

9-24-2015

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Rausch, Aadron, "Farm & Family Connections: Balancing Work & Family" (2015). *Historical Documents of the Purdue Cooperative Extension Service*. Paper 1041.

<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/agext/1041>

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Farm & Family Connections: *Balancing Work & Family*

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Owning and managing a family business such as a family farm offers unique benefits and challenges to the family members involved. On the up side, the family farm offers family members the opportunity to cooperate, set goals, develop strategic plans, and make decisions that generate profits to support economic success and financial independence. The challenge, however, is to create and sustain appropriate boundaries between the family and the farm business. One way to meet this challenge is to pay as much attention to family relationships as you do to the management of your farm business.

Family-relationship management is entirely different from farm-business management. Maintaining family relationships entails attention to personal relationship, parenting, cooperation, and love and respect among family members. You are probably thinking, "easier said than done."

Strategies for Maintaining Balance Between Work & Family

Managing boundaries between the farm business and the family is challenging. For example, managers of farm businesses need to decide how to distribute income between the farm and family expenses, and how to balance work and family time. Intensity of feelings, confusion between family roles and management roles, and personal temperament and communication style influence how the family and farm business function. Conscious and deliberate goal setting and planning can help family members anticipate possible challenges and create effective strategies for addressing issues related to farm-business and family-relationship management.

- **Explore Family Feelings**

Identify feelings and issues that get in the way of sound business practices. Families that talk about feelings and concerns before they become problems can develop effective coping strategies that provide the most benefit for the family and the farm business.

- **Develop Guidelines & Agreements**

Anticipate possible problems, and establish guidelines and agreements that provide effective solutions but still allow enough flexibility to address the unique nature of particular issues.

- **Recognize the Family's Role in the Business**

Establish agreement about family members' roles in the family and in the farm business. The role of the family is to promote and support the growth, development, and welfare of family members. The role of the family in promoting and supporting the

farm business is dependent upon the individual family member's role in the family business. For example, one person may provide support through balancing farm finances, while another family member may assist during periods of high production.

- **Understand Individual Family Members' Roles**

Understand how each family member sees his or her role in the family business. Confusion about role responsibility can lead to feelings of inadequacy or isolation if family members are unsure about their roles.

Assessing Your Success

Effective farm-business and family management involves identifying, managing, and resolving problems. Effective managers identify problems, generate and evaluate possible solutions, work towards agreement, put a plan into action, and reevaluate the effectiveness of the solution. Flexibility is critical!

Use this assessment worksheet to help you and your family assess how you are doing at balancing work and family on your family farm.

Sources & Resources

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Balancing Work & Family: How Are You Doing?

How well are you balancing work and family issues?	Yes	No	Not Sure
I recognize family issues and feelings that get in the way of sound business practices.			
We usually talk about family-business issues before they become a crisis.			
Our family has developed agreements or guidelines for dealing with business and family issues.			
Our family has decided what role family members will play in the family business.			
The members of our family have identified their family and business roles.			
We have a set time each day, week, or month when we get together as a family to discuss feelings and concerns related to the family business.			
Our family is good at identifying issues or concerns related to the family business.			
We usually talk about our issues and concerns, and the family generates possible ideas for handling them effectively.			
Each person in our family has the opportunity to express his or her feelings or concerns.			
When our family is faced with a tough decision, we can usually agree on an action plan.			
The members of our family are usually willing to try different strategies if one strategy is not working.			

This publication is part of the Farm Business Management for the 21st Century series. Other publications in the series provide information about the evaluation of management skills, measuring and analyzing financial performance, and applying strategic management to the farm business. For the most current information about Farm Business Management for the 21st Century publications and other supporting materials, visit our Web site at <www.agecon.purdue.edu/ext/fbm21>.

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