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District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

Transition Planning: Step 12 – Putting the Plan into Action

In eleven news columns over the past year, I've tried to break down K-State's *Transition Planning: 12 Steps to Keep the Family Farming* reference into smaller pieces. Putting a plan into action is the final one, and while reaching the finish line is a good thing, it can be uneasy as well.

This stage is when the farm's successors should be taking over the majority of the decisions. Asset 'separations' occur and suddenly the 'look' of the farm may change. While the passing of the torch is exciting and comes with a hopeful look towards the future, it's also good to note how each party might be feeling as it's done.

For the party taking on greater responsibility for day-to-day operations, pressure can mount. Do I have all the tools in place to make this work? Am I going to step on toes if I take the operation in a different direction? It might even feel some days like 'what have I done?!' All those feelings are normal even as no two situations are the same. Part of putting the plan into action is understanding there will be rough patches even as excitement about the future grows. Plans aren't perfect and there *will* be waves to ride out.

For the generation stepping back from the farm, what you've done every day for a long time may change and that may be uncomfortable. That, too, is normal and when possible, retiring operators should consider how those feelings of belonging, self-esteem and self-fulfillment previously tied to the farm will be met when our job is not the farm. It may not seem like a big deal, but failure to do so can lead to fear, annoyance, confusion, and even sadness.

If the transition plan is still taking place, try to address some of these feelings by stepping in/ away in steps. Along the way, both parties should engage in deliberate conversations about what the transitional steps should look like. Does the senior farmer-owner want to step away all at once? Does the succeeding generation want them to stay on as a mentor or advisor – and for how long (formal arrangements are always preferred...)? These questions need clarification just like business plans and asset transfers so neither party is left surprised, hurt, or lost.

It's been said that transitions will happen, one way or another. How proactive we are can make a big difference in how smooth and ultimately successful it might be.

For a summary of this series' references, visit our Meadowlark Extension District Crops & Soils page at: <https://www.meadowlark.k-state.edu/crops-soils/>. Resources from the K-State Office of Farm and Ranch Transitions and be found at: <https://www.agkansitions.org/>. For this step, see a University of Wisconsin resource entitled *Control of Farm Management Decisions* - <https://farms.extension.wisc.edu/articles/control-of-farm-management-decisions/>. It's a quick read for anyone interested in what the first steps in the process might look like and includes an accompanying worksheet to help you think through things from both sides of the equation. Please reach out if you need additional assistance getting access to any of the above.

Ross Mosteller
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

Feeders Matter in Waste

The calendar has flipped to December, and it has begun to feel like winter is on the way. This fall has been an open one to graze livestock on relatively abundant forages in northeast Kansas. All good things generally come to an end and even the most dedicated graziers find times when harvested forages need to be provided for livestock. University research has shown that the type of feeder and amount of access to hay makes a difference in feeding loss.

Reducing hay waste is one of the easiest ways to improve the efficiency and profitability of livestock operations. The type of hay feeder utilized can significantly impact how much forage is wasted at feeding. Feeders are designed differently and understanding how feeder design influences hay loss, can guide decisions on feeder type utilization and affect bottom-line profitability. Keep in mind that each operation is unique and there is no “one size fits all” answer to feeding hay.

Hay feeders fall into three major classifications; open-bottomed, sheeted-bottomed and cone or basket type feeders. The feeding waste ranges from most waste to minimal, respectively. K-State’s Beef Systems Extension Specialist Emma Briggs summarized University research, and her article in Beef Tips serves as the basis for this column today.

Open-bottom feeders are widely used, but this design often leads to high levels of waste. Feeders that lack sheeted bottoms, individual feeding stations, or barriers to limit access to the bale make it easy to pull hay from the bale and drop it outside the feeder. Research has shown waste levels of 16% to 21% of the original bale weight with these feeders, much of it due to hay being trampled. While open-design feeders may seem convenient, lightweight, or cost-effective upfront, the hay wasted can quickly add up, making them a less economical choice in the long run.

Feeders with sheeted bottoms offer a practical way to reduce hay waste. A sheeted bottom, extending at least 18 inches from the ground, helps contain loose hay and minimizes the amount cattle can pull out. Sheeted-bottom feeders are particularly effective during the later stages of feeding when the bale collapses. They help maintain a clean feeding area and keep loose hay within reach. Research indicates that these feeders can reduce hay waste by about 39% compared to open-design feeders, with waste levels dropping to around 12% of the original bale weight.

The most efficient feeder designs have either basket or cone inserts. These feeders incorporate advanced features that drastically reduce hay waste, such as suspending or restricting access to the top third of the bale. By keeping the hay centrally located and contained, these designs make it harder for livestock to waste hay by pulling it outside the feeder. Studies have shown that feeders like these can reduce waste by 60% to 73% compared to open designs, with reported losses as low as 2% to 5% in some cases. In these studies, these feeders also incorporate sheeted bottoms, which reduce waste as the bale collapses, and provide ample feeding space.

Another important consideration, no matter the type of feeder or for those unrolling hay, is to keep a limited amount of forage in front of the livestock. More waste is generated when the amount of feed provided is in excess to what the animals will consume in a day. The longer the animals have access, the more likely they are to use hay for bedding versus feed. Restricting access to hay for 5 to 12 hours a day can be a highly effective way to reduce waste. This practice decreases hay intake and lowers overall costs by reducing the amount needed for the winter season. Despite the reduced access, cattle can maintain acceptable performance, making this a practical option for many operations.

Laura Phillips
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

Amaryllis Blooms for the Holiday

If you are looking to brighten up your home this winter, consider growing an Amaryllis (*Hippeastrum*). These classic holiday flowers are easy to get to bloom. You can purchase the bulbs at many garden stores and supermarkets. Try to select the largest ones available that are firm and dry. If growth is visible, it should be bright green. Each bulb should produce three to four blooms on a one to two-foot stem. Larger bulbs will produce more flowers.

Amaryllises grow best in tight spaces. Select a container about one-inch larger in diameter and twice as tall as the bulb with drainage holes in the bottom. Often the bulbs will come in kits with an appropriately sized pot. Hold the bulb over the container with the roots dangling to the bottom and add a sterile potting mix. Firm the soil around the roots carefully to avoid damaging them. Leave the top third to half of the bulb visible above the soil.

Put the container in the sink and water thoroughly. When the water has stopped draining, set the plant in a warm, sunny location. As the flower opens move the plant away from direct sunlight and to a cooler location to prolong the bloom period, which can last up to one month.

When blooming is complete, the amaryllis plant is still growing. Remove the bloom stalk to prevent the bulb from expending energy on seed formation. Move the container back to the sunny window. When the danger of frost has passed, you can gradually expose the plant to the outdoors by first moving it to an area with dappled shade. Over time move it to a location with six hours of full sun each day. Apply a balanced houseplant fertilizer monthly.

Prior to the first frost bring the amaryllis back inside and place it in a dark location. Stop watering it and when the leaves dry cut them off just above the bulb. Allow the bulb to rest for eight to twelve weeks with no water. When new growth appears or when you are ready to force the bloom, relocate the bulb to a sunny window and begin watering and fertilizing regularly. From dormancy to bloom it usually takes four to six weeks. Though amaryllises only require repotting every three to four years, the time to do this is after dormancy.

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Teresa Hatfield
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

No article this week.

Cindy Williams
District Extension Agent, Food, Nutrition, Health, and Safety

Tips for a Strong Financial New Year

The holidays give you the chance to spend time with loved ones and friends, catch up on your favorite hobby or TV show and make resolutions for the New Year. While it can be overwhelming thinking about what you'll do differently next year, focusing on your financial future is a great place to start. For a strong financial new year try some of these tips:

- Check your credit report. Because it affects your ability to get a loan or job, and can help you avoid identity theft, you should check your credit report at least once a year. Reviewing it can also help you understand your credit score, a system used by banks, credit card companies, and other businesses to figure out how likely you are to pay back money you borrow.
- Manage your debt to rebuild your credit. It's never easy to face financial difficulties but ignoring your debt may cause bigger problems. Learn the things to do right away if you cannot pay your credit card bills. Recovering from a financial blow can take time.
- Protect yourself from scams. When a product or opportunity sounds too good to be true, it usually is.
- Know your mortgage rights. How to finance a home can be one of the biggest decisions you'll make? You can prepare for and manage this responsibility by knowing the rules that protect you when shopping for a mortgage and your rights once you have one.
- Don't rush big financial decisions. When choosing between financial products and services, it's easy to feel pressured into making snap decisions. For example, before applying for a new credit card, think about how you plan to use it and shop around to find the best card for you.
- Save for a new financial goal. If your financial situation changes or your income goes up or down, or priorities switch you may need to set new objectives for yourself. To reach those new goals think outside of the box, like saving in creative ways. Try setting aside part of your next tax refund to reach that goal.