

Effective Communication Leads to Success in Family Businesses



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Many farms are family businesses. Husbands and wives often work side by side with their children and their spouses. Running a business with family members can provide a very satisfying work environment with many benefits. Along with the benefits come added challenges of communicating the ideas and feelings of each family member in an open and respectful manner.

The benefits of being involved in a family owned business are many. Decisions can often be made very efficiently. Families can discuss ideas about a concept or project in the morning and with consensus, begin working on the project that same day. Being in control of your business is another benefit of family operations. Most family farms are not at the mercy of investment groups or a board of directors to make decisions regarding their future for them. Many farms have the benefit of different generations working together. The wisdom and advice from those with the most experience can be shared with younger members. In turn, the ingenuity from younger generations can bring renewed energy and ideas that help invigorate and improve the operation.

Trust and cooperation are essential in a family run farm, as the success of the farming operation impacts all those involved. Children see the trials and tribulations their parents go through first hand and come to understand the skills and dedication needed for the operation to be successful. Farm families take great pride in watching the farm grow and flourish as each new generation lends their support and talent to the effort.



For all of the benefits of working in a family business to be realized, the members of the farm family must also be aware of the importance of good communication. Conducting productive meetings in a setting that provides a comfortable venue where all involved can express their opinion is key. Below is a list of useful strategies a family run business can incorporate to facilitate effective communication between members.

1. Schedule Routine Meetings.

Life on a farm is busy! All too often, decisions regarding important topics are either put off or quickly discussed in passing because there is "never any time" to

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meet. By scheduling a routine meeting time every month, it allows family members a dedicated time to discuss the issues at hand and forces everyone to make time in their busy schedules.

2. Make Time to Meet During the Day.

It is easy to work all day to take care of the day's chores and then find the only time to meet is at night after work. Working late can cut into both family and personal lives. Setting aside time during the day to meet will also allow other professionals (i.e. veterinarians, nutritionists, accountants) to attend your meetings.

3. Build a Team.

Depending on your farm's needs, build a team of professionals that can meet with your family to address specific topics within their areas of expertise. Including your accountant, veterinarian, nutritionist, agronomist, etc. can make the meetings more productive and will help provide an outside, third party opinion to mediate any topics where there is a family dispute.

4. Utilize Email Correspondence.

Not every small decision needs to be written down, but on occasion, it is useful to summarize meeting minutes or write a "meeting recap" email and send it out to everyone involved. This becomes useful six months later when the email can be referenced to verify a particular decision on a topic that may have been forgotten.

5. Stay Committed!

Assign someone the task of scheduling the monthly meetings and making sure that they are done every month. It is easy to implement a new idea, like monthly meetings to facilitate communication, only to have 4 or 5 meetings before the idea fades because "we got busy".

In conclusion, being part of a family run business can provide wonderful opportunities that cannot be found working for an outside employer. With those benefits come unique communication challenges. Taking time to schedule routine meetings will help foster communication and cohesiveness; ultimately making being involved in a family business more productive and enjoyable.

