: A Costly Leadership Mistake

The cost of poor leadership can cost an organization as much as 7% of its total revenues. A single poor leader costs an organization an average of $126,000 each year.

Unicorn Labs

Top three strengths essential for leaders today

1. ***Emotional Intelligence (24%)***
2. ***Results- Driven Leadership (20%)***
3. ***Ability to Thrive in Ambiguity (16%)***

AESC

***Lesson**: The wrong leader doesn't just stall progress—they drive a company into decline. In any industry, experience, vision, and adaptability matter. The right leadership isn't just an advantage—it's survival.*

Resilient Leadership & Emotional Intelligence: The Key to Agricultural Success

- In agriculture, uncertainty is constant—climate shifts, supply chain disruptions, and evolving technology demand **strong, resilient leaders**.
- The most effective leaders combine **resilience with emotional intelligence (EQ)** to **inspire teams, adapt to change**, and **drive innovation**.

FOUR PILLARS OF RESILIENT LEADERSHIP & HOW EQ ENHANCES THEM

Adapt Quickly –
Leaders must navigate market fluctuations, sustainability shifts, and digital transformation with agility.

Maintain Composure –
High-pressure situations require calm, strategic decision-making.

Foster Positivity –
Resilient leaders motivate teams and sustain morale, reducing turnover.

Encourage Learning from Setbacks –
The best leaders embrace failure as a learning opportunity.

Solutions: What Companies Need to Do

- Invest in leadership development: Training, mentorship, and skill-building.
- Expand talent search: Consider non-traditional candidates from tech and finance. Consider the domain experience needed to achieve the vision.
- Enhance employer branding: Showcase agriculture's innovation potential.
- Implement strong succession planning: Identify and develop future leaders early.

*In the talent marketplace, **culture** has emerged as the invisible hand that can make or break an organization's ability to attract and retain top-tier talent.*

48% | **38%**

*According to K&R survey respondents, **trust and mutual respect (48%)** form the bedrock of high-performing cultures, followed closely by **effective communication and collaboration (both at 38%).***

***Lesson**: Agriculture isn't just about growing food—it's about growing leaders. The companies that invest in leadership today will be the ones that harvest success tomorrow.*

Call To Action:
Why This Matters

- Companies that invest in resilient, emotionally intelligent leaders see higher employee retention, stronger innovation, and long-term success.
- The key takeaway: Agriculture needs leaders who are adaptable, composed, emotionally aware, and willing to learn from setbacks.

START

THANK YOU

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