

The Farmer's "Market"

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Message from the President

ALAN HOSKINS

One of the things I enjoy most about my career is assisting families in successfully transitioning the farm from one generation to the next. It is a true honor to be allowed to offer thoughts and ideas ultimately utilized by the owners in consummating this transfer.

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture portion of the United States Department of Agriculture website (nifa.usda.gov/family-farms) classifies family farms as "any farm organized as a sole proprietorship, partnership, or family corporation". The website further states "Under this definition, the National Agricultural Statistics Service's Census of Agriculture reported that family farms account for almost 96 percent of the 2,204,792 farms in the United States". A significant portion of the number of farms referenced above are owned and operated by husbands, wives, parents and children, etc.

During a recent meeting with a father, mother and son who are prospective customers, the father made a comment about how they were becoming more intentional about discussing the farm's direction among the family's members. He also commented on how they had improved their communication even on day-to-day issues. I complimented them on these positive changes as it takes an effort by all to move this needle. Improving communication is a challenging endeavor and does not happen without recognizing the need to alter prior interaction methods.

I requested permission to ask a follow-up question regarding their communication. As they are all actively involved in the operation and see each other daily, I inquired as to the amount of time they spent having conversations not related to the farm. They gave an answer I suspect applies to many farm families; not much. After further discussion, they thanked me for bringing this up and agreed their non-business communication should be improved. I spoke to the father earlier this week as they had just returned from a recent vacation including the entire family. He remarked they had thought about the question I asked that day and had made it a point to ensure a good portion of their communication during this time was not business related. He again thanked me for the question and stated they were going to continue to be more intentional about these types of conversations.

It has been well documented that allowing "what we do" to become "who we are" is a path best avoided. That can be a very daunting task for farmers and ranchers. For the family I referenced, they see value in changing their communication to have a greater emphasis on "family" in the term "family farm". If your operation is already doing well in separating the business communication from the personal, I commend you. If you feel there is work to be done in this area, hopefully this article can serve as a good beginning point for a discussion with your family members. If it allows at least one family to improve their interactions, my time writing this has been well spent.



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National Farm Machinery Show
February 12-15, Louisville, KY
Booth #4363 & 4365

20 Lessons to Take into 2020

By Sonja Begemann
Ag Web

As we enter into a new decade, there are many lessons we can glean from not only 2019, but the years that preceded it, too. With each tough year comes lessons, and each good year blessings. Here are a few lessons we hope you'll consider this next decade.

1) Be mindful of stress.

"Identifying stress is an important first step but then, we have to take a step forward to deal with that stress," says Farm Journal's PORK editor, Jennifer Shike. Stress can be overwhelming, especially in challenging years, find ways to manage it.

2) Don't let being 'busy' steal joy.

"Busyness is like sin: kill it, or it will be killing you," author Kevin DeYoung in "Crazy Busy" says.

3) You can't control the weather.

2019 was undoubtedly a surprising year on many fronts. Perhaps the most challenging obstacle was one farmers can't control—the weather.

4) Show appreciation—don't just expect it.

"When was the last time we showed any appreciation to anyone who chose to do business with us? When was the last time we thanked a feeder or a packer or a distributor or grocer?" asks Kate Miller in her blog 'I Will Not Thank A Farmer.'

5) Take safety seriously.

Safety on-farm is critical. Grain bin entrapment, for example kills 5% to 8% of victims, even when their heads are above the grain. Rescuing entrapped farmers is dangerous, too, 20% of manure pit deaths involve someone helping someone else.

6) Even 'good' farmers sometimes take prevent plant.

USDA pegged prevent plant at more than 19 million acres this year—a new record. It doesn't matter how long you've farmed, or how well you plan when Mother Nature doesn't cooperate.

7) We're still learning about growing corn.

This year's odd weather lead to a

phenomenon in corn maturity unlike farmers and researchers have seen before—proving that no matter how much we learn, we'll never know all there is to know about the golden grain.

8) Persevere.

Calling this spring a wet one is an understatement. Farmers push through terrible conditions when they could to plant a crop—proving their resilience.

9) The sins of previous seasons will haunt you.

In 2018, harvest was extremely delayed and those ruts and washouts showed up spring 2019. In 2019, spring weather lead to less-than-perfect field conditions at planting and harvest. You will see the impact of those conditions in 2020 and following.

10) Prepare yourself to be a better supporter for family.

"What would happen if we moms took a few moments to better prepare for [rough] days? Because if mom's not feeling it, not one is feeling it," says Jennifer Shike.

11) Corn can hit 800 bu. per acre.

"The seed is going to carry you so far, it gives you that foundation and then the management side is the key," says David Hula, NCGA's corn yield winner in 2019.

12) Don't give up on your dreams.

For college senior Gavin Spoor, his dream was to farm. He started with 6 acres and is quickly growing, through less-than-traditional crops such as popcorn.

13) You're capable of more than you know.

Sampson Parker never knew he would have to use a 3" pocketknife to sever part of his arm to escape fiery death—but he did. He wanted to see his family again, he wanted to survive, so he found something inside him that made him capable of the seemingly impossible.

14) You will get through the bad times.

It's hard to fully understand tragedy or extreme loss or disappointment until you've been through it, but you can.

15) Mental health should be at the forefront of priorities.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the suicide rate in rural America is 45% higher than urban areas. This needs to stop, reach out for help.

16) Sometimes you can't prepare enough.

Farmers and ag suppliers alike knew it was going to be a wetter-than-normal harvest. Still, cold weather snuck in early and propane supplies ran short, proving that even knowing something ahead of time doesn't always mean things will go smoothly because Mother Nature can throw a wrench in plans.

17) 2019 is a year we won't soon forget.

For some farmers, this could be the year certain fields are permanently put out of production. For others, 2019 could be the year they stop farming. Not all stories are sad though, many welcomed babies, some expanded their operations and others have stories of blessings from a seemingly terrible year.

18) Farmers are inspiring.

"In two decades of covering agriculture, I'm always impressed by the common thread that ties America's producers together: resiliency... Given all of the challenges the industry has stared down in the past few years, we know it was time to feature some of the positive and inspiring moments happening" in the Farm Journal 'Grit with Grace' series, says Farm Journal Editor Clinton Griffiths.

19) Think differently.

"All too often, we let what we know limit what we can imagine, which is why the best leaders are insatiable learners."

20) There's always tomorrow.

Each season brings a clean slate, new opportunities. Use them. Take what you learned in 2019, what you've learned your whole farming career to get better: be a better farmer, a better husband or wife, a better parent, whatever drives you—tomorrow is yours for the taking.

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