

The Dairy Farmers Son

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What stops people from talking about succession planning?

In my role as an agricultural consultant I quite often have difficult conversations and ask questions that people don't necessarily always want to answer or be asked. So when it comes to succession planning in farming families is that why people try and avoid it? Is it a difficult conversation?

In part I think yes, but I also think that is one of a combination of things that stop us. Succession planning is a difficult conversation but is that really a reason not to try? Does it really seem just too big and just too hard! Farmers in general are quite intuitive people which means they know what to do and how to do it, but sometimes putting that into words is the hard part.

Succession planning involves several moving pieces and I think the daunting task of finding a starting point is what stops a lot of people from moving forward. So, pick one thing. It might just be asking a family member what do they want? It may be starting a conversation about bringing in someone from outside the business to discuss the matter. A conversation about where you see yourself in the future or what are your interests outside of the farm might lead to a discussion about where you want to be in a certain time period.

Fear is another stumbling block that can stop the discussion. It may be the fear of putting a plan in place for an outcome that no one really wants to occur. Is it the fear of offending someone or having a disagreement? Is it the fear that it won't be a simple process and it could take a long time to get it finalised? Sometimes keeping our head in the sand is simpler in the short term, but can this lead to issues or tension in the future?

Another fear that I see is what will I do if I am not on the farm. I would be a rich man if I got a dollar for every time I heard a farmer say I don't want to move into town and rust into the ground. But is that really the case. Is there something that you could do with yourself? The advent of the Men's Shed, where people that are good with their hands can help repair and make things is a great way to become involved. Travel may be on the agenda or getting back involved with a sporting club.

Succession planning will generally involve a team of people. Some of these people may already be involved in your business like your accountant and your bank manager. You may use a consultant, industry rep or a financial planner. One addition to your team that is sometimes overlooked is using a peer in another farmer that may have been through the experience already and have some valuable insights.

Unfortunately, succession planning is not a one size fits all solution, all farms and all families are different. No one likes change and succession planning is admitting that something is going to change. When done properly the benefits of succession planning can be substantial for all involved. There is always help out there for those that ask. Don't let the fear of a difficult conversation stop you from starting.