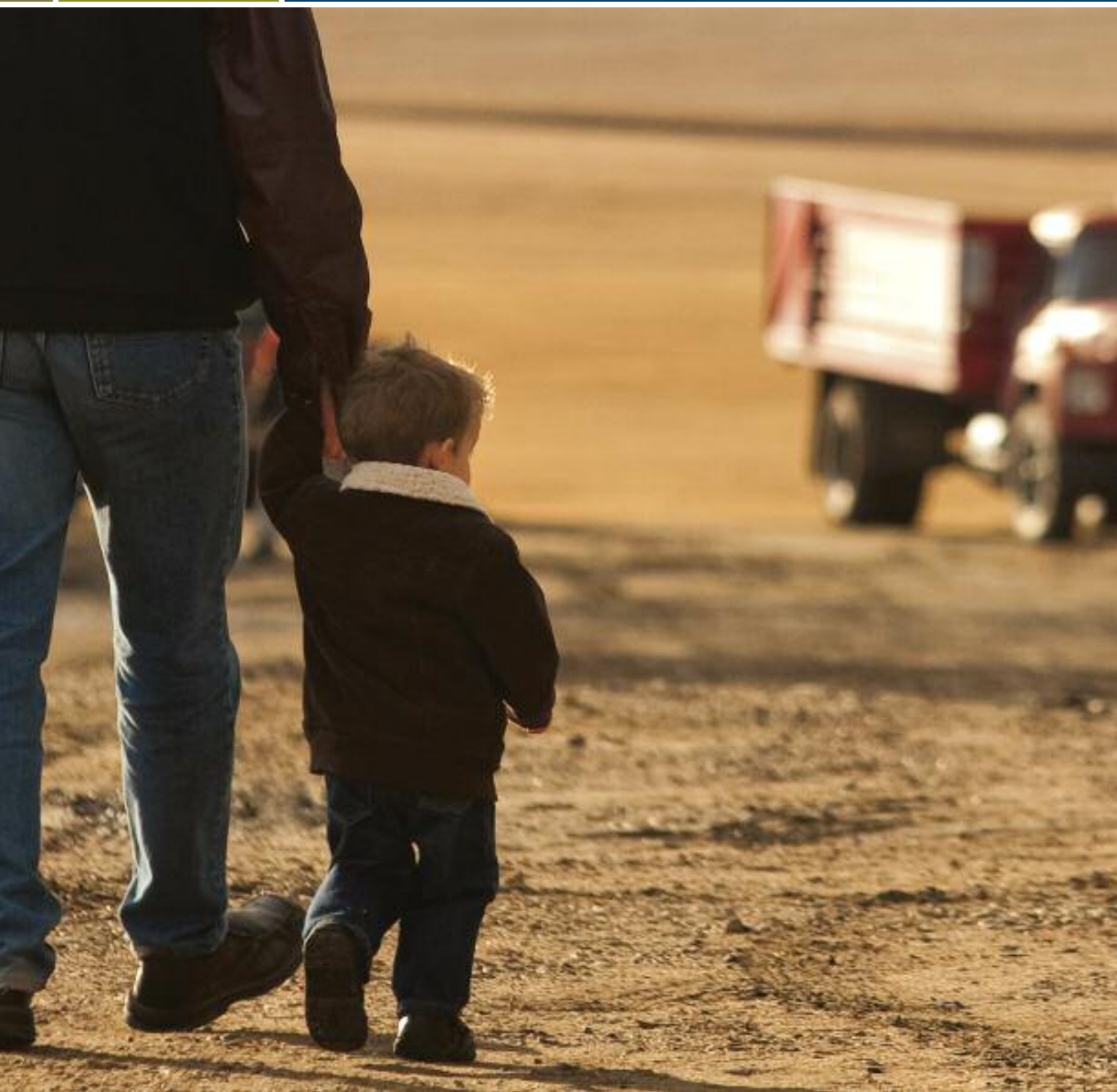


JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2010

real-life
management
stories

AgriSuccess





How two families tackle business decisions



FEATURES

- 11** **How two families tackle business decisions**
Farms run more smoothly if decision-making is clearly defined.
- 14** **Understanding farm family dynamics**
Dr. John Fast and Elaine Froese talk about working through tough issues.
- 16** **Making room for the next generation**
Farm size and structure are important if you want to include more family members.

COLUMNS

- 3** **The big picture**
Communication can make or break family farms
Don't let resentment simmer on a back burner.
- 4** **Your money**
Experts say you're more protected with a pre-nup and disability and critical illness insurance.
- 6** **Young farmer profile**
Sundgaard family plans for future generations
Meet Trent and Sharon, poultry and grain producers from Standard, Alta.
- 8** **Ask an expert**
The human challenges of farming with family
Psychologist Pierrette Desrosiers gives straight-up advice for ag families.
- 18** **Planning to succeed**
Can you teach an old dog new tricks?
Adapt to a new role as the younger generation takes over.
- 20** **Safety on the farm**
Speak up about unsafe situations
How do you refuse a task you consider unsafe?

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2010

On the cover:

Trent Sundgaard and his son Ryker on the family farm near Standard, Alta.

Editor, Kevin Hursh

Associate editor, Allison Finnermore

Original photography by Greg Huszar.

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Cette publication est également offerte en français.

AgriSuccess has been honoured with industry and trade publication awards, including:

- Canadian Farm Writers' Federation award for periodicals; Bronze 2006, 2007, Gold 2008, Bronze 2009
- Canadian Agricultural Marketing Association (CAMA) Awards; Merit 2006, 2007; Excellence 2009

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from the editor



Farming with family can be a blessing or a curse. Sometimes it's both at the same time.

Maybe that explains some of the old adages. "Blood is thicker than water," indicates how family members tend to stick together. On the other hand, "You can pick your friends, but you can't pick your family."

You do pick your spouse, but marital problems can put both the family and the farm in a difficult position.

This magazine, published by Farm Credit Canada, goes to producers in all parts of the country and all sectors of agriculture. Producers tell us that they like to read stories about their own region and their own type of production. That's why we try to put diversity in each issue.

However, one of the things most of us have in common as producers is family involvement in the farming operation. The issue of family dynamics is relevant whether you're raising

potatoes in Atlantic Canada, operating a dairy in Central Canada, running a grain farm on the Prairies, or retailing from a greenhouse on the West Coast.

That's why we've decided to tackle this sometimes sensitive topic. It's a subject that affects us all and it fits nicely with our mission statement that you'll find at the bottom of this page.

We have advice from experts on how to deal with the speed bumps. On the positive side, we have profiles of many farm families across the nation where the family model of farming is flourishing.

We welcome your feedback. Are the stories in this edition useful? Tell us what you think. We're always interested in any theme or story ideas you have for future editions.

Just email kevin@hursh.ca.



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Communication

can make or break family farms

Family farms continue to be the backbone of agriculture in Canada, and that's not likely to change any time soon. Family farms are businesses – in many cases big businesses – but sometimes it's tough to think of them in commercial terms rather than family terms.

The key is communication.

Earl Smith of Sundre, Alta., has worked with farm families throughout most of his career as a professional agrologist. For many years, he was a farm lender, but now he's a private consultant working with farm families on their succession planning needs.

"A family can sit down with their accountant or lawyer, but they may not get the results they want because they don't communicate properly," Smith says. "There's a huge lack of interpersonal communication in a lot of farm families."

This is typically a long-standing problem that comes to a head when the family finally tries to deal with succession issues. Often the operating arrangement has not been smart to start with.

"Some situations are not fixable," Smith admits. "The personalities can't get along." He has seen family members who treat each other horribly.

"The older generation typically has the power, because they own the assets. The younger generation may have worked on the farm for years with little to show for their efforts."

Thankfully, most farm families are not beyond help, but there are many common pitfalls. The issue sometimes is pressed when a member of the younger generation brings a new spouse into the family and he or she has a fresh perspective.

"Seventy per cent of farms have multiple operators," Smith observes, "but there is often no formal agreement in place."

Farm operations vary so widely that it's impossible to have a cookie-cutter approach. Still, Smith wishes there

were more good templates available for running joint farming operations.

There can be communication problems outside the farm unit as well. Non-farming siblings may think they're not being treated fairly, since they may not fully appreciate the sweat equity and sacrifice of farming siblings.

"Seventy per cent of farms have multiple operators but there is often no formal agreement in place."

Sometimes the older generation picks the wrong siblings as the next farming generation. Or they may want all the kids to farm when that isn't feasible for the operation.

Even extremely successful farms are not immune to these sorts of difficulties. And all these problems are compounded by a lack of effective communication.

Rather than dealing with expectations in open conversations, resentment is left to simmer on a back burner. All the parties make assumptions about how the future will unfold.

It's not a good way to live or run a farm business.

The family-based model of farming has many advantages. It can be even stronger if there's open and ongoing communication. Don't hesitate to seek help from Earl Smith (email: earlsmith@xplornet.com) or other professionals quoted in this edition if you're having difficulties.

BY KEVIN HURSH / *Kevin is a consulting agrologist and journalist based in Saskatoon, Sask. He also operates a grain farm near Cabri, Sask., growing a wide array of crops.*

Even in agriculture, lawyers recommend a pre-nup

If a disaster happens, the difference between running a successful farm operation and going out of business is having a good risk management plan.

While most producers buy insurance to protect themselves against losses from fire, hail, drought and death, most don't have a pre-nuptial contract in place to protect their farm in case of divorce.

"They are frequently used in Quebec and in Europe but in Western Canada and the United States, we avoid them," says Greg Bobbitt, a lawyer with NSWB law firm in Weyburn, Sask. "We think of them as a sign that the marriage won't make it, while everyone else thinks it's just a prudent thing to do."

Many look at marriage or a common-law relationship from a romantic point of view and prefer not to think of it as a financial union. That's why a lot of people feel uncomfortable negotiating a pre-nuptial contract with a future spouse.

But a pre-nup can protect you if one party or the other decides to end the relationship. The contract usually specifies maintenance provisions and how property will be divided. For older couples with children from previous relationships, it also covers estate issues.

Without a pre-nuptial or co-habitation agreement in place, Bobbitt says Saskatchewan law is very clear on how a couple's assets will be divided. The value of any asset held at the time of entry into the relationship (formerly called the date of marriage) is exempt from division under the Family Property Act.

For example, if you had a piece of property worth \$25,000 when you entered the relationship, you

would be able to claim a \$25,000 exemption. However, if it's worth \$45,000 at the time of separation, the \$20,000 appreciation would be divisible. Matrimonial residences and furniture aren't exempt unless there are extraordinary circumstances.

According to Statistics Canada, about 37 per cent of marriages in Canada now end in divorce. The failure rate for common-law relationships is even higher. Most provinces except Quebec give common-law partners the same rights as they would have if they were married.

Pre-nups can be one-sided if one person has far more assets than the other. Outside Quebec, both sides must have independent legal advice.

"I strongly recommend pre-nuptial agreements, especially now at a time when a lot of older people are getting remarried or entering into relationships and maybe want to preserve their estate for their children," Bobbitt says. "They are becoming more frequent, but are still not that common."

NSWB has more information on pre-nups at www.nswb.com/prenuptial.htm. You can also dig into how farm property is divided when a relationship ends at www.nswb.com/farming-divorce.htm. While this information applies specifically to Saskatchewan, most other provinces have similar laws. For more on pre-nups, check with your lawyer.

BY LORNE McCLINTON / Lorne has worked in the communications field for the last 20 years as a journalist, photographer, scriptwriter and corporate writer. He divides his time between Quebec and his grain farm in Saskatchewan.





Disability insurance is part of risk management

Being a farmer isn't the most dangerous job, but it consistently makes the top 10 list of dangerous occupations in Canada. That's why good disability insurance should be part of every farm's risk management strategy.

Disability insurance pays a predetermined monthly benefit if you become disabled through accident or illness before you reach the age of retirement. According to the Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association, about one-third of all Canadians aged 35 and older will be disabled and unable to work for at least 90 days before they turn 65.

In fact, the Financial Services Commission of Ontario says you're three times more likely to suffer a disability than die before retiring.

There are all kinds of disability insurance options, and wading through the fine print can make your eyes glaze over. The key part is the policy's definition of a

disability. For example, the most desired policies pay benefits if you're unable to work in your own occupation. Others pay only if you're unable to work in an occupation that relates to your training, education and experience. A few only pay benefits if you're totally disabled and unable to work at all.

Be sure your policy covers both accident and sickness. In general, you're more likely to be disabled in an accident when you're younger and by an illness as you age. It's a good idea to consider a policy that covers mental illness or nervous disorders, too.

Disability insurance doesn't come cheap. You can keep costs down by choosing a longer waiting period before benefits start. This means you wouldn't collect for a broken leg or other short-term problems, but would be covered for long-term disabilities.

BY LORNE McCLINTON

Consider critical illness insurance

If you're self-employed, critical illness insurance should be a part of your financial risk management plan. It provides a one-time lump sum payment if you're diagnosed with a serious illness covered by the insurance. A policy would typically cover cancer, heart attack, stroke, blindness, multiple sclerosis, kidney failure and so on, but not a pre-existing condition or illness.

This type of insurance provides a cash infusion to help with the financial strain of coping with serious illness, as opposed to the long-term income replacement of disability insurance. For example, you could use the money to cover travel costs for treatments. You could also pay for home care services or

help defray living expenses while you're undergoing treatment or recuperating.

Costs vary depending on your general health, the amount of coverage you want and the number of illnesses the policy covers. As with life insurance, critical illness insurance is much cheaper if you take it out when you're young and healthy.

For a list of insurance companies that offer health insurance, visit OmbudService for Life & Health Insurance at www.olhi.ca. The site has disability and life insurance guides as well.

BY LORNE McCLINTON

Sundgaard family plans for future generations

The transition of farm decision-making from one generation to the next doesn't always happen on a timely basis, but at 36 years of age, Trent Sundgaard is already in charge of the future of his fourth-generation Alberta poultry and grain operation.

Trent's father Don involved the younger Sundgaard at an early age. Now, Trent is on his own much of the time. For the past several years, Don and his wife Valerie have been spending their winters in warmer climates.

However, having the power to make major decisions doesn't make them easy, especially when it comes to long-term investments.

The Sundgaard broiler chicken operation is located on two sites – the original site, where Don and Valerie live, is within the town of Standard, an hour east of Calgary.

The newer operation, where Trent lives with his wife Sharon and their two young children, Sydni and Ryker, is a couple of kilometers outside Standard. Their home also has space that houses Sharon's hairdressing business.

The chicken houses total 50,000 square feet and have capacity for roughly 80,000 birds. There are six or seven production cycles per year, and between cycles, the houses are cleaned and disinfected. With production of roughly half a million broilers a year, the Sundgaard operation is larger than average, but Trent keeps it in perspective.

"In one year, we don't produce enough chickens for one week of processing at the Lilydale plant in Calgary." And, he notes, the Lilydale plant is just one of three major processors in the province.

The Sundgaards use manure from the barns on the farm's grain land. They seed about 1,400 acres to spring wheat, durum, canola and yellow peas.

Some of the land is owned and some is rented. The same situation exists on the poultry side of the operation – some of the broiler chicken quota is owned and some is leased from other growers. Not all provinces allow chicken quota to be leased, but Alberta does.

Renting farmland and leasing broiler quota has allowed expansion without as much capital outlay.

"It's expensive to buy broiler quota," Trent explains. "It's a long-term investment and I worry about the long-term future of supply management, given what might happen with the World Trade Organization."

Trent has a strong interest in growing the grain side of the operation, believing that commodity and farmland values are likely to continue to increase over the long term.

Renting farmland and leasing broiler quota has allowed expansion.

Sydni and Ryker are just five and two, but Trent and Sharon are already making decisions with the next generation in mind.

"We try to operate and grow the farm in a manner that will make it possible to pass on the opportunity should the next generation be interested," Trent says. "I think that's in the back of the mind of nearly every producer."

Trent is glad the family has their farm lifestyle. "Even when we're cleaning out the barns, a day on the farm is better than a day in the big city," he says with a smile.

BY KEVIN HURSH

PHOTOS:

1-SHARON AND RYKER, 2-SYDNI AND TRENT



1



2



ASK AN EXPERT

The human challenges of
farming with family

Agriculture psychologist Pierrette Desrosiers explains how to manage family communication issues.

Is it easier to communicate among farm family members?

It's a myth to assume that just because we were raised together or live together, we're going to have good communication. I can often speak to one family member and find out more about their innermost feelings than all the other family members know.

There can be a huge filter when it comes to communicating with family members, and then the family may make assumptions about how the others feel.

Communication is more difficult under stressful situations. Stress on the business means stress on the family, and vice versa. People lose patience with spouses or kids. Developing good communication skills can help a family get over tough times.

Remember: the communication in your farm business will never be better than the communication in your farm family.

Can individuals learn to improve their communication skills?

Most people can, but it's a struggle for others. Some can't manage their emotions and therefore can't effectively communicate. Some hold everything inside, and that can cause an explosion.

I also run into situations where a narcissistic boss destroys morale. Narcissists are people who have not developed empathy. They don't care about others, have an elevated opinion of themselves and have trouble integrating others into the operation. People who have this personality disorder won't benefit from communication training. It won't change anything.

Fortunately, most people can improve, but communication is a "soft" skill. It's not like learning something and then you know it. It has to be practiced to develop new pathways in the brain. In training or coaching sessions, role playing is a good way to practise.

The integration of a new spouse into the farming operation can be a challenge. Is the best solution to keep that person separated from the business?

There's another myth that if you don't integrate the new spouse in the operation, problems will be avoided. The new spouse is going to be involved. Spouses have to live with the consequences of farm decisions, and their opinions matter. They need to be in the communication loop.

Should families hold regular, structured meetings?

Almost every farm family I work with admits they should hold more meetings. It's amazing how poor the information flow can be.

In one family group I talked to, some members didn't know that a significant amount of dairy quota had recently been purchased. In another case, some were unaware of a \$200,000 tractor purchase. These are worrisome cases of poor communication regarding big decisions.

While meetings can be a great tool, if communication skills are bad, meetings might not help. If someone can't manage his or her emotions and says things that are hurtful, meetings can actually be counterproductive.

In general, though, communication increases the probability of success. Family members may have different ideas, needs and opinions, but points of view should be out in the open. Often there are creative ways to reconcile different viewpoints.

So, are family farms an advantage or disadvantage?

It depends. Often it works very well, but if the family system is not well equipped, there can be problems. In the worst cases, the farm and the family can be in jeopardy. Effective communication requires a lot of skills. IQ isn't as important as EI, emotional intelligence. EI relates to the ability to identify, assess and manage your own emotions and the emotions of others.

Is professional help available?

Yes, but producers are often hesitant to ask. They may think that outsiders can't help, or they may have an ego that's too strong to seek help. Unfortunately, it's sometimes a crisis situation that finally forces a family to get assistance.

Any parting advice?

Never speak when you're very upset. You may say hurtful things you don't really mean. If your emotions are running high, take a deep breath, have a break, take a walk and respond when you're calmer.

BY PIERRETTE DESROSIERS / *Professional speaker*
Pierrette Desrosiers is the first "Work Psychologist and Specialized Coach" in the agriculture sector. She is fascinated by the many human challenges of family farms. Raised in a farm family and married to a producer for more than 20 years, she has facilitated sessions throughout Quebec, Ontario and New Brunswick on topics including stress, happiness, emotional intelligence, communication, conflict resolution and human resource management. Her website is www.pierrettedesrosiers.com/index_en.html.



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1 2

FEATURE

How two families tackle business decisions

How do you make important decisions on your farm? Is there a lack of consultation or, on the other hand, is there so much talking it causes paralysis by analysis?

In the run of a day, there are dozens of decisions to make. From simple, straightforward choices to those that require planning and reflection, nearly every step during the day needs some background preparation before moving ahead.

Now, mix in a team of knowledgeable co-workers who also happen to be related to you – suddenly, even the simple decisions could become much more complicated.

Many family farms in Canada seem to have found their stride working together, including Four E Farms (no photo) in Leamington, Ont., and Stepler Farms near Miami, Man.

At Four E Farms, father Peter Epp and sons Ken, Ron and Ed produce 2,200 acres of corn, beans and wheat, and 240 acres of processing tomatoes.

During their years in business together, family members each found a niche in the farm operation. In some instances, their roles evolved over time, while in other cases, the sons were guided by their father.

Is there a lack of consultation or is there so much talking it causes paralysis by analysis?

“Dad recognized some of our strengths and tried to guide some of us to certain areas, Ken recalls. “Why don’t you do this?” he would ask. If it worked out and we enjoyed it, then we stayed.”

And if it didn’t, the role changed. Finding each person’s place at Four E Farms took about 10 years, Ken says. Now, day-to-day operational decisions fall to the shareholder who handles that part of the farm.

At Steppler Farms, parents Dan and Pat are in partnership with their sons Ian, Geoff, Adam and Andre. The charolais, grain and honey producers formalized their partnership in 2008.

Prior to that, each son was farming on his own, with everyone helping the other out. But they faced an annual mountain of accounting paperwork. When Dan and Pat started succession planning a few years ago, incorporation became part of their plan.

The family has now pooled its resources and divided the workload, so decision-making is clear-cut and well-defined.

Since the sons farmed prior to incorporation, they knew their areas of specialty. Dan is chairperson and takes on the role of mediator and advisor. Dividing up the managerial roles between his sons provides each with autonomy.

“As operational bosses, each son makes and enacts day-to-day decisions and has the authority to make essential minor purchases like repairs, medications and so on,” Pat explains. Major expenditures and budget decisions are made by all five, with input from everyone.

Both the Epps and the Stepplers agree that decision-making in a family farm business relies on one very important factor: communication.

At Four E Farms, the Epp brothers and their father meet every morning to discuss farm plans for the day ahead.

“Sometimes, not everyone agrees, but you build a consensus,” Ken explains, noting that no matter what

decisions the family farm faces, the family maintains a common philosophy. “We work for the good of the company and not the individual.”

The Stepplers, while firm believers in communication, were skeptical when it came to the idea of setting up formal meetings with those who are so close.

“At first the idea of family meetings seemed awkward,” Pat says. “Before incorporation, we talked or planned somewhat individually with no formal structure. Now, we conduct each meeting in a semi-formal manner.”

Dan and Pat set the agenda, including issues brought forward by the sons and matters they want discussed. With each decision, everyone has the opportunity for input.

“Dan actually goes around the table to make sure that each person states his opinion,” Pat explains. Meetings are monthly during the winter, but that changes with the seasons.

“We hold weekly meetings to plan the work that is ahead of us for that week, as well as long-range decisions on things that have to be fixed or purchased,” Pat says. “Each morning, the four boys meet for about 20 minutes to plan out that day’s work so that when the workers arrive at 8 a.m., the day’s schedule is in place. Over the noon meal, any changes to this schedule are then made.”

Both families also agree that keeping an open mind when working with family helps facilitate decision-making.

“Choose your attitude,” Pat advises. “Recognize when to shrug your shoulders, when to press a point,” she says, adding this advice also applies to older generations, reluctant to release control.

BY ALLISON FINNAMORE / *Allison specializes in cultivating words. Based in New Brunswick, she is an agriculture and business communicator with nearly two decades of experience. She contributes to publications nationwide and works to help industry promote farming and rural living.*

PHOTOS

PREVIOUS PAGE:

1-DAN AND IAN STEPLER, 2-ANDRE STEPLER

RIGHT:

1-ADAM, 2-ANDRE, 3-IAN





FEATURE

Understanding farm family dynamics

It wasn't the stuff on top of the water that sank the famed Titanic. According to Dr. John Fast, farm family businesses are just as vulnerable to the dangers of what lurks beneath the surface.

Fast is the founder and president of Family Enterprise Solutions, a Waterloo-based management consulting and training organization focused on family businesses (www.johngfast.com). He also founded the Centre for

Family Business, affiliated with the University of Waterloo, and is co-author of numerous books used by professionals and family businesses.

According to Fast, the legal and financial matters that farm family businesses deal with are only 10 to 20 per cent of their issues: the “stuff” above the water. And while they need to be done properly, “it is the 80 to 90 per cent underneath the surface that is the most important,” he says.

What works. Fast and Elaine Froese, an active farmer and a certified life coach from Boissevain, Man., agree that conflict is normal and all families will run into personality issues.

Froese helps families talk about tough issues. With her down-to-earth style, she asks hard questions of farm families who need help. (Her website is www.elainefroese.com. She’s also quoted on page 20 in this issue.)

Family members must develop skills within the dynamics of the family farm to manage conflict, Froese says, so everyone can achieve certainty. “When there is certainty, people get out of the neutral zone – and a lot of farm families are in the neutral zone, unclear about who gets what and when. And they are unclear about what they have agreed to because there is no roadmap,” she says.

Fast and Froese say that successful families thrive on good communication patterns. “If a family can keep communicating and not get stuck or trapped in not communicating, they can get to the other side and make creative plans,” Fast explains.

“There is general acceptance in the farm population that some things that need to be talked about and worked through are being avoided,” Froese adds.

A focus on transparency is key for Fast. Sometimes during succession planning, parents will go to the lawyer or accountant and put something in place, he says, “but it isn’t talked about with everybody in the family, and that lack of transparency can end up destroying relationships. The rule of thumb or best practice is always to err on the side of more transparency, not less, if you want the happy, harmonious family.”

Parenting versus partnering. Both experts highlight the importance of family business members knowing what role they’re playing when dealing with family business

matters. “Eventually, you want them to be partners, not children, and that requires a different kind of parenting,” Fast says. “Therein lies the genius or the challenge, moving into true partnerships with your next generation.”

Froese helps her clients “unwind” and “unpack” their emotional issues and pays close attention to their “ages” and “stages.”

“As a coach, it is very important to know what decade you are in because with each decade comes new tasks and goals. For example, a 60-year-old having a hard time letting go of management needs to understand that his 40-year-old son or daughter really needs to take charge.”

Although most people claim family is the most important thing in life, Fast says the number one issue in family businesses worldwide is not feeling appreciated. “If you aren’t affirming them, you are tantamount to abusing them.”

Farm family businesses cannot take relationships for granted, according to Froese, who notes that family dynamics on a farm has many complex layers. She says the farm family that stops paying attention to the value of relationships is making a critical error.

How do we define success? Each family member can have a different definition of success. Herd health, quota or land holdings are all good measurements, but Fast says they aren’t enough. Families need to consider the human capital, which he calls the foundation for measuring healthy farm families.

He defines human capital as the family and the health of individual family members.

“Too many farm families don’t talk about that as a success metric, and unless you do, it is very easy to let things slide when it comes to relationships and communication. It might not be easier to run a business with family members, but when family businesses work, they possess an inborn competitive advantage no other company can match.”

Success Story. See how Tupling Farms makes respect a business advantage. www.fcc.ca/journal.

BY ANNE HOWDEN THOMPSON / *Anne is a professional freelance journalist specializing in agriculture. Raised on her family’s dairy farm in Ontario, she has always maintained an active involvement in many facets of agriculture.*

Making room for the next generation

How many families will your farm support? Is there room for the younger generation to be involved and still allow everyone a reasonable standard of living?

These questions are asked in farm operations across the country. Unfortunately, the answers aren't always clear.

Off-farm income often plays a big role. More family members can be involved if they can supplement farm income with earnings from a job or another business. Off-farm income is sometimes a temporary bridge to full-time farm involvement.

Here are two stories from families who are making it work.

Going corporate. It's an extended farm family for Larry Blenkin of Sintaluta, Sask. Larry's dad and uncle farmed together until the early '70s when Larry's dad passed away. Today, the operation involves Larry, his younger brother Sheldon and Darren Luscombe, the stepson of Larry's uncle.

Together, the three men run a grain farm of about 8,000 acres, concentrating on seed production. They also own the two grain elevators in Sintaluta. One is used for storage and the other is their seed-cleaning plant.

Three years ago, the farm was incorporated. Each of the three principals kept his farmland, but other assets were placed in the corporation. Larry is pleased with how it's all worked out.

"We couldn't really afford to buy out my uncle when he wanted to retire," Larry explains. "With a share structure, it's easier for someone to phase out of the operation and it would be easier for someone to buy in."

While income tax savings are typically the biggest motivation for incorporation, Larry also likes how everything can be structured in a corporate setting. All three take a salary from the company. The company also employs seasonal workers and they're considering a full-time employee.

At this point, it isn't clear if other descendants will want an ownership position in the farm, but the corporate structure would make that relatively easy to accomplish.

Thinking big. To provide opportunity for the younger generation, the Dykshoorn family of Foremost, Alta., purchased another farm located near Wiseton, Sask. Last year was their first year farming the new operation.

There's more than five hours of driving to get from one farm to the other, but farmland prices in west central Saskatchewan were more reasonable than in southern Alberta. Crop types and farming practices are similar in the two areas.

Ron and Lorinda Dykshoorn have five children, two of whom are farming. Chet received his agriculture diploma from the University of Saskatchewan and is married to Tania. A younger son, Sam, is taking agriculture at Lethbridge College.



From his years at the U of S, Chet has many farming colleagues in Saskatchewan, contributing to the decision to buy a farm there.

“We had to expand to make room for both sons,” Ron explains. “Without Sam’s interest, we probably wouldn’t have expanded so much.”

Ron and Lorinda had Dykshoorn Farms Ltd., while Chet and Tania ran their land as a separate partnership. With the expansion, everything was rolled into the incorporated entity. Most of the farmland is also within the company.

“We have a very good tax lawyer who helps us with estate planning and we have a good accountant as well,” Ron notes.

The family has just over 6,000 acres near Foremost and last year grew large kabuli chickpeas, yellow peas, barley, spring wheat and durum at that location. The new farm near Wiseton is over 3,000 acres and grew mustard, durum, large green lentils and red lentils.

A tractor and seeder stay at Wiseton, but the combines are moved back and forth between the two locations, as is the high clearance sprayer.

Each week, the family meets to discuss marketing and review the financial position of the farm. Lorinda runs the office and does the bookkeeping. Tania helps with the operation as well, but she’s busy with their young daughter, Maddyson.

“Our plan is for me to turn over the decision-making in the next five years,” says Ron, who recently turned 58. “I’ll be glad to help after that, but I won’t be calling the shots.”

The family farm dream. Farming with other family members is a dream-come-true for many. For others, it can end up as a nightmare. The root of disagreements is often financial.

There are many ways to structure a farm operation to involve multiple family members, but clear roles and reasonable income expectations are critical to success.

BY KEVIN HURSH

Can you teach an old dog new tricks?

Please understand that I, too, am an “old dog” and empathize with those thrust into the situation of imminent change. Hard as it is normally, making that shift after 30 years of doing things “my way” in a close environment such as the family farm is even more difficult.

The succession of a farm from one generation to the next is a hazardous time when each generation can trip over the other as they sort out their roles on the farm. A typical scenario is handing over responsibility for a certain operation, say the farrowing barn, to one of the children, but then not being able to resist the temptation to point things out to employees when the conversation should really be with the barn’s new manager.

Even old dogs will adapt if there’s something worthwhile to be had on the other side of the turbulence.

The best solution, as with all farm succession matters, is to implement change over time and not wait until it has to be done – which is always easier to say than to do. Role clarification is an essential activity in this process. The downfall is that we tend to assume what our role is without first having a conversation with those involved.

Try this simple exercise to initiate the dialogue. Have those involved write a list of activities and responsibilities they think comprise their roles on the farm or for a particular operation. Pop these lists into different columns in a spreadsheet, number them by priority or importance and run the sort data function. Voilà – a side-by-side comparison of who thinks they’re doing what. If they match, fantastic. If not, you have the starting point of a role clarification conversation.

The real trick in this process is to keep the conversation going, for new and old dogs alike. Even as roles become redefined, adapting to the change takes time and should be a regular point of discussion among team leaders and managers. Rather than waiting for a crisis, a weekly dose of “How’s it going, eh?” can help bring the small issues to the surface and get them dealt with before they become intractable.

The last point to consider is “What’s in it for me?” Even old dogs will adapt if there’s something worthwhile to be had on the other side of the turbulence that always accompanies change. Make sure that “something” is meaningful and clear so that old dogs can become new again.

BY HUGH MAYNARD / *Hugh is a specialist in agricultural communications based in Ormstown, Que. A graduate in farm management from Macdonald College (McGill University), Hugh is a seasoned journalist and broadcaster.*



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SAFETY ON THE FARM

Speak up

about unsafe situations

Have you ever been asked by your employer, or perhaps a family member or co-worker, to perform a task that you considered unsafe? I can recall a number of such occurrences during my years growing up and working on various farms. It can be an awkward situation to say the least. So how do you deal with it?

This issue requires some background. In a number of provinces, occupational health and safety regulations grant workers the right to refuse unsafe work. However, this right does not always apply to farm workers. Also, in some provinces, like Ontario, occupational health and safety regulations do not apply to family farms. Moreover, when a worker refuses unsafe work, the first step is to try and resolve the conflict internally before involving a workplace inspector.

**My intent is to keep my family
alive no matter what. It's worth
it to me to speak out.**

Ultimately, it makes little difference whether you have the right to refuse unsafe work. Nor does it particularly matter if you are dealing with work assigned by an employer, a co-worker or a family member. The fact is, you've been asked to do something that doesn't feel right and you are faced with a choice: do you voice your concerns and risk creating a potential conflict with the other person, or do you keep quiet and risk proceeding with a potentially dangerous situation?

For Elaine Froese, the answer is simple. "My intent is to keep my family alive and well no matter what," she explains. "So I have no worries about saying, 'No, you can't do that – it's not safe.' It's worth it to me to speak out."

Froese is a farmer from Boissevain, Man. She's also a farm family coach who specializes in conflict resolution. For over 20 years, Froese has worked with farm families to help them talk about tough issues or what she calls "undiscussabull." She says one of the most effective ways to raise concerns about a potentially hazardous situation is to approach it from a point of curiosity.

"Rather than judging what the other person wants to do and raising their defences, you could say, 'I'm curious . . . are you OK with this? Because this doesn't feel good for me. Could we do it another way?'" she explains.

Still, it can be a difficult conversation because of the emotions involved. If you are a farm manager, one of your goals should be to create an open environment where family members and employees feel comfortable expressing their concerns. Then you can resolve the situation right away.

The key is to let people know that safety is a top priority on your farm. That makes it safe for them to speak up about unsafe situations.

BY PETER VAN DONGEN / *Peter is an agricultural journalist and communications consultant based on Vancouver Island. Born and raised on a dairy farm, Peter has work experience with many different types of farm operations.*



What a drive!

FCC Drive Away Hunger raises 1.6 million pounds of food

Every year, FCC Drive Away Hunger gives food banks a boost. The program brings FCC employees, community partners, customers, schools, businesses, residents and food banks together to fight hunger in communities across Canada. This year, a record amount of food was raised.

The drive hits the road with tractors and trailers each fall, collecting food and cash donations for local food banks. Canadians can also make a donation at any FCC office across the country.

"Year after year, the generosity of our partners and the overwhelming response we see from people across Canada continue to amaze me," says FCC President and CEO Greg Stewart. "The global financial situation has resulted in increased food bank use in many parts of Canada. We can't thank Canadians enough for continuing to rally together to support this program."

Since 2004, FCC Drive Away Hunger has collected more than 3.5 million pounds of food for Canadian food banks. Watch for FCC Drive Away Hunger in your community each autumn.

Tours	Final results (lb.)	Office collection	Total**
B.C.	N/A	77,818	77,818
Alta.*	54,130	84,707	138,837
Sask.*	156,427	93,057	249,484
Man.	N/A	125,372	125,372
Ont.*	213,473	215,768	429,241
Que.*	115,728	389,335	505,063
N.B.*	23,313	9,570	32,883
N.S.*	N/A	40,261	40,261
P.E.I.	N/A	9,203	9,203
N.L.	N/A	19,456	19,456
Canada	563,071	1,064,546	1,627,617

* Province hosted tour ** Combination of food and cash donations



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