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# **A qualitative study on how young employees value employer branding attributes in agriculture business context**

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**A qualitative study on how young employees value employer branding attributes in agriculture business context**

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# Abstract

Governments and organisations have set targets for increased food production as a result of an increasing population. In order to increase food production, the capacity of agricultural enterprises needs to be expanded. The Swedish agricultural industry expresses difficulties in finding labour, which prevent businesses from expanding, or that companies must settle with less skilled employees. In order to respond to the set targets of increased food production, agricultural companies need to be better able to attract and retain employees. The average age is high among employees in Swedish agriculture while the portion of young employees is declining. Since young peoples are the new generation of employees, they are of particular interest to agricultural companies to hire. One way to address the problem of finding and retaining workforce is through marketing. Employer branding is a marketing concept that includes how companies can attract and retain employees. Businesses can develop its employer brand by knowing what attributes of employer branding that are valued by their existing employees. This study aims to investigate how young employees value employer branding attributes in the Swedish agricultural sector.

This study applies a qualitative approach with case study design. The case studies consist of nine cases involving nine different young employees from agricultural companies in the region of Mälardalen. Data has been collected through semi-structured interviews based on an interview guide with questions to get the young employees' thoughts and answers. A conceptual framework has been developed to analyze the collected data. The framework is evolved from existing knowledge of employer branding. The framework is based on the analytical categories; *work content, affiliation, compensation, career, benefits*, all of which are considered to contain attributes that affect a company's Employer brand. The collected data has been analyzed with thematic encoding and divided into themes.

The study shows that young employees value several attributes of employer branding in their employment. Identified attributes that are valued are found in all analytical categories from the developed framework. In addition to identifying valued attributes and making suggestions for how employer branding practices can be developed, the study contributes to an expanded understanding of employer branding in the context of agricultural companies. Most attributes can be influenced by the employer. By using the results of this study, agricultural companies can develop their employer brand. This can lead to development and increase of agricultural businesses' production.

# Sammanfattning

Regeringar och organisationer har satt upp mål om en ökad livsmedelsproduktion till följd av en stigande befolkning. För att livsmedelsproduktionen ska kunna öka behöver kapaciteten hos lantbruksföretag utvecklas genom nya investeringar. Nya investeringar är beroende av input resurser så som tillgång till relevant arbetskraft. Den svenska lantbruksbranschen uttrycker svårigheter i att hitta arbetskraft, vilket leder till att expanderingsmöjligheterna hindras, eller att företag får nöja sig med sämre kompetens bland. För att kunna bemöta den framtida förväntansbilden om en ökad livsmedelsproduktion behöver lantbruksföretag bli bättre på att attrahera och bibehålla anställda. Det råder idag en hög medelålder bland anställda i svenskt lantbruk, samtidigt som andelen yngre i lantbruket minskar. Eftersom unga personer är den nya generationen anställda, är de av speciellt intresse för lantbruksföretag att anställa. Ett sätt att adressera problemet med att hitta och bibehålla personal är genom marknadsföring. Employer branding är ett marknadsföringsverktyg som innefattar hur företag kan attrahera och bibehålla anställda. Företag kan utveckla sitt employer brand genom att förstå vilka egenskaper av employer branding som värderas av deras befintliga anställda. Den här studien syftar till att undersöka hur unga anställda värderar egenskaper av employer branding i den svenska lantbrukssektorn.

Den här studien tillämpar ett kvalitativt angreppssätt med fallstudiedesign. Fallstudierna består av nio fall innehållande nio olika unga anställda från lantbruksföretag i Mälardalen. Empiri har samlats in genom semistrukturerade telefonintervjuer. Ett konceptuellt ramverk har utvecklats för att analysera den insamlade empirin. Det konceptuella ramverket bygger på existerande kunskap om employer branding. Ramverket baseras på de analytiska kategorierna; *arbetsinnehåll*, *erkännande*, *kompensation*, *karriär*, *förmåner* och *utveckling*, som alla anses innehålla egenskaper som påverkar ett företags employer brand. Den insamlade empirin har analyserats med tematisk kodning och delats in i teman.

Studien visar att unga anställda värderar flera egenskaper av employer branding i sin anställning. Identifierade egenskaper som värderas återfinns i alla analytiska kategorier från det framtagna ramverket. Förutom att identifiera värden, och komma med förslag till hur utövande av employer branding kan utvecklas, bidrar studien till en utökad förståelse av employer branding i kontexten av lantbruksföretag. Genom att använda resultaten i den här studien, kan lantbruksföretag utveckla sitt employer brand. Detta kan leda till att lantbruksföretag kan utvecklas och öka sin produktion.

# Abbreviations

**EB** – Employer branding

**EVP** – Employee value proposition

**HRM** – Human Resource Management

In this thesis, several synonyms are used interchangeable to create a flow in the thesis language. These synonyms are:

Business – firm – company – organization – corporation

Employees – worker

Workforce – labour – staff

Work – job

# Contents

<b>1 INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 BACKGROUND.....	1
1.1.1 Population growth and future food security.....	1
1.1.2 The agricultural job market.....	2
1.1.3 Young generations in the job market.....	2
1.1.4 The role of marketing in future labour supply.....	3
1.2 PROBLEM .....	4
1.3 AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	5
1.3.1 Delimitations .....	5
<b>2 THEORY.....</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1 THEORETICAL OVERVIEW .....	6
2.2 THE CONCEPT OF EMPLOYER BRANDING.....	6
2.2.1 The definition of Employer Branding .....	7
2.2.2 Internal and external use Employer Branding .....	8
2.2.3 Conceptual framework of Employer Branding.....	8
2.3 EMPLOYEE VALUE PROPOSITION .....	10
2.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	12
<b>3 METHOD.....</b>	<b>13</b>
3.1 LITERATURE REVIEW .....	13
3.2 SCIENTIFIC APPROACH.....	13
3.3 COURSE OF ACTION .....	14
3.3.1 Multiple case study.....	14
3.3.2 Choice of cases.....	15
3.3.3 Semi structured interviews.....	16
3.3.4 Telephone interviews .....	16
3.4 DATA ANALYSIS .....	17
3.5 METHOD DISCUSSION .....	17
3.6 ETHICAL ASPECTS .....	18
<b>4 EMPIRICS.....</b>	<b>19</b>
4.1 BACKGROUND.....	19
4.2 WORK CONTENT.....	20
4.3 AFFILIATION .....	21
4.4 COMPENSATION .....	22
4.5 CAREER.....	23
4.6 BENEFITS .....	24
4.7 DEVELOPMENT – ATTRACT AND RETAIN.....	24
4.7.1 Attracting employees .....	24
4.7.2 Retaining employees.....	25
<b>5 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION.....</b>	<b>26</b>
5.1 ATTRIBUTES OF EMPLOYER BRANDING.....	26
5.2 DEVELOPMENT OF EMPLOYER BRANDING PRACTICES.....	28
5.3 KEY FINDINGS FROM ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION.....	30

5.3 CRITICAL REFLECTION .....	31
<b>6 CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH .....</b>	<b>32</b>
6.1 CONCLUSIONS .....	32
6.2 CONTRIBUTIONS.....	33
6.3 FUTURE RESEARCH.....	34
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>35</b>
LITERATURE AND PUBLICATIONS .....	35
INTERNET.....	38
<b>APPENDIX 1 – INTERVIEW GUIDE .....</b>	<b>40</b>



## List of figures

<i>Figure 1 The employer brand in action (Rosethorn, 2009).</i> .....	7
<i>Figure 2 The conceptual framework of Employer Branding (Backhaus &amp; Tikoo, 2004).</i> .....	9
<i>Figure 3 The inter-relationship of EVP and CVP in the corporate brand. (Sochart, 2009) ...</i>	10
<i>Figure 4 The five elements of the employee value proposition (Kunkle &amp; Sorensen, 2008) ...</i>	11
<i>Figure 5 The conceptual framework (own illustration).</i> .....	12
<i>Figure 6. Development of employer branding attributes (own illustration).....</i>	29
<i>Figure 7. Key attributes valued by young employees (own illustration) .....</i>	33

## List of tables

<i>Table 1. Theoretical overview of selected theories .....</i>	6
<i>Table 2. Overview of participating respondents (own processing). .....</i>	19
<i>Table 3. Key findings from analysis and discussion .....</i>	30



# 1 Introduction

This chapter is introduced by a background to the empirical- and theoretical problem, followed by a problem definition. Furthermore, the aim, research questions and delimitations of this study is presented.

## 1.1 Background

This section presents the background description of the study. The background is divided into four sections; population growth and future food security, the agriculture job market, young generations in the job market and the role of marketing in future labor supply.

### 1.1.1 Population growth and future food security

The world's population continues to grow at a global level (United Nations, 2019). In 2019, the world's population reached 7,7 billion people, which have increased with two billion since 1994. The UN projection report, *World Population Prospects*, states that the world's population is estimated to be 8,5 billion in 2030 (ibid). Abel *et al.* (2016) state that the future of world population growth, matters for the future well-being of humans and their interaction with the natural environment (Abel, *et al.* 2016). A growth in global population will increase the amounts of agricultural products such as food and feed (OECD/FAO, 2019). Globally increasing demand will provide incentives to expand production. This growth in production of food on a global level, is expected to be 15% over the coming decade. Besides population growth, income per capita and global economic growth are projected to increase (ibid). This leads to an increase in demand for food (FAO, 2009). To feed the global population is the main purpose for agriculture, and it is a great challenge (Chavas, 2001). In addition to the projected demand-increase for food, the UN adopted the "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" including 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2015), were the goals serve as a framework for national action against global sustainable development (Sachs *et al.*, 2019). Its main purpose is to achieve sustainable development in three dimensions; economic, social and environmental (ibid). The SDGs deals with several areas identified as important for sustainable development, two of which relate to global food supply and productive employment (UN, 2015). SDG number two represents several tasks to end hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition to the world's population. To accomplish this, agriculture productivity needs to be doubled by increment of investments in international infrastructure and cooperation. SDG number eight stresses the need for productive employment and decent work. The main objective is to reduce the proportion of young people who are unemployed (ibid). An increase in world food production also increases need for input resources, such as access to workforce (LRF *et al.*, 2018).

In June 2017 the Swedish government adopted the National food strategy to function as a long-term food strategy to raise a competitive and sustainable food production industry in Sweden (Swedish Government, 2017). The strategy is focused on covering the entire supply chain, from production industry to consumers. Swedish Government states that the National food strategy is compiled to secure that the full potential of Swedish food production is realized. The main objective of the food strategy is to increase food production while also achieving goals in handling national environmental objectives, growth and increased employment. Until 2030, the strategy will work as a platform for shaping the Swedish food policy. It states that by 2030 the food industry will provide employment in urban as well as rural areas throughout Sweden (ibid). In *Lantbruksbarometern*, a survey produced by Swedbank and LRF Konsult, farmer respondents in Sweden were asked whether they are planning to increase production levels

(Andersson *et al.*, 2019). Half of the respondents planned not to increase or decrease production (*ibid*). This means that most companies are planning to maintain current production levels or decrease, which is counterproductive to the national food strategy. In order to increase the businesses production, there is a need to be able to employ staff. This unifies with Berthon *et al* (2005) whom stress that workforce is an essential resource for businesses.

### 1.1.2 The agricultural job market

Farming employment in the European Union have declined the last decade and has fallen to 9,1 million annual workers, representing a decrease by 30% the last fifteen years (Schuh *et al.* 2019). Business owner's family and relatives today represent most of the agriculture labour in Europe. Besides this, the greatest part (83%) of the European agriculture workforce is employed part time. On a European level, drivers of this decrement are found in technological development and educational status. Technological innovation increases agricultural productivity using less labour. Young people that acquire higher education levels are more likely to seek employment in non-agriculture companies. Apart from this, the population of eastern European countries that recently entered the EU, have made a shift from working in agriculture, towards working in other industries (*ibid*). Despite technological developments, the Swedish agricultural sector still has a demand for workforce to achieve set targets for increased food production (LRF *et al.*, 2018).

According to the Swedish farmer registry, the agriculture primary production employed 171 400 in 62 937 companies (Jordbruksverket, 2016). Swedish primary production of agriculture products includes gardening, crop production and livestock keeping (LRF *et al.*, 2018). Since 2010, employees within the primary production have declined with 4% (Jordbruksverket, 2016). The Swedish public employment service states in a report that the Swedish workforce market have experienced a high level of retirements since 2010 (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2010). From 2010-2025 approximately 1 600 000 people will retire from the labour market, which is 250 000 more than the previous 15 years. According to the report, the agriculture sector will face the greatest level of retirements during this period, were 46% of the workforce will retire during the projected period (*ibid*). Despite retirements, the share of agriculture workers in Sweden younger than 44 years have decreased from 28% to 17% between the yeas of 1996 to 2016 (SJV, 2020). According to Lantbruksbarometern, 69 percent of the respondents would recommend a young person to start a business, or work as an employee, within the primary production (Andersson *et al.*, 2019). In the Swedish agriculture there's a lack of workforce (Kolstrup, 2012). The sector will continue to need competent workers in the future (*ibid*). Lack of workforce prevent businesses from expanding (LRF, 2018). Agriculture businesses decrease production due to lack of workforce or choose less competent workers. This leads to companies avoiding new investments (*ibid*). Due to high retirement levels and a decrement in young people working with agriculture, the lack of workforce that Kolstrup (2012) state can be expected to consist or increase in the future. Young people are the new entrants to the job market and a potential generational group for agri-businesses to employ. Research show that each generation has its own approaches to work and workplace (Gaidhani *et al.*, 2019). Because of this, it is relevant for companies to understand and get to know the potential group of young employees.

### 1.1.3 Young generations in the job market

According to Mowen (1995) human values, lifestyle and consumption pattern changes throughout their lifecycle. Therefore, it is interesting to group humans in generations because they tend to have similar values, needs and behavioural patterns. This unifies with Peter &

Olsson (1999) whom stresses that categorized age groups can be analysed as subcultures, due to similarities in values and behaviours. Generation Y, also called “millennials”, are the ones born between 1978 and 1994 (Blackwell *et al.*, 2006). Research shows that Generation Y are more open towards diversity, technology and online communication (*ibid*). Also, they are more open to flexibility, new inputs and possibilities (Mohamad, N. 2018). Once in employment, they demand a career that is challenging, interesting, rewarding, satisfying and that provides them with a good salary. Additionally, they require their career to be meaningful and interesting. Generation Y has also grown up in a world of technology, where technological development always have been present (*ibid*). According to Tulgan (2016), the millennium generation will be more difficult to attract, retain and motivate than any other new generation that has entered the job market. By 2025, 75 percent of the global workforce will be Generation Y, and the remaining 25 percent, will partly be of the following Generation Z (Hobart & Sendek, 2014). The newest entrants to the job market is today the generation known as Generation Z (Gaidhani *et al.*, 2019). Generation Z is earliest born in 1995, which means that the oldest members are up to age of 25. They are determined to be highly connected with technology driven lifestyles and a productive users of social media (*ibid*). Since generations have different preferences when it comes to lifestyle and work, it will be necessary for agriculture employers to encircle and get to know the generations of future employees.

#### 1.1.4 The role of marketing in future labour supply

Workforce is an essential resource for the organization (Berthon *et al.*, 2005). Its quality and performance contribute to improve business results (*ibid*). Due to rapid changes in business environment, companies currently face competition in increased demand for workforce (Chhabra & Sharma, 2011). Business success depend on employee competence. In a competitive business environment, challenges occur when companies are to attract new workforce, due to increased competition in the demand for competent workforce (*ibid*). During 2019, the demand of workforce in Sweden reached a historically high level (Arbetsförmedlingen. 2019). According to Rucci *et al* (1998), increased demand on workforce, stresses companies to develop plans to brand themselves as employers, to attract new employees.

Branding was originally founded to attract and differentiate products (Keller, 1993). Though its foundation, branding have also been applied on people and human resource management, then titled as *employer branding* (Barrow & Mosley, 2011). Employer branding is about promoting what makes the firm an attractive employer (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). When actively working with employer branding, businesses can increase its public attention (Parment & Dyhre, 2009). With employer branding, companies communicate their image of an attractive workplace (Barrow & Mosley, 2011). If businesses improve the relationship with existing employees, they can develop their employer brand (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). By understanding how employees value attributes of employer branding, businesses can increase its internal and external employer attractiveness. The attributes of employer branding express what is promised and expected by a company (Balmer & Greyser, 2006, Brown *et al.*, 2006). The attributes are important for the employer brand since employers and potential employees make decisions about each other on the basis of which similarities they have in values and personalities (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). With increased demand for future workforce in the Swedish agriculture sector, employer branding can be a useful concept to embrace.

## 1.2 Problem

The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise communicates that 7 out of 10 companies have difficulties in finding the right workforce (Svenskt Näringsliv, 2018). Every third business signals that this have prevented a planned expansion. Carina Lindfeldt, head of labour market at the Confederation, states that “*finding the right workforce competence, is essential for business growth and prosperity*” (ibid). In the agricultural- and food production sector, LRF signals a vast majority, 8 out of 10 companies in sector experience difficulties in finding workforce, which in turn can prevent the company from expanding (LRF *et al.*, 2018). Competitiveness among other industries, and workforce-related costs are the primary obstacles in the recruitment process (ibid). Kolstrup (2012) also states that there is a lack of manpower in the Swedish agricultural sector. She also claims that the sector will continue to need qualified workers in the future (ibid). Besides this, Swedish public employment service states that there is a lack of workforce competence in the agricultural sector (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2019). Consequences of not finding workforce prevent businesses from expanding, which causes them to avoid new investments or forcing companies to do with less competent employees (LRF *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, the problem of not finding qualified workforce competence prevents agricultural business growth and counteracts the Swedish governments goal in the national food strategy, to increase Swedish food production.

Since Generation- Y and Z is and will be a part of the future agricultural-workforce, it is important for employers in the sector to understand their lifestyle, values and above all, their employment preferences. Even if the oldest members of Generation Y are 42 years old, Generation Y and Z represent the youngest people entering the job market. This study therefore chooses to name the members as “young- people or employees”. Since the young employees soon compose a vast majority of the national workforce, it makes them an important group. Workforce loyalty towards the employer is decreasing due to increased freedom of choice causing people to change job more often (Ng *et al.*, 2010). If staff tend to shift job more often it creates more mobility in the job market. This differ from history, were job shift didn’t occur in the same pace as today. Job shift is today more recognized as a career movement, rather than being dissatisfied with the current employer. As employers strive to attract new labour, it is important for them to understand the expectations that young people have when applying for a job (ibid). For the employer this causes more challenge in facing the business- and workforce market. Therefore, it becomes essential to know what attracts, motivates and make young people choose agricultural professions. This study identified, that science is scarce about young employees employer preferences in the Swedish agriculture sector.

One way that businesses can address the problem of finding and obtaining workforce in the agricultural sector, is by marketing. Employer branding is a marketing theory which helps businesses to present themselves to potential applicants in the workforce market (Saini *et al.*, 2014; Elving *et al.*, 2013). By building the brand of the employer, improving public awareness and improving loyalty of present employees, companies can retain staff and obtain new qualified workers (Urbankova *et al.*,2017). Employer branding is broadly researched in various industrial contexts such as healthcare-, IT-, and power industry (Berry & Martin, 2017; Heilmann *et al.*, 2013; Halvorsen, 2013). However, knowledge of employer branding in the agriculture sector is underdeveloped and there is therefore a gap in knowledge. This gap in knowledge is articulated by (Berghäll,2015; Urbankova *et al.*,2017) whom both states that there are not many studies on employer branding in agricultural business context.

Since there is a vast need for competent workforce in the Swedish agriculture sector, development of employer branding practices is important here. Indeed, many businesses

operating in this sector signals difficulties in recruiting the right competence. Sufficiency of competent staff in the right age is one of the key factors in a prospering business (Urbankova *et al.*,2017). Young employees are an interesting generational-group for agricultural businesses to recruit, since they are the new entrants to the workforce market. If agri-businesses understand how young employees value attributes of employer branding in their employment, they can develop to improve their employer brand. Therefore, this study focus on employer branding attributes from a young employee perspective.

## 1.3 Aim and research questions

The study aim is to examine how young employees value employer branding attributes in the Swedish agriculture sector.

By achieving this aim, the study can contribute to future research within the field of employer branding in the context of agriculture businesses. The study can also function as a decision basis, for agriculture businesses, that wants to attract and retain workforce.

### **Research questions of interest:**

What attributes of employer branding are valued by young employees in the Swedish agriculture sector?

How can employer branding practices develop to attract young employees?

### 1.3.1 Delimitations

The study has delimitations related to theoretical, methodological and empirical perspectives. Form a theoretical perspective, theory and literature chapter have language constraints. Research and use delimitate to available Swedish and English literature. Employer branding is a broad concept that can be applied in various contexts and perspectives. In this research, the study aims to examine young employees' values on employer branding attributes. Attributes of employer branding is in this study defined as business attributes that affect the employer brand. The chosen theories and conceptual framework are further explained in chapter 2.

Research is performed with qualitative characteristics since this is a qualitative study. Reasons for a qualitative study is to provide a deeper understanding of the employee perspectives on employment attributes, to understand how employer branding can be improved in the Swedish agriculture sector. The method of this study is reviewed further in chapter 3.

For collecting the empirical data, the study delimitates to focus on young employees in Swedish agricultural businesses. The choice of target group is based on the relevancy to understand young employees values. The study is set to focus on young employees, which is defined in section 1.2, with the maximum age of 42 years old.

## 2 Theory

This chapter is introduced by a brief review of the selected theories, followed by an explanation of employer branding and the employee value proposition. Furthermore, the conceptual framework of this study is reviewed.

### 2.1 Theoretical overview

Table 1 presents an overview of the chosen theories that benefit to fulfil this study's aim. The theories are combined to a conceptual framework (presented in section 2.4) that is used when analysing the empirical data. Table 1 summarizes the theories with a description followed by key references.

*Table 1. Theoretical overview of selected theories*

Theory	Description	Key references
<b>Employer branding</b>	Promotion of what makes the firm an attractive and desirable employer. Aims to attract and retain workforce.	Ambler & Barrow (1996) Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) Berthon <i>et al.</i> , (2005) Dyhre & Parment (2013)
<b>Employee value proposition (EVP)</b>	A tool of employer branding which outline essentials of employees related to employment. EVP defines the employee experience in the corporate brand.	Botha <i>et al.</i> , (2011) Browne (2012) Kunkle & Sorensen (2008) Sochart (2009)

Employer branding serve as a theory to understand attributes that makes the firm an attractive and distinctive employer. The theory is used in this study to understand attributes of employer branding. Employee value proposition is used to understand the employee essentials related to its employment. Analytical categories from the value proposition are borrowed to understand how young employees value attributes of employer branding.

### 2.2 The concept of Employer Branding

Employer branding emerged in the early 1990s when several peoples claimed its creation (Rosethorn, 2009). Originally branding was used to differentiate products but over the years it has been used to differentiate places, people and firms (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Employer branding suggest to differentiate the employer characteristics from its competitors. The aim of employer branding is to attract and retain workforce by enhancing unique offers of the organizations employment (ibid). Since employer branding is a parallel branding concept with conventional branding (product branding), traditional marketing techniques is applicable (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). A strong employer brand attracts more competent applicants and shape their expectations (Davies, 2007). Backhouse & Tikoo (2004) states that employer branding has the potential to be a valuable concept for managers to embrace. Businesses can use employer branding as an umbrella under which they can channel different employee recruitment and retention activities (ibid).

Employer branding involves promoting (external as well as internal) a clear view what makes the firm an attractive employer (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). It seeks to impact organizational



culture and identity that contributes to employee loyalty. Employer branding help to increase productivity and retain staff. Its main purpose is to attract new workforce and improve relationship with existing employees (ibid). According to Ambler & Barrow (1996), employer branding can be seen as a conceptual framework of branding theory and human resource management. Human resource management refers to managing activities for people who work in an organization (Kramar, 2014). Ambler & Barrow (1996) stress were corporate brand and consumer brand is the same, employer branding is also the same. Thus in companies whose corporate brand is not the same as the marketed consumer brand, employer branding becomes another brand that is marketed to the employee segment (ibid). To attract, motivate and retain the firm’s current and future employees, employer branding establishes an identity of the company (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

### 2.2.1 The definition of Employer Branding

The first found definition of employer branding was coined by Ambler & Barrow (1996). The authors define employer branding as *“the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company”* (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p 187). Berghäll (2015) describes this definition as how the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits of an employer differ from other employer competitors. The theory represents the firm’s efforts to promote, both internally and externally within the firm, a view of what makes it desirable and different as an employer (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). It is about promoting the employer brand, to attract and retain workforce.

Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) define employer branding as *“the process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity”* (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p 552), and the employer brand as *“a concept of the firm that differentiates it from its competitors”* (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p 552). According to this definition, employer branding is activities done to promote and differentiate the employer brand. Rosethorn (2009) defines employer branding as *“An employer brand is in essence the two-way deal between an organization and its people- the reasons they choose to join and the reasons they choose – and are permitted – to stay. The art of employer branding is to articulate this deal in a way this is distinctive, compelling and relevant to the individual, and to ensure that it is delivered throughout the lifecycle of the employee within that organization”* (Rosethorn, 2009 p 19). The definition leads to a strength in the corporate employee brand. According to Rosethorn (2009), the definition consists of two pieces added together; Employee value proposition and Employee experience. Figure 1 illustrates the employer brand according to Rosethorn (2009). Employee value proposition is furthermore explained in chapter 2.3.

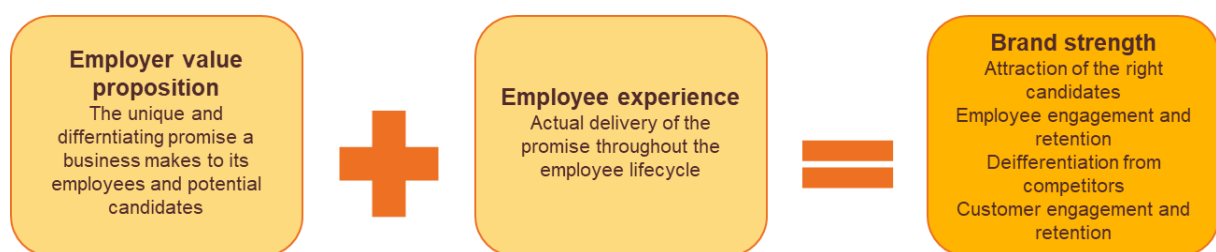


Figure 1 The employer brand in action (Rosethorn, 2009).

Thus, different definitions of employer branding, they all indicate that employer branding involves promoting within and outside the company, a clear view of what makes the firm a desirable employer (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). There is also a common agreement on the fact that employer branding is including concepts from brand management transferred into human

resource management (Christiaans, 2012). From an organizational structure point of view, employer branding is therefore situated between marketing and HR department (ibid). Despite above mentioned similarities with corporate- and product brand, employer branding differs from these in two ways (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). First, employer branding is employment specific, featuring the business identity as an employer. Secondly, it targets both an internal and external audience (ibid).

### 2.2.2 Internal and external use Employer Branding

External employer branding refers to all activities forming the business image as an employer (Pluta, 2015). The purpose is to make the business the employer of choice ahead of its competitors. Attracting talents is considered the first step to build an outstanding workforce. Reputation and recognized attractiveness of an employer act as a magnet for potential employees (ibid). External marketing is established by the firm to attract the best possible workers (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). The assumption with external marketing is to create a brand distinctiveness which allows the firm to attract and employ distinctive human capital. The development of a clear message distinct the firm from its competitors. External marketing of the employer brand is primary design to attract new employees, but it also supports corporate or product brand (ibid). External marketing is designed mainly to market the brand towards potential employees (Berthon *et al.*, 2005). External employer branding can sometimes be overshadowed by external product or corporate branding (Sengupta *et al.*, 2015). This due to external branding includes the practice of leaders, organizational activities towards fulfillment of social responsibilities and built of trust and trustworthiness to its shareholders and customers (ibid)

Internal employer branding refers to employer brand activities within the firm to promote the firm as an employer (Pluta, 2015). By internally enhancing the employer brand, the organization creates a culture of trust between employer and employees (Sengupta *et al.*, 2015). Establishment of strong moral values satisfies employees and fulfills the promises made at the first employment interview (ibid). According to Ambler & Barrow (1996), this helps the organization to retrain their staff. Sengupta *et al* (2015) states that “*Satisfied employees are the best source of employer branding*” (Sengupta *et al.*, 2015 p 311). Systematic career management, economic benefits, work-life balance, employee development and work culture are examples of factors that create a good internal employer branding. The more an employee can associate its own values with the corporate values, the more he or she will feel attracted towards working in the organization (ibid).

### 2.2.3 Conceptual framework of Employer Branding

According to Backhaus & Tikoo (2004), employer branding creates two principal assets; employer brand associations and employer brand loyalty. Employer brand associations shapes the employer image which in turn affects the employer attractiveness (ibid). Brand associations of a firm are thoughts and ideas that alerts minds of consumers. The associations can either be expressed verbally, but also emotionally as thoughts evoked by the brand (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). These associations determine the employer brand image (ibid). Employer image is defined as the potential attitudes of applicants and perceived attributes about the job or firm (Christiaans, 2012). Berthon *et al* (2005) defined the term employer attractiveness as “*the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organisation*” (Berthon *et al*, 2005 p 151). These benefits can be functional or symbolic (Backhaus & Tikoo).

Functional benefits can be salary, benefits or leave allowances while symbolic benefits relate to prestige or social approval of working in the firm. Employer attractiveness can be seen as an antecedent to the concept of brand equity (Bethon *et al.*, 2005). By other means, all the more an employer is considered attractive by potential employees, the employer brand strengthens (*ibid*).

Brand loyalty is the second principal asset to employer branding. According to Aaker (1991), brand loyalty describes the attachment that a consumer has to the brand. It builds on the idea that a customer that is loyal to the brand is less likely to switch to another brand, even in times when the brand is weakened by competitive actions (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004). Employer brand loyalty is the commitment that employees do to their employer. It can be conceptualized to relate to organizational identity and organizational culture. Employer branding is commonly used to affect organizational- culture and identity. Organizational culture builds on the assumption that values learned by members of the organization is passed on to new members, and values affect the way people within the organization behave. Culture is an evolving concept that shapes the organization. Besides culture, organizational identity is an additional contributor to employer brand loyalty. Organizational identity can be defined as the collective group attitude about who the company is. It involves the aggregated employee view on how employees identify themselves with the company. Finally, employer branding seeks to enhance the leverage between employer brand loyalty, and employee productivity. Studies have shown that satisfied employees, tend to have higher performance, higher productivity and provide higher levels of customer satisfaction. Therefore, employer brand loyalty can relate to employee productivity (*ibid*).

To easier understand the different concepts of employer branding, Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) developed a conceptual framework presented in figure 2.

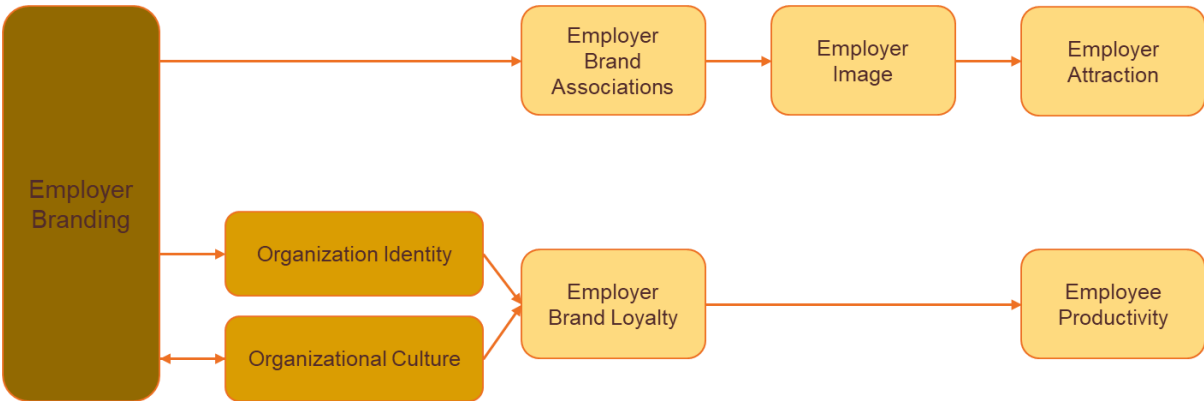


Figure 2 The conceptual framework of Employer Branding (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Employer branding can be visualized as the umbrella under which brand- associations and loyalty lies. Employer brand associations can be considered as external values that implicate on the employer image, which in its turn affect the employer attractiveness. On the other hand, employer brand loyalty is driven by organizational- identity and culture. The employer brand loyalty relates to employee productivity. Since this study aims to examine attributes of employer branding in young-employees employment, there is need for an additional concept to identify attributes that young-employees have.

### 2.3 Employee value proposition

The EVP can be seen as a concept evolved from employer branding (Botha et al, 2011). It is emphasized to put the employee brand in a differentiated position compared from competing employers (ibid). Both employer branding and the EVP is based on the corporate culture (Dyhre & Parment, 2013). Since the employer branding is designed to help to organization to attract and retain staff, the EVP can be a powerful concept in this development (Botha et al, 2011). An Employee Value Proposition (EVP) serves to create a balance between job satisfaction and performance of the employee in the work culture (Goswami, 2015). The EVP can be used as a concept evolved from employer branding as it outlines the desirable essentials of employees related to employment (ibid). Many firms have formed a CVP (Customer value proposition) to enhance benefits and motives why a customer should buy a certain product (Berghäll, 2015). In traditional branding, each product or company has its own potential targets or customer. The equivalent in the workforce market is the EVP (ibid). Minchington (2010) defined employee value proposition as *“a set of associations and offerings provided by an organisation in return for the skills, capabilities and experiences an employee brings to the organization”* (Minchington, 2010 p 33). According to Sochart (2009) the EVP is related to employer branding and defines the employee experience in the corporate brand. It relates to other forms of corporate branding and it is not performed by one single department in the organization. The organizations corporate brand is an overall promise to customers, shareholders and employees (Sochart, 2009). Figure 3 below, shows the inter-relationship of EVP and CVP in the overall corporate brand.

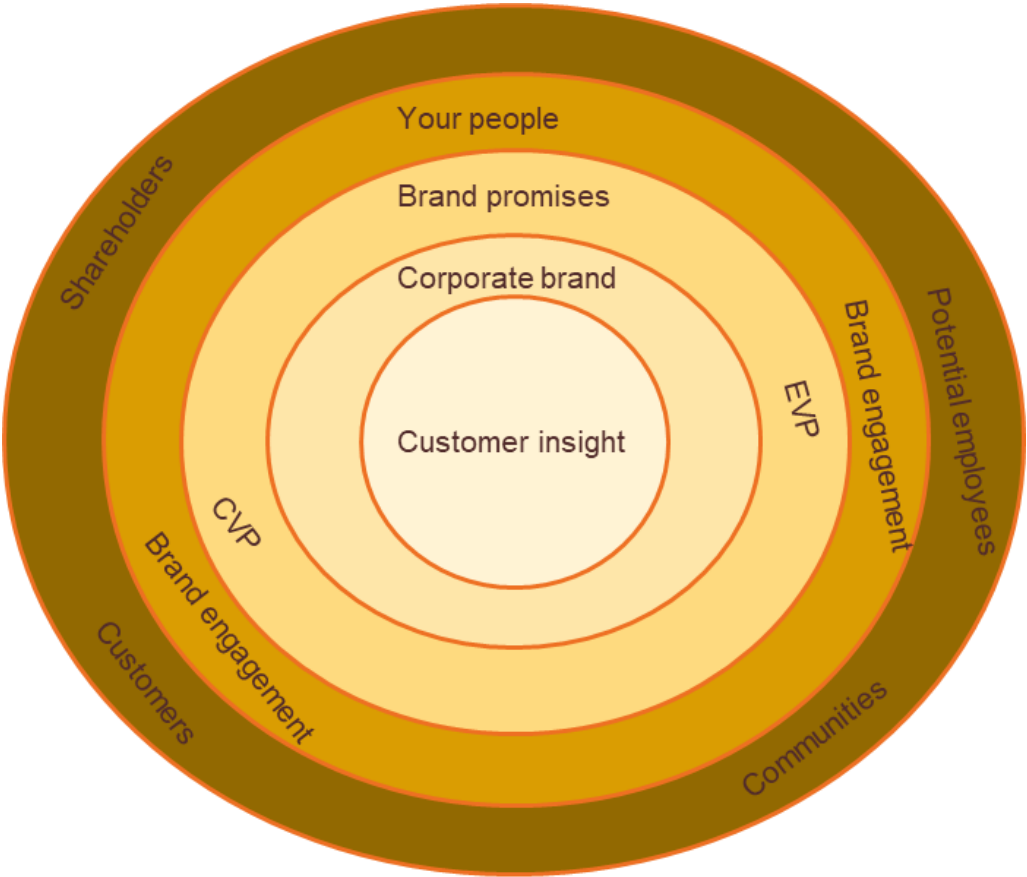


Figure 3 The inter-relationship of EVP and CVP in the corporate brand. (Sochart, 2009)

Figure 3 illustrates the inter relationship between the corporate brand positioning and promises, such as employee value proposition (EVP) or customer value proposition (CVP). The corporate brand position, sets a base for promises to specific target audiences, such as customer, employees, shareholders and the wider community (Sochart, 2009). In order to deliver promises to these target audiences, employees must be engaged and committed to deliver a coherent brand experience. The EVP contains similar elements as brand positioning. It should contain a clear strategic positioning with market definition and targeted candidates, an insight based on deep understanding of the targeted candidates needs and motivations, a differentiated promise supported by tangible facts and an integrated expression of the EVP, both internally and externally (ibid). According to Tandehill (2006) the employee value proposition should identify the unique people policies, processes and programs that demonstrate the organizations commitment to, for example, management development, ongoing employee recognition and employee growth. The EVP should also list the central reasons that people will choose to commit themselves once working in the company (ibid).

In order to develop an employee value proposition that attracts the targeted group of employees, the firm needs to have insights in the different needs of the target group (Minchington, 2005). Each EVP is a firm-unique concept that contains a mix of characteristics about the employment. The characteristics can be explained by a five elements framework, developed by Kunkle and Sorensen (2008). Starting from this framework, the company can develop and create its own employee value proposition. The five elements framework is presented in figure 4.

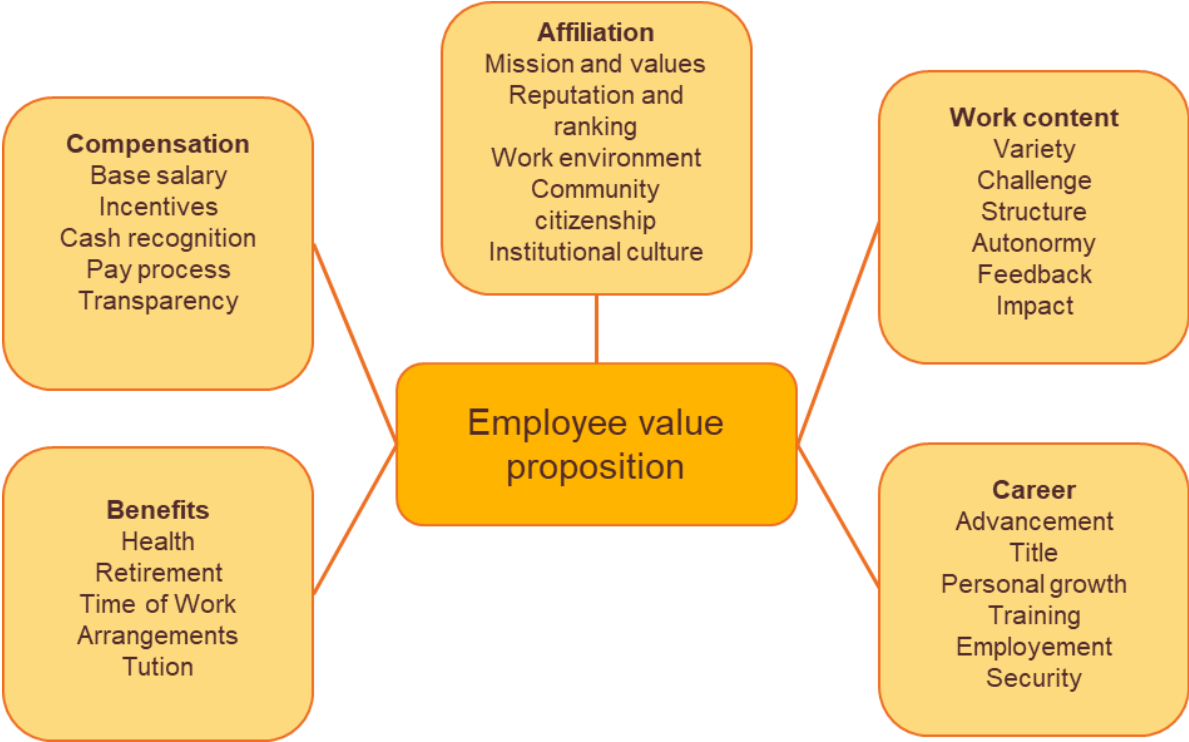


Figure 4 The five elements of the employee value proposition (Kunkle & Sorensen, 2008)

Once having knowledge of the five elements of EVP; Compensation, benefits, work content, career and affiliation, the company can design their own value proposition (Browne, 2012). Each of the elements has its own aspects that is important for employer motivation. The aspects can be of more or less importance for the individual employee. Compensation emphasizes money that employees receive for their work (Browne, 2012). Benefits include indirect

compensation as healthcare, service pension and vacation days. Work content is the satisfaction employees receive from work and what motivates them to work. Career includes long term development and advancement opportunities. Affiliation refers to the feeling of belongingness employees have towards the organization (ibid). With the EVP, employers can get a deeper understanding of their targeted group of potential young-employees. According to Morocko & Uncles (2008), successful employer brands characterizes by having a relevant value proposition that is developed to fit their potential employees. The theoretical framework presented above can help agricultural firms in their advancement in developing their own EVP. The five elements of the employee value proposition will serve as analytical categories for examining employer branding attributes in this study, which is explained in chapter 2.4.

## 2.4 Conceptual framework

This study is to examine how young employees value employer branding attributes. As read in this chapter, the concept of employer branding can be studied in many ways and requires inputs from many perspectives. Employee value proposition is a concept evolved from employer branding as it outlines the essentials of employees related to the employment (Goswami, 2015). Successful employer brands have a relevant value proposition (Morocko & Uncles, 2008). Attributes of employer branding is in this study defined as attributes in a business that affect the employer brand. The content of the five elements in the EVP therefore affect the employer brand and can be considered as attributes of employer branding.

The conceptual framework for this study is based on a combination of the concept’s employer branding and employee value proposition. Theory of employer branding emphasis attributes of employer branding. Employee value proposition emphasis essentials of employees, explained through five analytical categories (Kunkle & Sorensen, 2008) Thus, in combining these two concepts, the conceptual framework is applied to examine how young employees value employer branding attributes. This conceptual framework is created to fulfil the aim, and answer research questions of this study. The conceptual framework consists of five analytical categories that is all considered as Employer branding attributes. The five categories; *Work content*, *Affiliation*, *Compensation*, *Benefits* and *Career* are borrowed from the concept of employee value proposition (Kunkle & Sorensen, 2008). To answer the second research questions in this study; *How can employer branding practices develop to attract young employees?* The analytical term *Development* has been added. This, to understand how young employees perceives development of outlined employer branding attributes. Figure 5 presents the conceptual framework of this study.

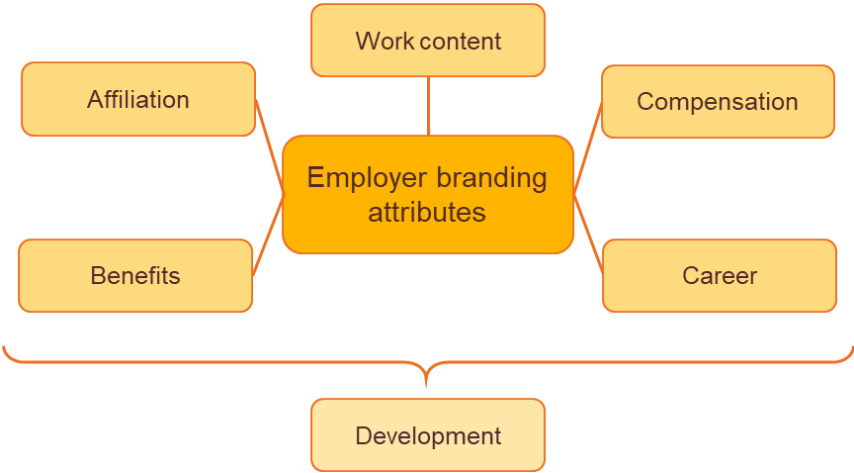


Figure 5 The conceptual framework (own illustration).

## 3 Method

This chapter presents the method used to achieve the aim of this study. The chapter starts with a literature review followed by an argumentation of the chosen scientific approach. Furthermore, the course of action is presented, explaining how the multiple case studies and respondents was compiled. An explanation of how the empirical data was collected and analysed is also featured. At last, the chapter ends with a discussion of the chosen method and ethical aspects of this study.

### 3.1 Literature review

The literature review in this study aims to create an understanding of what was already known in the researched area. A literature review serves as a foundation for conducting a research approach and to give foundation for the research topic questions (Bryman & Bell, 2013). In this thesis, a narrative literature review was applied which implicate a research of known literature from the researched area. A narrative literature review creates a transparent process which minimizes distortions. It consists of replicable scientific research throughout the study, without a specified framework of how the literature review is carried out. This give flexibility to the study (ibid). Credibility of this study increases with a well performed literature review since it enables arguing on point of stands taken in this study.

The literature review is based on research within the marketing field of employer branding and the employee value proposition. The literary sources consist mostly of scientific articles, statistics, subject literature and reports. Primary focus of the literature review has been the concept of employer branding and the employee value. Research have also been made on previous branding studies within and outside the context of agriculture. The researched literature has primary been found at SLU Library and the search engines Primo and Google Scholar during February to April, 2020.

### 3.2 Scientific approach

Several approaches can be applied when carrying out a scientific research. What is considered scientific research can be discussed from different point of views but it often ends up with how the data was collected. According to Robson (2002), scientific research is carried out systematically, sceptically, accurate and ethically with a consistent aim of finding out the truth. Bryman & Bell (2013) states that scientific research within the field of business and administration is usually applied by using two research strategies; qualitative and quantitative.

This study is assumed to be of qualitative approach were the aim was to perform multiple case studies to study how individuals perceive and interpret their social reality. A qualitative research approach put weight in words and not by quantifying numeric data (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Mainly, the qualitative research approach emphasizes an inductive point of view on the relationship between theory and research, were the concentration point is on generating new theories (ibid). The qualitative approach includes strategies to collect, organizes and interpret data adopted by interviews with individuals (Malterud, 2001). Qualitative science method is interpretative, which set focus to create and understand the social reality, based on how individuals interpret their environment (Bryman & Bell, 2013). The qualitative approach also takes an ontological standpoint meaning that social qualities is the result of interaction between individuals (ibid). According to Malterud (2001) qualitative research strategy is useful to

investigate the “*meaning of social phenomena as experienced by the people themselves*” (Malterud, 2001, p 398). Therefore, a qualitative research approach is applicable when studying values and perceptions of individuals. Since this study aims to examine how young employees in the Swedish agriculture sector value employer branding attributes, the descriptive qualitative research approach is applicable. This thesis intends to interpret how social reality among young employees is constructed and how it affects their values on employer branding attributes. The data was collected through qualitative interviews by talking to young employees from agriculture businesses. By using qualitative interviews, the researcher can understand the respondent individuals (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Criticism has been raised towards qualitative research because it is considered to sometimes be too subjective (Skinner *et al.*, 2000). This, due to the researcher’s presence during the collection of data can cause influence over the outcome of results. Kvale & Birkmann (2014) state that it is difficult to generalize results in a qualitative study since the aim often is to study a specific context which makes it hard to copy. Though the authors claim that the descriptiveness of a qualitative study, enables a contextual understanding of the studied subject, which can be difficult to obtain in a quantitative study (*ibid*). Despite criticism on qualitative research being too subjective, social reality is perceived differently by people, hence, it cannot be considered as objective (Jacobsen, 2002). In this thesis, we study employees in their social reality where values and actions are under constant process, shifting with their surrounding environment. Therefore, their social reality can be under constant progress, which originates from Bryman & Bell (2013) definition of constructionism. Since this study aimed to examine values of young employees, the descriptive and interpretive approach of qualitative studies was found suitable. The selected theories in this study were used when analysing the empirical findings. The goal was to find similarities and patterns in the empirical material from which conclusions could be drawn.

### 3.3 Course of action

In this section the course of action in the used method is reviewed. First, a description of the multiple case study, followed by a presentation of how the respondents were selected. Furthermore, the section also includes a presentation of how the interviews were designed and the usage of telephone interviews.

#### 3.3.1 Multiple case study

According to Eisenhardt & Graebner (2007), case study design serves as a popular research design in the field of business and administration. Case studies normally consist of one single case to be studied (Bryman & Bell, 2013). The case can be an organization, a location, an event or a specific person (*ibid*). It is the case in its context, that researchers strive to explain (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Scientists argue that case studies are often performed in qualitative research, though the research design is also used when applying a quantitative research approach (Bryman & Bell, 2013). According to Yin (2009), evidence can be provided by reports, interviews or observations in either qualitative- or quantitative case studies. The case study design distinguishes from other methods due to its focus on one single case, which provides in depth clarification (Bryman & Bell, 2013). A central part in a case study is to study decisions that have been made, and the results given by them (Yin, 2009). Besides choosing case study as a research design, the level of analysis is also a factor to adjust to (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Within the field of business and administration, there are five levels of analysis; society,



organizations, groups and individuals (ibid). This study sets its focus on the individual – young employee in the agricultural sector.

In this study, attributes of employer branding were studied in the context of Swedish agriculture businesses. The aim was to examine how young employees value employer branding attributes. When choosing research approach, it is important to consider the type of research questions and the unit of analysis (Robson, 2002). This is accordant with Yin (2009) whom states that case studies are a preferable approach when answering research questions of “how” and “when”, when studying a phenomenon that the researcher have slight control of. This statement correlated with the research questions of this study, and case studies was thereby seen as a suitable research design for this study. Case studies can be performed as single- or multiple case studies (Eisenhardt, 1989).

According to Bryman & Bell (2013), case study research is not limited to studying one single case. Multiple case studies are a common approach when the researcher wishes to compare the studied cases. This enables the researcher to take a standing point on equalities and inequalities among the different cases (ibid). In this study, focus was set on studying attributes of employer branding and how they were valued by young employees in the context of agriculture businesses. The collection of empirical data was carried out by multiple case studies, with the aim to study each case’s attributes of employer branding. Each case is represented by a respondent employee, in the context of a certain agriculture business. To keep the respondent anonymous, the cases will be interviewed and presented in a single text.

### 3.3.2 Choice of cases

Before choosing cases in this study, I started to set criteria for the respondents to fulfil to be included. The main criteria were that the respondents had to be at an age of maximum 42 years old, and thereby be a part of generation Y or Z, in this study considered as “young employees”. Also, they needed to be part- or fulltime employed in an agriculture business in the field of; dairy production, crop production or pig production. This is reasoned with the need for workforce competence throughout the agriculture sector (LRF, 2018). The selected cases were limited to the region of Mälardalen, Sweden. Mälardalen is defined as the region including the counties of Uppsala, Västmanland, Örebro, Södermanland and Stockholm. I demarcated to this region due to its geographical location in relation to SLU, Ultuna and because it was more cost efficient. By determining criteria’s I could identify respondents that gave depth to the interviews, which enabled me to find answers to the established research questions (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The geographical delimitation and planned data collection were made before the global awareness of the COVID-19 virus. Due to the virus, it would have been possible to modify this geographical delimitation to perform the interviews on a national level. Thus this, I decided to go on with the geographical delimitation to Mälardalen since the respondents already had accepted participation and were scheduled.

For the research to sample the desired data, it is important to regard how the choice of cases have been exercised (Bryman & Bell, 2013; Merriam, 1994). Two ways to sample data by case studies is probability- and non-probability sampling (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Non-probability sampling is performed by not randomly selecting cases from the population. Criticism towards non-probability sampling is difficulties in generalizing the results, compared to probability sampling were the cases are selected randomly (ibid). According to Merriam (1994), non-probability sampling is commonly used in qualitative case studies. Goal- and purpose-oriented samples are the most commonly used samples when using non-probability sampling. Goal-

oriented sampling involves efforts from the researcher to gain insight, discover and understand the investigated case (ibid). The non-probability sampling is applied in this study, since the author does not wish to generalize results to a population. The studied young employees have been chosen by the author to sample the desired data to answer the research questions and fulfil the studies aim. One chosen respondent provided contact info to additionally seven more respondents, which led me to influence, in a lesser degree, who participated in the study. Nine cases consisting of nine employees from nine different agriculture businesses were selected for this multiple case study. Thus, due to Gentles *et al* (2015) whom states that a minimum of four cases are needed to achieve theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation is considered when sufficient information is achieved, and no more new information will change the outcome results (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

### 3.3.3 Semi structured interviews

To investigate how young employees value employer branding attributes, I choose to perform semi-structured interviews. Semi-structure interviews are characterized as a flexible form of interviews where I used an interview guide (see Appendix 1) that was prepared in advance to the interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2013). The interview guide serves as a list of themes, from which the interview questions are conducted (ibid). The guide enabled flexibility to the interview and the ability to ask questions depending on the social- or respondent context. To achieve the desired data, and reduce the risk of affecting the respondent's answers, I used open-ended questions. The interview guide has been tested with friends and family prior to the interviews, to enable necessary editing.

The interview guide was introduced by five questions concerning the respondents background. The background questions were necessary to serve as a basis for further discussion throughout the interview. It also constitutes the foundation for the background section in chapter four. By knowing the employees age, prior education and employers, a brief description of their current employer and a description of how they found their employer and why they chose that specific one, enables me to distinguish the respondents as well to find similarities in their background. After I received information about the respondent's background, I proceeded with questions of my main themes. The main themes; *Work content, Affiliation, Compensation, Career, Benefits* and *Development* were based on the conceptual framework of this study.

### 3.3.4 Telephone interviews

Since this study, and the collection of data, is implemented during the outbreak of COVID-19, decision was made to perform telephone interviews, instead of face-to-face interviews. This to reduce the risk of spreading the virus, and to show consideration for the respondents. Primarily, semi structured interviews are carried out by face-to-face interviews, were questions are asked directly to the respondent (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Another way to perform the interviews is by telephone. Compared to face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews are often cheaper and more time efficient. Telephone interviews also reduces the risk of affecting the respondent's answers by factors as gender, age or ethical background, that is revealed in a face-to-face interview (ibid). However, telephone interviews cause loss of non-verbal data, such as respondent expression during the interview, which can obstruct interpretations. Non-verbal data tend to improve richness of the data. Though, Sturges & Hanrahan (2004) claims that telephone interviews can be used successfully in qualitative research method. Another advantage of telephone interview is when discussing sensitive questions that could cause inconvenience in a face-to-face interview (ibid).

### 3.4 Data analysis

In this study, the unit of analysis was the respondent employees' values on employer branding attributes. Qualitative data assembled by interviews often consists of a vast amount of text that is unstructured, which in turn cause difficulties when the researcher is to analyse the data (Robson, 2011). To ease the analysing, each interview was recorded after approval from the respondent. According to Robson (2011) and Yin (2013), analysing the data from the study is important, and there are few methods to do it. Thematic coding is a commonly used method for analysing qualitative data (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Thematic coding is a tool used in the method of grounded theory (Bryman & Bell, 2013). In thematic coding, the collected data is structured in themes, in order to identify patterns and trends (Bryman & Bell, 2013; Yin, 2009).

The themes used for the thematic coding is based on the six themes established in the interview guide; *Work content, affiliation, compensation, career, benefits and development*. After the interviews, I was able to separate different thoughts and answers to the presented themes. The collected data from the separate cases were interweaved in to one single presentation, to make it easier for the reader and to keep the respondents anonymous. The method of thematic coding was useful since it helped me to distinguish similarities and differences in the separate cases. The themes facilitated the interpretation and analysis of the collected data.

### 3.5 Method discussion

Disadvantages with qualitative research is that the researcher is not objective enough (Bryman & Bell, 2013). There is a risk that the researcher, affect the respondents when answering the research questions. This risk is greater in qualitative research than in quantitative (ibid). The risk also include how I interpret the respondents answer, which affects the results in this study. Therefore, the results in this study can be affected by the researcher feelings and interpretations of the collected data. There is also criticism that qualitative research is hard to replicate since the researcher is the most important tool when collecting the data (Bryman & Bell, 2013). It is difficult for the researcher and respondents to retrieve data without affecting it without having expectations or prejudices.

Further criticism is that there are difficulties in generalizing results conducted by qualitative interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Criticizers state that it is impossible to generalize the results to a different context (ibid). However, this study does not seek to generalize results, but to create a deeper understanding of how employer branding functions in the context of young employees in an agriculture business. I was able to draw conclusions based on the collected data, thus, the results cannot, and are not supposed to be generalized. Results conducted by a qualitative case study, can not be representative for the entire population (Bryman & Bell, 2013). The context is of great matter in qualitative research, and the results are not suitable to apply in a different context (Kvale & Birkman, 2014). Results from a qualitative study, should therefore be generalized to theory, and not the contexts population (Bryman & Bell, 2013). In this thesis, telephone interviews have been used to interview employees from agriculture businesses. Since the interviews have been conducted at the workplace, the context could unconsciously have affected the respondents. Employer characteristics and employee values can be a sensitive matter for the employee to discuss. Therefore, I have decided not to use questions that refers to the employee's employer, but to ask general questions about employer values in the context of an agriculture business.

Respondent valuation can be a tool to increase the study's credibility (Bryman & Bell, 2015). By respondent valuation the respondent confirms or edit the collected data. However, the

researcher chose not to apply respondent valuation, to ensure to get the respondents spontaneous thoughts and expressions. If the respondent changes the collected data, there is a risk that important data gets lost.

### 3.6 Ethical aspects

It is of great matter when conducting a qualitative research to be sensible about ethical considerations throughout the study process (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). Ethical aspects associate with interference between the researcher and the respondents (Given, 2008). It is important to ensure trust and integrity with the respondent by staying confidential (Troost, 2010). Kvale & Brinkmann (2014) bring up four ethical guidelines; informed consent, confidentiality, consequences and the researcher's role. These ethical guidelines improved decision making in this study.

Respondents in this study approved to participate on their own free will, and the collected data was used only to fulfil this study's purpose. The respondents were informed about the aim of this study before the interview, which is important according to Bryman & Bell (2015). To avoid discomfort, the interviews were recorded after the respondent's approval. I also decided to let the respondents be anonymous, which was transmitted before the interview. It is important for the researcher to investigate, understand and handle, consequences the participation may cause the respondent (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014).

## 4 Empirics

This chapter presents the empirical data. The data was collected through 9 semi structured interviews conducted by telephone calls to young employees in agri-businesses. The 9 interviews consist of 9 separate cases, each with a respondent young-employee. The chapter starts with a background description of the participating respondents. To keep anonymousness and ease for the reader, the respondent's answers are wrapped up in a single text. Further, the data is divided in to different themes upon which the interview guide and conceptual framework was based on; *work content, career, affiliation, compensation, benefits and development*. The themes are presented in subheadings which includes the employees thoughts and answers.

### 4.1 Background

In total, 9 interviews with young employees in different agricultural businesses were conducted. The participating respondents were currently employed in agriculture businesses from the region of Mälardalen, which was one of this study's criteria. The interviews were conducted with 9 individual full-time working participants. Out of them, 3 were women, and the remaining 6 were men. Before participating, the respondents were informed about the aim of this study. They were also informed that they would be anonymous as participants in the study. To enable the reader an overview of the participating respondents I have created table 2, presented below.

Table 2. Overview of participating respondents (own processing).

Number of respondents	Age range y/o	Average age	Average number of employees*	Production field (D,P,C)**
9	20-29	24,33	2,5	(3, 2, 4)

\* Average number of employees in respective business  
\*\* Main production field (D,P,C) = Dairy-, Pig-, Crop production

All the respondents studied the agriculture alignment at high school. None of them had university education. Almost 50% of the participating employees have had more than one employment since they finished high school. All the respondents have agriculture-related work as their main work-task, though 3 out of nine also work with forestry- and/or machine-contracting related tasks. Some businesses also have side production in either livestock or grain farming. Two of the respondent's employee businesses employ additional workforce during harvesting season. Most of the respondents have worked with agriculture since they finished high school. Before that, many of them also have relation with agriculture from e.g. a family farm or relatives/friends working with agriculture businesses in some way.

The participants work tasks vary depending on the business production field. In dairy- and pig production, work tasks primary consists of animal keeping but also machine operating during feeding and harvesting season. Pig production employees have diversified the work tasks between machine operating or animal keeping. In crop production, machine operator is the most common work task. Besides operating machines, the employees also spend working hours in the workshop during winter season.

One of the first questions asked to each respondent was why they had chosen an agri-business employer. Several of the respondents answered that they found their work tasks, such as crop production or animal keeping, to be of great satisfaction. All the respondents had a great interest for their work task, which motivated them to work. A vast majority had developed their interest in agriculture businesses during their high school education. Almost half of the respondents grew up on a family farm from where they built their relationship with agriculture. The remaining half got familiar the agriculture sector during their education at high school or by having relatives or friends working in the agriculture sector.

*“I have always had the interest of animals, which caused me to seek education within the agriculture sector and further on working in a pig producing agri-business”*

During the respondent’s education, many of them got in touch with agri-businesses during internships provided by the high school. For four respondents the internships led to employment.

*“During my second year at high school I got a job offer for a summer job at the business I had my internship at”*

A major part of the respondents reasoned their work to be flexible and including many-sided working tasks. Employees gave examples where they needed to understand crop production, animal keeping, new technology and engineering.

## 4.2 Work content

Work content refers to what satisfy and motivates employees in their work (Browne, 2012). It involves aspects of work tasks, challenges in work, business leadership, independence and feedback from employer. During the interviews I asked the respondents to describe their work content and what they found of importance for their well-being at work. Further if it was necessary, several questions were asked to understand work structure, business leadership and employee-feedback.

A major part of the respondents concluded their work as many-sided. This was considered as an important part of the well-being at work due to the variety of work tasks that the employees were facing. The variety of work tasks also resulted in individual responsibilities given to the employer. Six out of nine respondents implicated that they felt a great sense of responsibility during their work. When asking if the respondents considered it important to influence how their work tasks is performed, 90 percent answered *“that is very important”* without hesitating. By influencing their job assignments, the employees felt that they were payed attention to.

*“Although I am young, I am encouraged to suggest new ideas to improve our work. This is good whether or not my boss decides to go on with my suggestion”*

On the contrary, one respondent experienced the employer as not encouraging employees to influence their work tasks.

*“I have tried several times to change routines and influence how my work tasks can be performed but my employer does not listen to me”.*

By being neglected by the employer the employee does not feel their work to be recognized. The mentioned respondent feels less motivated to work and the sense of belongingness to the

business is damaged. The same respondent also emphasise that the employer does not give any work-related feedback, something that eight other respondents found of great importance.

*“Feedback of my work is of great importance, it strengthens me!”*

One respondent emphasizes that positive and negative feedback on the employee’s work is essential. The employee believes that senior employers sometimes are less encouraged to give feedback. Several of the respondent’s experience feedback as a part of the business culture. By giving positive and negative feedback, development is achieved and the team spirit increases. Two respondents state that they find it important not to be afraid of doing wrong, and that their employer handles faults in a positive way.

As a part of influencing the job tasks, four respondents mention challenges in work to be very satisfying. They all indicate that employers whom encourage the employee to face new challenges motivates them to work. Three respondents suggest it stimulating to be included in the business production economics.

*“Challenges are fun. It is stimulating to figure out new ways of increasing our milk production, and my employer encourages me to!”*

When it comes to leadership, a majority stress the managers personality to be significant for how employees enjoy their workplace. Five respondents suggest that employer’s manner and personality, plays a big role in how they thrive at work.

*“The employer needs to have a good way of communicating with the employees”*

By this the employee does not only indicate on work-related communication, but also on a personal basis. Only one respondent emphasized that digitalization can improve communication in agri-businesses. The same respondent gave example that the employer business uses the chat mobile application “Whats App” to communicate. By using the application, employees and employer can chat work- and not work-related messages. The work-related messages rationalize work while non work-related messages improve team spirit and belongingness in the firm.

### 4.3 Affiliation

Affiliation refers to the sense of belongingness employees have towards the organization (Browne, 2012). It describes aspects of culture, values, work environment and the business reputation (ibid). Many respondents had at first trouble to identify values or cultural aspects at their business. After giving thought to the question, several respondents had good and bad experiences to share. Most of the respondents interpreted corporate values and organizational culture as employer deeds to improve factors as belongingness and team spirit. There were several examples given on how the employer improve and maintain these factors.

Most respondents gave examples of scheduled meetings among employer and employees. Depending on the employer, meetings were held in different times and numbers. Some businesses held weekly meetings, while other held meetings once or several times a day. All respondents felt that meetings provided a clear structure of the work-tasks, while also contributing to a better atmosphere and community among employers and employees.

Employees of companies that do not hold weekly or daily meetings, expressed their absence from these meetings. The same employee who mentioned the company's use of the "What's app" application is a sign that it can also be used to improve affinity between employers and employees.

*“On my previous employment, the employer had an ambition to have weekly joint coffee breaks. This lasted two weeks before it was forgotten. Now we have coffee every day at 09:00 where we go through what to do during the day”*

Besides scheduled meetings, most of the respondents had experiences in activities outside of the usual work-tasks. Five respondents gave examples of harvest-feasts or Christmas buffet. They all pointed out that mutual activities create belongingness and increases motivation for work. Several respondents also attend exhibitions or crop seminars with their employer, were sometimes hotel staying is included.

*“It is important to have fun together and be able to make up fun activities”*

Many respondents stressed that it is important that the employer cares about its employees. They believe that the employer should ensure that employees feel good and thrive during their work.

Several employees considered that a success factor for the company's reputation is that the employees are doing well. Seven out of nine respondents felt that the company's reputation plays a major role for them both in their employment, and whether they would seek employment with a new company. Five respondents point out that social media can be of good use to communicate with potential employees and to improve business reputation. The same respondents stressed that agriculture businesses improve in the usage of social media.

*“In order to build a good reputation as an employer, it is important to be responsive and listen to your employees”*

None of the respondents raised work environment as an important aspect in their work. When asked, the crop production employee in general brought up new machines with good comfort and access to a good workshop as aspects of good work environment. Animal keeping employees stressed access to staff room for breaks, redressing and personal hygiene.

*“Today I do not have a proper place to shower and I miss having access to a good staff room”*

## 4.4 Compensation

Compensation includes money that employees receive for their work (Browne, 2012). Furthermore, compensation include salary, bonuses and salary development (ibid). When I asked the respondents about pay, six out of nine replied that pay is an important part of the employment. Several of them replied that pay in agricultural businesses is not always the best, but it is important that the employee gets paid for work performance. A few mentioned that they are not employed in agriculture for the sake of pay, but by other values such as versatility, work-stimulation and flexibility. Five of the respondents mention in connection with the conversation about salary, that the important thing is that you as an employee work with something you think is fun.



What all respondents agreed on, is that it is important that there is transparency and clarity in how pay is set, and what the development of one's salary might look like. Only one respondent had taken the initiative to increase his salary, while the rest felt that it was the responsibility of the employer to give the employee a clear wage development. Two of the respondents mentioned that the employer has a bonus scheme for its employees. Bonus schemes differed between companies. One respondent's employer bases the bonus on the company's performance, while another company bases it on how many hours the employee worked. Both respondents looked positively at having a bonus to work for. None of the other respondents mentioned bonus as a compensation they were longing for. Two respondents claimed that agricultural companies sometimes offer too low wages, which means that they can sometimes lose employees to other industries. They stress that it is important that the employee is paid for the work performed, and that it is rewarded if you do well.

## 4.5 Career

Career is known as long term development and opportunities to advance in new work assignments, responsibilities or professional roles (Browne, 2012). When asking the respondents of career opportunities, only a few of them mentioned that advancement in professional roles within the firm was desired. Several of the respondents instead pointed out that there are few possibilities in small agri-businesses to advance into becoming manager. They argue that agri-businesses usually consist of few employees. Although two respondents whom had experience from working in larger agri-businesses, stated that a possible career development could be working towards taking more responsibility and eventually becoming a manager.

*“At my previous employer, I was given more responsibility, which eventually made me manager of the crop production”*

Although many of the respondents does not see manager as a possible way advance, about fifty percent sees self-employment as an opportunity. The same respondents claim that self-employers have a larger freedom of choice, greater responsibility and the ability to work for more businesses.

Several respondents point out that personal development can be achieved when participating in the managers calculations and decision making. The respondents argue it stimulating to be a part of production economics or investment planning. They claim that employees often have good inputs when it comes to developing new working methods or investing.

*“The employees were involved when our manager planned to invest in a new automatic milking system. He showed us the sellers offer and let us have inputs on the price and available accessories”*

Besides decision making, 8 out of 9 respondents have attended courses to license in e.g. pest controlling or to educate. They all point out that attending courses it important for their development, since it increases their attractiveness when looking for new employers. Also, some licenses are mandatory for their work. The respondents emphasize it is important that employers pay educational expenses. Several respondents also point out that their manager invites them to attend seminars or exhibitions.

*“If I do not develop at my current work, I might quit and seek new employment”*

Four respondents claim that they might quit and change employer if they do not develop at their current work. Two respondents plan to apply for university to educate in agriculture. They claim that university education enables them to apply for a more demanding job. None of the respondents brought up employment security as an aspect on which they put much thought in.

## 4.6 Benefits

Benefits indicate indirect compensation such as vacation, housing, pension, healthcare and company car (Browne, 2012). It comes in addition to the normal salary (ibid).

A common benefit that almost all respondents mentioned with their employment was that they had a job that was very flexible. Several recounted that they work long days, often over ten hours, during spring farming and harvest, and then during the winter have a greater flexibility with working hours. This frees up time for hobbies and other activities.

One respondent highlights the company car as a good benefit for agricultural companies to offer. It means a lot to the employee while in some companies it facilitates the work. There was only one employee whom had a company car as benefit. Several of the respondents mentioned that staff housing can be a benefit that many employees appreciate having access to, especially if you start early or have a long distance to commute to work.

None of the respondents mentioned occupational pensions as an important benefit in their employment. The main benefit highlighted by all respondents was that agricultural enterprises have a great deal of flexibility in their work.

## 4.7 Development – attract and retain

This study is to examine attributes of employer branding. One of the research questions in this study is to examine how employer branding practices can develop to attract young employees. Since employer branding is about how businesses work to attract and retain workforce (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004) the question *“how can agri-businesses develop to attract and retain workforce?”* were asked to get the employee view on how employer branding attributes in agriculture businesses can develop to attract young employees.

### 4.7.1 Attracting employees

Five respondents expressed that social media can be very useful in attracting staff. Several examples were given where agricultural companies (sometimes the hiring company) continuously published pictures and posts from daily operations. Some respondents undertest that it is important that the potential employees can get a picture of the entire business. The interviewed also expressed that social media can be a great tool for reaching employees, by allowing posts to be shared and thus reaching a large audience. The same respondents also recounted companies that post employment applications on social media. Another respondent stressed that agriculture businesses can be attractive employers to technological interested people. This, since agriculture machines nowadays require a high skill in managing computers and GPS systems. To attract these potential employees, the respondent suggested that businesses should be better in filming their operations, where the agri-technology is highlighted. One respondent stressed concern about animal-welfare activism, causing businesses to avoid social media and showing their business to the public.

One respondent claimed that agricultural companies need to be better at being seen. One way to be seen is at trade fairs or contexts where professional organizations, such as LRF (Federation

of Swedish farmers), also participate. The same respondent also gave examples of agricultural companies that focus on being seen among children and young people – to establish interest in agriculture and food at an early age.

Several participants stressed that it is important that the company interior and exterior is in order. By this, respondents believe that it should be clean and tidy among buildings and machines. They claim that the company seems more serious if it is clean and tidy.

#### 4.7.2 Retaining employees

A large majority believe that a major success factor for attracting, as well as retaining employees, is that the entrepreneur is responsive, communicative and has a good sense of his company and employees. Most respondents said that "*it is important how the employer is*". By this they mean that the employer personality, and how the employer preserves its employees, is a very important aspect whether they choose to be employed by a specific agricultural company. The employees also claimed the need for an employer whom encourages new ideas and give compliments about the employee's work.

For the company to retain its staff, several interviewed employees express themselves that independence and flexibility in work is an important aspect. If these factors are maintained, the employee feels an increased responsibility at work, which is stimulating. Two other factors that keep employees in the company are good atmosphere and team spirit among employers and employees.

## 5 Analysis and discussion

In this chapter the empirical findings are analysed and discussed with the theories presented in the conceptual framework found in chapter two. This to create a greater understanding of the empirical data and its relation to previous literature and theories. The chapter is structured by answering and discussing the research questions of this study; *What attributes of employer branding are valued by young employees in the Swedish agriculture sector?* and *How can employer branding practices develop to attract young employees?* The chapter ends with a review of the key findings and a critical reflection.

### 5.1 Attributes of employer branding

This section is to answer the research question; *What attributes of employer branding are valued by young employees in the Swedish agriculture sector?*

According to the case studies, there is a various amount of employer branding attributes that are valued by the employees. Aspects found involves attributes from all five analytical categories, were some are more valued to the employee than others. The attributes of employer branding mainly involve cultural-, emotional- and monetary aspects. It is clear, that actions taken by the employer, affect the attributes of employer branding. This is confirmed by Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) whom stress that businesses can strengthen their internal and external employer brand by improving their relationship with existing employees. It is clear that the enhanced values in the cases sometimes separated from each other, depending on the employee's employer. This unifies with Backhaus & Tikoo's (2004) definition of employer brand "*a concept of the firm that differentiates it from its competitors*" (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p 552).

Several attributes of employer branding are found in how the employee value the business affiliation. It appears that highly valued attributes are sense of belongingness and team spirit. These values result in "fun at work", business reputation and community. Thus, many cases consisted of employees in businesses with very few employees, many of them emphasized importance to have a good relationship with other employees, as well as the employer. This is confirmed by Michaels *et al.* (2001) whom stresses that having good relationship with other employees by sharing knowledge is a valued asset for businesses.

This study shows that business reputation is a valued attribute in agriculture businesses. Several employees stressed the importance of business reputation when searching for potential employers. This is confirmed by theory were reputation and recognized attractiveness of an employer can attract potential employees (Pluta, 2015). Edvardsson *et al.* (2016) stress the importance for businesses to be aware of their external reputation. This was also supported by Harris & de Chernatony (2001) whom state the organisational identity is reflected in business reputation. Therefore, business can strengthen their employer brand by improving reputation and relationship with existing employees. Besides reputation, this study displays that communication and structure in employment are values that create community and a better atmosphere (Mosley, 2007; Parment & Dyhre, 2013). Although Kunkle & Sorensen (2008) state that work environment influences how employees values the employer brand, none of the respondents mentioned work environment spontaneously. The working environment for employees can be stable environment, staff spaces or, for example, the interior of machinery. The fact that respondents themselves did not describe work environment as an important

attribute may be that it does not differ much between different companies, or that the employees simply do not reflect on the working environment in their employment.

Attributes of work content are factors motivating the employee to work (Botha *et al.*, 2011). It includes not only work tasks but also how the employer organizes the work. According to this study, variety in work task, feedback and the ability to influence the work tasks are considered valuable attributes by the employees. These values are confirmed by Berghäll (2015) whom determined employer attractiveness in the eyes of agricultural students. Several employees stated importance of the ability to influence work tasks and that new ideas should be encouraged by the employer. This unifies with Michel *et al.* (2001) whom stresses that freedom in work tasks is an important part of a business employee value proposition. A major part of the employees considered their job to be varied and many sided. All employees agreed on variety in agriculture business work tasks. However, difference was found in the grade on which they could influence their work tasks. Employees who experienced ability to influence their work tasks, highly valued this attribute in their employment. Employers whom encourage employees to influence their work tasks were highly valued. To have a good communication, and encouraging the employees is considered important to attract existing employees (Mosley, 2007); Parment & Dyhre, 2013).

Ambler and Barrow (1996) stress the importance of mediating opportunities and values inside the organization to utilize existing competence. Several employees were unified with Ambler & Barrow (1996) were they gave examples of employers whom encouraged them to take more responsibility and be part of decision making in their work.

Only one employee gave example of using digitalization to communicate within the firm. This partly counteracts Mohamad, N (2018) whom stress the younger generation to be more communicative through digital channels. Though this could be the issue that agriculture employers are less likely to implement digital channels for internal communication, since they are part of an older generation. Several interviewed employees stress that social media can be a preferable channel when agri-businesses are to recruit. Therefore, the usage of digital channel for internal communication could be valued by young employees. Parment & Dyhre (2013) and Mosley (2007) stress that internal communication encourages existing employees. According to this thesis, the usage of digital channels is valued by young employees and it can be improved by agri-business employers.

Only a few employees mentioned that advancement within the firm was desired attribute. This counteracts Berghäll (2015) whom stated that career advancement is the most desired attribute regarding career. However, Berghäll (2015) studied students at agriculture university, which is another context and her results therefore can separate from the results presented in this study. As the employees argue about career advancement, they also stress that agriculture businesses usually consist of few employees. This can make it rare or that opportunities to advance never occur during their employment. As the production units in Swedish agriculture become larger (LRF, 2018), this may change in the future as a larger number of employees are needed in agricultural companies, which opens new career opportunities. This is strengthened by two employees in this study, whom had experience from working in larger agriculture businesses. They mentioned crop manager as a possible career advancement. However, besides career advancement in terms of acquiring new ranking, several respondents stressed that advancement can be to have a greater influence or be part of the business decision making. A few employees stated to see self-employment as a possible way make a career advancement in the future. According to Browne (2012), generation Y have an inherent focus on career progression and learning. The anticipated wish to influence and be part of decision making, the employees

respond in this study is unified with Browne (2012). Almost fifty percent of the employees claimed that they might quit their employment if they feel less stimulated due to lack of advancement. Young generation employees demand a career that is satisfying and rewarding, and they are more difficult to retain and motivate than older generations in the job market (Tulgan, 2016; Mohamad, N. 2018).

About fifty percent stressed salary to be an important value in their employment. Some respondents agreed on a low wage level in agriculture businesses. Dairy employers assumed wage levels to be the most important attribute in employment, which was disproved by Kolstrup (2012) whom stressed in her study salary not to be the most important attribute in employment. Respondents in this study partly agreed with Kolstrup (2012) and not stressing salary to be the “most important” attribute. However, a vast majority considered employer initiative to raise salary to be of strong value. The empirics can be interpreted as the employees value a salary development more than average wage level in agriculture businesses. This, due to salary development is considered as appreciation for job performance, were salary raise is the reward. Several respondents mention that the most important thing, rather than salary, is that the employee enjoys the work. Fun at work goes beyond high wage levels. This is confirmed by Browne (2012) and Jams and Bibb (2010) whom state that businesses with successful employer branding can reduce the cost of new employment.

Benefits is explained to be non-wage compensation that is offered to the employee (Browne, 2012; Kunkle and Sorensen, 2008). Mentioned attributes are healthcare, pension, retirements and vacation (ibid). However, none of the respondent directly mentioned any of these attributes. Nevertheless, there was a consensus that employment in an agricultural company often allows for a great deal of flexibility for the employee. Flexibility was considered as a benefit by most young employees. Flexibility for the employee can be considered a value of employer branding since the employer brand contains a unique set of offerings to the employee (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). One can argue that flexibility in working hours belong in the section of work content, however a vast majority instead stressed flexibility when discussing benefits.

Sengupta *et al* (2015) stress that “*satisfied employees are the best source of employer branding*” (Sengupta *et al.*, 2015 p 311). Corporate belongingness, variety in work tasks, flexibility, pay progress and employee development are examples of employer branding attributes that are valued by the young employees. I accordance with Sengupta *et al* (2015), these factors create a good employer branding. The more the employee associates with the corporate values, attraction towards the employer increases (ibid). Broadly speaking, the employees agreed on how they value the attributes of the employer brand. Previous literature on employer branding and employee value proposition largely conforms to the empirics in this study.

## 5.2 Development of employer branding practices

This section is to answer the research question; *How can employer branding practices develop to attract young employees?*

Section 5.1 contributed with attributes of employer branding that were valued by the interviewed young employees in this study. These attributes were considered valuable for employees and thus have an impact on the company's employer brand. By developing these attributes, agricultural companies can improve their employer brand and thus become better at attracting and retaining employees (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Berthon *et al.*,2005; Rosethorn, 2009). Figure 7 presents the development of employer branding attributes to attract young employees.

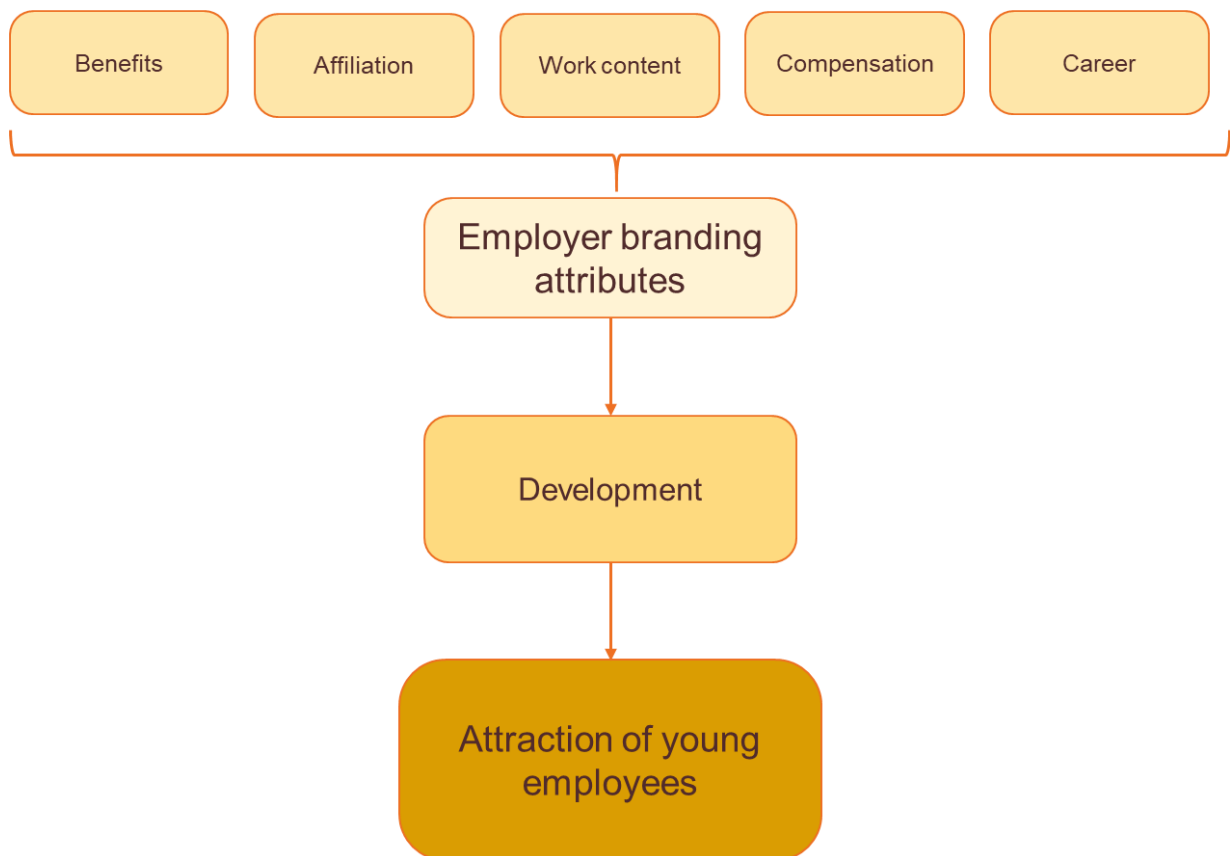


Figure 6. Development of employer branding attributes (own illustration)

To acquire enough data to answer the research question in this section, the question “*how can agri-businesses work to attract and retain workforce?*” were asked to the respondents. Prior to the question, the respondents had reflected over attributes for which they valued. In this question, they were also placed in the position of an employer, to give their view of what the agri-business can do to attract young employees. Several respondents mentioned social media and technology as tools for the employer to use, in order to attract young employees. By social media, a vast number of potential employees can be reached and get an insight in the business operations, as well as finding job applications. By posting pictures and posts from daily operations, the business promotes themselves through existing employees, which is considered the best source of employer branding (Sengupta *et al.* 2015). This associates with previous research that says that younger generations use technology and social media to a large extent (Gaidhani *et al.*, 2019; Mohamad, N 2018; Tulgan, 2016). This knowledge also supports the employee whom suggested that agricultural companies should be better able to market themselves as a high-tech industry. If agri-businesses promote that agriculture is a workplace which uses new technology, young people interested in tech might find the work interesting.

Several of the values the employees reproduced had to do with the employer's personality. The employer's personality and leadership philosophy contribute to the employer brand attributes which the employees' value. These values create brand associations for the employee which affects the employer image. The employer image in its turn affects the employer attraction (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Berthon *et al.* 2015). Therefore, if agri-business employer develops their leadership style and philosophy to address these values mentioned by the employees, the business can increase its attraction as a potential employer to young people. The employees

involved in this study, are hired in businesses with an average of 2,5 employees/business and can thus be considered as small businesses. There are several literatures whom support that leaders in small businesses can have a great influence over his/her staff (Bass, 1981; Ladzani et al. 2010; Kilpatric, 2009). This supports that leaders in agri-businesses can work to develop the employer's impact to increase attractiveness towards young potential employees.

Except wage levels, one could argue that all agri-businesses can develop to increase all attributes valued by the employees. Since the salary level is linked to the company's finances, there may be some restrictions that prevent the company from offering high salary levels. After all, most of the attributes do not mean a direct cost increase for businesses and should therefore be attributes most entrepreneurs can work on to improve the employer attractiveness (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

### 5.3 Key findings from analysis and discussion

To summarize and highlight parts from the analysis and discussion, Table 3 has been composed. The table contains categories containing key attributes that have been highlighted by the cases in the study. Each category also includes an extract from the analysis carried out.

Table 3. Key findings from analysis and discussion

Category	Work content	Affiliation	Benefits
<b>Key Attributes</b>	*Influence *Job variety *Feedback	*Reputation *Relationships *Communication	*Flexible work
<b>Analysis</b>	This analysis show that young people value the work content of their employment in various aspects. Prior research and the results of this study show that presented attributes are of high value to employees. By working to strengthen the employee's experience of these attributes can have an impact on how the employer is perceived. These attributes can be considered to relate to the entrepreneur's leadership and personality. Employers should, through their leadership, have an approach in which these attributes are promoted, in order to strengthen the company's employer brand.	This and existing studies show that business reputation is considered an important attribute of employer branding. Studies show, that good business reputation, improve the employer brand. By improving relationships with existing employees, agri-businesses can improve their reputation, and thus their employer brand. Besides reputation, internal and external communication seem to be a valued attribute by both theory and empirics of this study. Employee's put value in verbal and digital communication which affects the sense of belongingness and improves business culture.	Although the theory mention benefits such as health care, pensions and holidays, most young employees expressed that flexibility in working hours is a benefit they value. By providing trust to their employees, employers develop the sense of flexibility in their work that several young farm employees value.
Category	Compensation	Career	Development
<b>Key Attributes</b>	*Transparency *Salary development	*Development *Advancement	*Communication *Technology *Care *Encouragement
<b>Analysis</b>	This and existing theory confirm that high salary is not the most desired attribute in employment. However, the results of the study suggest that employees highly value the possibility of having transparency in salary setting and having a wage trend during their employment. How employees value this aspect should be transferable to many employers.	This study show that young employees have a desire in advancing and developing. However, not many cases stressed desire to advance within the business, though lack of advancement opportunities might result in employee gives notice to leave. Unless companies can offer advancement in new professional roles, companies can improve their employer brand by ensuring that employees can develop during their employment. Development can be seen by getting new tasks, training or being involved in decision-making.	Most attributes articulated by employee's, such as can be influenced by the business leader and therefore be developed. By improving listed attributes, agri-businesses can improve their employer brand. Several employee's mentioned development opportunities in the usage of technology, such as social media, for promoting the employer.



### 5.3 Critical reflection

Since this study is of qualitative approach with data collected from nine different cases involving young employees of agricultural businesses, it cannot be considered generalizable to the population of young employees in agricultural businesses. Despite this, the results of this study may contribute to future research of employer branding because the study's conceptual framework (found in section 2.4) is transferable as it can be applied in other but similar contexts, such as the forest industry. A major part of the results in this study was supported by existing research in the field and the results can therefore be considered as credible.

The empirical results presented in this study were dependent on my interpretations of the qualitative data collected from informants. When performing and analyzing the interviews, the young employees sometimes used the same answer when discussing various analytical categories. Therefore, the coding of the collected data depended on my ability to interpret and present the data in a way that corresponds with the respondent answer. Several of the employees answers were recurrent by other each other, which increases credibility in this study. Although I did not ask questions that directly related to the employer of the respondent but tried to stick to general questions about employment in agricultural companies, the respondents' answers may still have been influenced by how the young employees relate to their employer. However, this may not have had a major impact on the results of the study, since the answers I sought from employees should relate to their values, which must be partly based on work experience

The method of multiple case study was used in this study. However, the data from the separate cases were interweaved to get an integrated view on the employees thoughts and answers. I chose to interweave the data, and not present it in separate cases, to keep the respondents anonymous and to make it easier for the reader of this study.

This study delimited to only interview employees of generation Y and Z, which resulted in a maximum age of 42 years old respondents. However, none of the interviewed respondents that accepted participation were over 30 years old. Several of them were in the age range of 20-25 years old and not all had work-experience from multiple employers. This may, however affected the results in this study since work-life experience may prepossess they way people perceive employments in agri-businesses.

## 6 Conclusions and future research

The final chapter in this study presents conclusions and a respond to the aim of this study which was to; “*examine how young employees value employer branding attributes in the Swedish agriculture sector*”. Further, the contributions of this study is explained. At the end of this chapter, suggestions for future research are provided.

### 6.1 Conclusions

The problem background in this study is based on statements and reports from industry organizations whom stresses difficulties in finding the right workforce (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2019; Kolstrup, C 2012; LRF *et al.*, 2018; Svenskt Näringsliv, 2018). The problem of finding the right workforce extends both inside and outside the agricultural sector. Consequences of this problem prevent businesses from expanding or cause avoidance of new investments. This study, and prior research state that the marketing concept of employer branding can be a way to address this problem (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Berthon *et al.*, 2005; Saini *et al.*, 2014); Elving *et al.*, 2013). Younger generations are the new entrants to the job market and is therefore an interesting group for businesses to recruit. This study presents an understanding of what and how young people in agricultural context value attributes of employer branding.

Most of the existing literature process employer branding from a general perspective and is rarely used in the context of agriculture. This thesis studied employer branding from a employee perspective, to reveal what attributes employees value. The author of this study developed the knowledge of employer branding by creating a conceptual framework which was applied on young employees in agri-businesses. Despite the agricultural context of this study, the framework is applicable in other contexts.

This study concludes that young employees in Swedish agriculture businesses value several attributes of employer branding in their employment. Although the perception of these values is subjective, the interviewed employees were unified in which attributes they value in many cases. Figure 7 presents key attributes valued by the young employees reviewed in the five analytical categories of the conceptual framework.

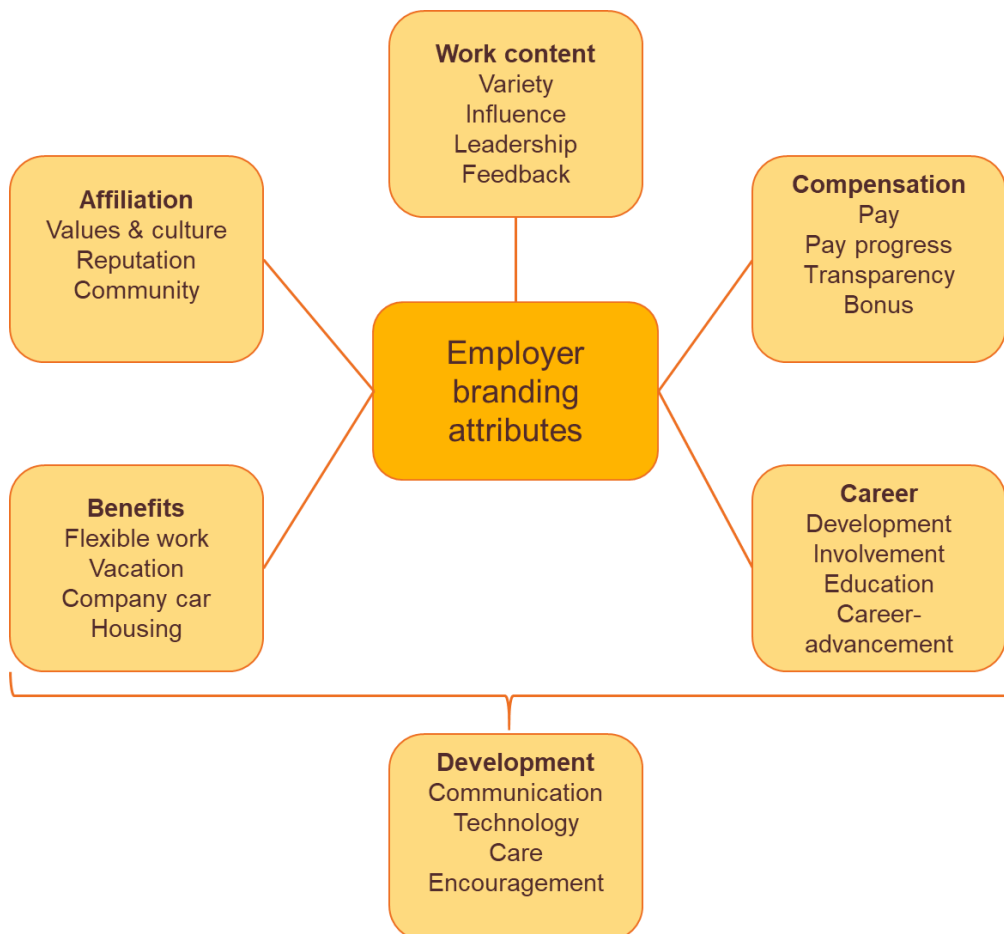


Figure 7. Key attributes valued by young employees (own illustration)

Attributes valued by employees in this study includes categories of; *work content, affiliation, compensation, career, benefits*. Besides these values, this study presents suggestions from young employees on how agri-businesses can work to develop their employer branding practices. In this study, a majority of the employer branding attributes valued by employees is employer specific and can be influenced by the company leader. By using the results in this study employers in agriculture businesses can work to develop their employer brand and thereby increase its attraction towards employees. If agricultural companies improve their employer brand, and thus become better at retaining and attracting employees, the agricultural industry can increase its production capacity and meet global and national strategies on increased food production. It is necessary to emphasize that this study does not aim to generalize results to a population of young farm employees, but to create an understanding of how young employees value attributes of employer branding. This by relating this study's empirical data to previous knowledge of employer branding.

## 6.2 Contributions

This study contributes to the knowledge of employer branding within the context of agriculture businesses. Previous literature and this study identified a gap in existing knowledge of employer branding in agriculture context (Berghäll, 2015; Urbankova *et al.*, 2017). This study contributes to an expanded understanding of attributes that affect an agricultural company's employer brand. By using the results in this study, Swedish agricultural companies can create an understanding of attributes of employer branding that young employees' value. By improving

these attributes, the business can develop its employer brand. The results of this study could thus be a way for Swedish agricultural companies to deal with the existing problem of finding workforce (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2019; Kolstrup, C. 2012). If businesses acquire understanding of what attributes of employer branding their employees value, they can improve their employer image. By improving the employer image, agri-businesses can increase its employer attractiveness (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). The results in this study, presented in figure 6, can therefore function as a decision basis for agriculture businesses that wants to attract and retain workforce.

Besides agricultural context, this study contributes to existing knowledge in the field of employer branding. More specified, the results in this study provide knowledge about how young people value employer branding attributes. It also gives the employee perspective on attributes in employment that affect the employer brand. By expanding knowledge of what employees value in their employment, businesses can create a greater understanding of how they can operate to attract and retain workforce, which is what employer branding is about (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). The developed conceptual framework can be used in future studies where researchers are interested in how employees value attributes in their employment.

In addition to contributing to the field of employer branding, this study also presents an example of where young people gave their thoughts and answers of what they considered important in their employment. This can support future research involving young employees, both in- and outside agricultural context.

On a national level, this study can be used by authorities, industry associations and food companies that aim to increase the attractiveness of being employed in Swedish food production. The food sector (primary production and processing) faces challenges in attracting and retaining staff (LRF, 2018). This study can contribute with knowledge about the characteristics of the employment that are valued by young employees working in the sector. By using the results in this study, organizations can develop new frameworks to face the challenge of finding right workforce.

### 6.3 Future research

This study is limited to the region of Mälardalen, which includes a minor part of the young employees in the agricultural sector. Due to the local workforce market which could have affected the respondent's answers, it would be interesting to see the results in other geographical locations in Sweden. Since this study is of qualitative research approach where I interpreted the respondent's thoughts and did not seek to generalize results, it is interesting to see the results in a larger population, in suggestion performed by a quantitative research approach.

Participants in the study have already made the choice to choose an agricultural company as their employer. As the sector faces challenges in finding new relevant labor, it is also interesting to examine how people outside the agricultural sector view agricultural enterprises as potential employers.

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# Appendix 1 – Interview guide

## Introduction

The respondents are informed what the study is about followed by the aim of this study. Further, they are told that participation is anonymous. Prior the interview, the respondents are asked if they accept recording of the interview.

## Background information

- Age
- Prior education and work
- Employer description
  - Number of employees
- Why do you chose to work at an agriculture business
- Were did you find your current employer?

## Work content

- Describe your work tasks
- How do you value the ability to influence your work tasks? Develop!
- What are your comfort values?
- How do you feel about work challenges? Develop!
- What is your preferences concerning leadership and work structure?
- What do you feel about being independent in your work?
- How do you value feedback in your employment?

## Career

- How do you value the ability to advance?
- How do you value the ability to develop at your work?

## Affiliation

- Can you reflect over corporate values and culture?
- How does the business reputation as an employer affect you? Develop!
- Do you value work environment? Develop!

## Compensation

- Reflect over how you value salary in your employment!
- How do you value development of your salary?
  - Incentives for raised salary
- How do you value to have a transparent salary development?

## Benefits

- Are there any benefits that is of important for you?
  - Describe the benefits you value in your employment

## Development

- How can agri-businesses develop to attract and retain workforce?

- Describe what factors you find important that makes an agriculture business attractive to its existing and potential employees!