
Farm Legacy Letter: Documenting the Past to Secure the Future

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Writing a farm legacy letter is not only a powerful way to share the heart and soul behind your family farm, but also a practical way to convey the timeline of important events in its history. While a traditional will handles the legal transfer of land, equipment, and other tangible assets, a legacy letter passes on what truly makes your farm special: your values, life lessons, and hopes for future generations.

This guide will help you craft a meaningful legacy letter that conveys your family farm's story and spirit for years to come and ensure that its history is preserved. It can also act as a valuable conversation starter for family farm succession planning.

What Information Should be Included in a Farm Legacy Letter?

Land Acquisitions:

- Year purchased: Establishes how long the farm has been in the family. This is important for heritage, financing, and potential tax considerations.
- Seller's name: Helpful if questions arise over boundaries, easements, etc.
- Prior land usage: Structures, wells, mining, shifts in production (dairy to row crops, for example), things that could impact soil health.

Major Family or Business Events:

- Start year for each family member actively farming: Creates a clear work history for reference in determining management roles, contribution, and equity stakes.
- Ownership transfers due to death or retirement.
- Business structure changes: Explain when and why legal structures changed (for example, C-Corp to S-Corp) to help next generations understand tax implications and legal obligations.
- Significant changes in landlords and/or leasing arrangements: Helpful in understanding relationships and future negotiations.
- Dates major structures were built (barns, grain systems, shops, etc.) Provides a timeline for insurance, maintenance planning, depreciation schedules, and capital improvements.

Other Items:

- Historic weather events: Record instances of major crop losses or building damage due to floods, droughts, tornadoes, etc. Important for risk management, insurance claims, and disaster planning.
- Informal field or land names: Document the legal addresses for those fields known only by their nicknames to those who are the current farmers (for example, Butler Farm, Back 40, Grandpa's Field, Chattin's Hill, etc.).
- Property taxes over time: Gives insight into the financial responsibilities that came with caring for the land.

- Digital picture file: This may not be included in the legacy letter, but it could be useful to have for visual documentation of the farm structures through time.

The “Why” of Your Family Farm:

- Values of your family farm: Document the values that have driven your farm to succeed year after year (community ties, family closeness, faith, trust, etc.), decisions that had to be made, and sacrifices that helped to shape the farm.
- Life lessons through the years: Share life lessons that the family farm has taught you (can be funny, sentimental, or other stories that you would like to be passed down through the generations).
- Your hopes and dreams for the farm’s future: Document what you would like to see happen to the farm in the future. What is important to you? Do you care if the farm is sold for development? Should it remain a row crop farm? Would you prefer for the farm to remain organic? Any other lasting sentiments should be shared here (note that these are not enforceable through the legacy letter). To be enforceable, the wants and desires must be documented in legal documents (such as a will) to be followed your death.

These topics ensure that whoever takes over has **practical, documented information** that saves time, avoids confusion, and supports smart decisions. It’s not just history. It’s a working reference for managing the farm well into the future.

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PIFB provides multi-generational family businesses with research-based business management resources aimed at improving personal leadership performance and driving operational growth. Our ambition is to prepare family business owners, managers, and stakeholders (including non-owner spouses and future owners) to be effective stewards of their family enterprises.

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