

LEAVING A LASTING LEGACY: A RIGHTRISK™ PROGRAM FOR SUCCESSION PLANNING

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Abstract

The average age of farmers in the United States was 58.3 years in 2012, and it has increased significantly over the past several years. These data suggest that many current farmers and landowners are or should be considering the transition of their businesses – ownership and management – to the next generation. They should also be concerned about sharing their legacies with children, grandchildren, friends, and others.

A legacy is the summation of a lifetime of achievement and the context in which that lifetime will be remembered. A legacy is not just money but also a reputation, what was accomplished, and the difference a person makes in the world as they pass through, their mark on the universe. More importantly, a legacy is something that is passed along years after a person leaves the world as we know it.

Leaving A Lasting Legacy presents an alternative approach to end of life planning. The on-line course and group workshops guide participants through 1) methods and tools for improving intergenerational relationships; 2) sharing personal values and life lessons; 3) passing on personal possessions of emotional value; 4) preparing instructions and final wishes to be fulfilled; and 5) transferring financial assets and real estate.

More than 150 Colorado farmers and ranchers participated in legacy workshops during the winter of 2014-2015. Assessment questions were asked of the participants at the beginning, end, and throughout the workshops using a personal response system to collect anonymous answers.

The first question asked of participants was “how much do you love your family”. Most (greater than 80 percent) responded that they loved their family unconditionally or very much. Follow-up questions and discussions pertained to whether they were taking actions which supported their love of their family.

Only about one half of the workshop participants indicated that they are having intra-family discussions about succession planning. While approximately 75 percent of the respondents had a will or other legal document stating their wishes for their estate, many heirs had not been told about their parents’ wishes. Further compounding end-of-life issues is that members of both generations (parents and children) are have not talked about end-of-life planning.

Following participation the workshops, more than half of the participants indicated they would, within the succeeding 12 months, talk with their families, complete the Leaving a Lasting Legacy workbook, and contact an attorney and/or other consultants. Another approximate 25 percent indicated they would take some different action. Workshop participants indicated that having enough time (38%) and bridging communication gaps between generations (38%) were the biggest obstacles to leaving a lasting legacy.

By talking with family and friends and taking a proactive approach to succession planning, people can help to ensure they are remembered in the best possible light and that their life’s work will more successfully transition to future generations. The Leaving A Lasting Legacy materials can help farmers and ranchers and their families more likely achieve their legacy goals.

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