



MANAGING FAMILY AND FARM COMMUNICATION, COMMUNICATION, COMMUNICATION

Dariel McNaughton

Introduction to Farm Tech Speech

My name is Dariel McNaughton and I have farmed with my husband in the Rumsey district for a little over 35 years. I was born and raised on a farm all my life. We are a third generation farm family and are most proud of our family, farm and community. Over the course of the years there have been many changes as we have a mixed farming operation that started out with cattle, grain and hogs and at present we have the mixed farming operation and a tilapia grow facility. The fish venture is only 5 years old as we converted our hog barn into such. We have two sons and their families who farm with us as well as a daughter who lives about 20 miles away and is very interested in what we do on the farm.

I met and married my husband in less time that it takes to have a baby and can you imagine the sudden change that I threw that family into? There were no discussions on what our future may hold or courses readily available to prepare us for the future as there are today to take. I was an instructor at Olds College when I met Mel and one day a colleague of mine and I were talking and he asked me where I was going to live and I replied "in the big house on the farm and my future parents were going to move a doublewide a caragana hedge away." His reply to me simply was "it will never work!" That statement shocked me as no one had ever told me I could not do anything or that things wouldn't work (as Mel has learned over the years) and that statement has been with me ever since. My mind was made up, it WILL work, but little did I know how much work that it might take or the situations that may arise. When one is young, naïve, and starting out in a new life situation you are really not aware of all that may be ahead of you.

I am not a psychologist or a sociologist, I simply am a person who has lived in a multi farm family situation for 35 years and sometimes there have been bumps in the road but things have been good. My story is a REAL LIFE story. All of the examples I will be using involve our family except a few that are real life situations that have happened to people we know. I always felt loved by the McNaughton family and immediately became involved in the farm as it was quite a drive for work in the Business Education field and we felt I could put that to use on our farm. Maybe I did not always agree with the decisions that were made but I always supported Mel in whatever venture we would take on. Now when I witness the struggles of some families with the generational challenges I feel there is a strong need to take a proactive approach to achieve the potential benefits of working together. Change is inevitable and with change tough issues as well as emotional issues can arise. I cannot imagine farming now as we did when we started out in 1969.

Have you ever driven down the road and seen a new mobile parked in the family farm yard? Have you ever noticed that most times it is very close to the existing house-probably so close that the kitchen windows are almost directly across from one another? Then have you driven down that same road a few months or a year or so later and notice the mobile is no longer there? Well, I guess that is one thing that I would notice more than most of you in this room because I have lived with the mobile very close and now as a matter of fact, I am living in that mobile and I am now the mother-in-law. It has not taken that long for the roles to change either, the way time passes. We have been fortunate that things "worked out" with Mel's parents but feel that was due more to luck or chance than good planning. The main reason for this was probably due to the fact that Mel's father was 64 when we, the young generation, came back to the farm as compared to the more normal age of late forties or early fifties when the new generation arrives back. Also, his father let us make the decisions, although there were times when we needed Dad's mature advice.

We can learn about new markets, new farming methods, safe food and so on, but how do we learn about ourselves and those we work with. I truly believe the human resource side of a family business (and that does



not just have to be the farming family business) is highly neglected. No one seems to want to talk about this “warm and fuzzy” part of the business and if we do not the family will soon start to grumble and the family business will start to crumble. This is why I believe we need to Manage Family and Farm. You have heard the saying “a stitch in time saves nine”-it can be applied to generational farming.

To demonstrate the ideas of my presentation I would like to introduce you to two families, the Huffy’s and the Buffy’s. Lo and behold I hope there is no one in this room by those names. I do not want to step on anyone’s toes or hurt anyone’s feelings as I mention fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, daughter-in-laws, or simply in-laws (I wish we could find another word for that name) or any other names. I do not want any of you to think our family situation is perfect, I just want to stress to you that there are situations of conflict, emotion, trust and values that we have encountered and worked out and this is and will be an ongoing process. I know there are other families with the same needs.

I must say I am most fortunate to have two “new” daughters that I have great love and respect for and I feel the same from them.

Example

So, what do we do when one or more of our children decide to return to the farm? In some cases it is a known fact that the son or daughter will return at some point or time and there has been discussions or maybe that son or daughter just announce “hi mom and dad, I’m home to help.” Do they arrive and things try to stay the same as before, do they use the machinery until it’s worn out and when it is time to upgrade there is no value left for either generation. Or is there pre-planning? Whatever the situation may be something has to be done, the sooner the better. We must recognize four main points.

1. Recognize there is a need
2. Take action
3. Find resources
4. Get results

Farming has changed more in the past 7 years that it has in the past 97 years. Can you imagine how much change our fathers and grandfathers have seen-just imagine what they have to comprehend or are unable to comprehend now in the world of technology. Computers have entered our world and have taken over most everything, including our manual bookkeeping, there is GPS, and our machinery has allowed us to make far more efficient farming. The young generation is more educated when they return to the farm. Our team consists of those with accounting experience, business education, mechanical engineering, legal secretary, crop management, and pharmacist as well as technical skills such as GPS and computer skills. Of course education does not stop here as we continually take courses and are involved in many activities in our community. Change is constant and we must keep up with it. CHANGE is inevitable.

It wasn’t until the late 80’s that we decided we should be doing something different and started taking courses offered by Alberta Agriculture (MAP). We knew that some day one or both of our sons or daughter may return to the farm and time was marching on. After hearing some of the horror stories of families encountering family and farm demise, stress, sickness, and hatred towards one another as well as other shocking stories Mel and I felt very fortunate none of that had taken place to these degrees on our farm. We recognized there was a need and it was time to take action, find resources and get results.

There are life skills that we all learn as we grow and mature. Some of the most important skills probably are the life skills like respect for yourself and those you come in contact with, ability to use common sense in decision making, and honesty when dealing with your team members.

Here are some factors that involved us and our team members.

CHANGE for everyone.

Not everyone has farming experience.



Financial difficulties, expansion. You cannot add another generation without adding revenue.
Parents need to let go and trust new generation
Team members take on different roles
Expectations of new team members
What's fair is not equal and what's equal is not fair
Cannot worry about one team member doing more or less than his share
Do not expect the new generation to do things the way you did-there are new ways of doing things.

MANAGING FAMILY AND FARM COMMUNICATION, COMMUNICATION, COMMUNICATION

The topic of communication is probably one of the most important issues when it comes to making things work in a business, whether it be farm related, oil field or whatever.

FAMILY MEETINGS

- a) meet on specific dates
- b) make a time line-meetings can take longer than expected and the team can easily get off topic and nothing gets accomplished
- c) make an agenda
- d) bring concerns to the meetings: be open-minded, be honest
- e) invite an independent person to your meeting/s if you are stuck on a subject
- f) have family meetings and business meetings separate
- g) learn about each other- strengths/weaknesses

• **ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS** • **TONE OF VOICE** • **VACATIONS** • **WORKING WITH HIRED PERSONS**

GOALS

Make goals and act on them. Write goals down-they are no good floating around in your mind. Put the goals where you and others can see them.

Goals can be PERSONAL FAMILY BUSINESS

1 YEAR (SHORT TERM)

5 YEARS (INTERMEDIATE)

5 YEARS PLUS (LONG TERM)

Ask yourself??????????

1. What is important to me, my family and our business
2. What stage of life cycle are you in (spring, summer, fall, winter)
3. What do you want from the farm business-a comfortable standard of living, a viable business to plan succession planning

BUSINESS PLANNING

What do you want your business to look like in the year 2010? Where does each member of your team want to be in 2010? Is everyone on the same page at the same time?

VISION STATEMENT

MISSION STATEMENT

COMPANY GOALS

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE BUSINESS



PRODUCTS/SERVICES

WILLS

RESOURCES

- Take short courses-on the Family side-on the Business side
 - CAPA – Olds
 - Private consultants
- Read, Read, Read
- Renewal courses offered through Alberta Agriculture - Business planning
- Become active in your volunteer projects and take courses they offer
 - example: 4-H
- Watch what others are doing

CONCLUSION

In order to keep your business viable as well as keeping the team members happy it takes a lot of work on everyone's part. Those entering the business need to understand that the parents/grandparents have worked hard over the course of the years to build the business to where it is today. Parents need to be upfront with their siblings as well as know when to let go and trust the next generation to carry on.

Communication, communication, communication cannot be stressed enough. Understand that life will not be perfect, but imagine the power and progress a family can have if they all work together. Write down your goals and act on them, no one can read your mind. Build a business plan. Everyone needs to be on the same page at the same time and support one another.

Recognize there is a need, act on that need, find resources and get results. Learn about one another and respect each other's strengths and weaknesses. Life is too short to live an unhappy and unproductive life.

Today I hope you can take home one little piece of information that may be a small step to making a large difference in your life and the family you work with every day. Which family do you want to be an example of –the Huffy's or the Buffy's.?

If you have any questions I will gladly try to answer.