

# MANAGEMENT TIPS

by Kevin Bender

As with most if not all business organizations, farming together with family members has some unique advantages as well as some challenges. Put three family members together in a farm operation each as sole proprietors and some more challenges and opportunities arise. Growing barley, canola, faba beans, oats, peas, and wheat is what my dad, my brother and I have done for the past fifteen years together. What has made us successful or given us an advantage over many others?

One way is by keeping our fixed costs down. We roughly have two full lines of equipment for three farming entities.

Secondly, we rarely have had to hire help. Our most difficult time crunch comes at harvest. We run two combines and one tandem truck. The geographical diversity of our farm does not lend itself to something like a grain cart. Very little of our land is adjoining and more of it is rented than owned. Grain storage is mostly at the field so at harvest grain movement is usually within a mile of the combines.

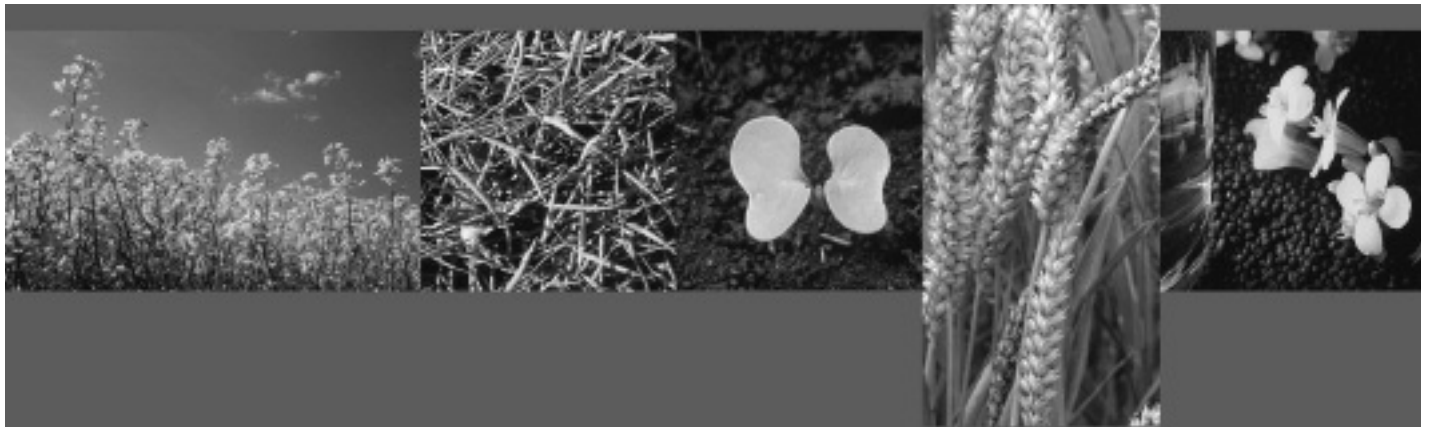


Each of us has areas where we are more skilled than the others and we concentrate on those areas. For the most part, we stick with what we are most familiar with. This increases efficiency and lessens the chance of error.

When it comes to threats or challenges, probably the most obvious one is communication breakdown. Open communication is essential for success. We experienced a time when we were on the verge of going independent as a result of not communicating. Taking it a step further, we recognize there is no room for selfishness in this arrangement. Contrary to common business practices, though we strive to be as profitable as we can, we are as concerned about the well being and success of each other as much as we are ourselves. There is no “looking out for number one”. As long as we each maintain this outlook, things roll along quite smoothly.

Along with this principle of selflessness goes generosity. There is no nickel-and-diming. We keep track of large transactions but small amounts or grain or input purchases are not worth spending time differentiating. In a nutshell, we all work for the common good of the unit (each other).

Our farming arrangement is certainly not for everyone but it has worked well for us. It has allowed us to keep our costs down and when the above principles are consensually adhered to, it has provided a very efficient, low stress and rewarding livelihood.



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