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District Extension Agent, Crops & Soils

Transition Planning: Step Ten – Developing a Business Plan

It's to be expected that the steps required to complete a successful farm transition plan will become more difficult the deeper into the process we get. Step 10 – Developing a Business Plan – confirms the increasing difficulty. Has anyone ever really *enjoyed* writing a business plan?

What even *is* a business plan? Part of what makes business plan development difficult is the multitude of things it should include. The previous steps asking you to develop a vision or a mission statement or confirming the financial aspects of the business are viable should all in some way be included in a business plan as well. In short, it's *the* comprehensive farm plan.

We typically have a 'plan' somewhere. It's often in our head and changed from time to time as issues arise even if it often keeps moving in the same general direction as when we started. Still, whether you are a business looking to expand or one in transition, the business plan can become an important communication tool for sharing information with everyone from family members and employees to lenders, investors, and partners. It's a framework to graphically show the direction you're headed – and how you intend to get there. A well thought out and explained plan can satisfy investors, encourage employees, and provide stability – even in chaos. A poorly designed plan can ruin the confidence of external and internal partners alike.

Need help getting started? There are many tools available, but the University of Minnesota's *AgPlan* is one to consider. It includes a list of items to include and provides examples as well: <https://agplan.umn.edu/> (sign up required). Oklahoma State also has some excellent information (<https://extension.okstate.edu/programs/farm-management-and-finance/e-farm-management-training/developing-a-farm-business-plan/>) including a video explanation of the aforementioned *AgPlan* program. It's a great way to get started thinking about how to get the plan in motion.

Yes: the work is getting a little harder – but just two more steps to go. The business plan requires some effort, so be intentional about setting time aside to do so. It can be a chore, but it's a chore vital to the long-term stability of your ag business and of a successful transition as well.

Ross Mosteller
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

Does Preconditioning Pay When Prices are High

Having recently purchased vaccines to give preconditioning shots to calves, I'd be lying if I said I didn't think about skipping that cost this fall. All classes of cattle seemed to continue to set records on high prices as we've moved through the summer. The decreased supply could lead one to ask if preconditioning really pays or at least if buyers are willing to pay for it. A little look at history would say that year in and year out, it is the right decision to precondition calves prior to weaning.

Looking back on data from the Livestock Marketing Information Center (LMIC) comparing average feeder calf prices for preconditioned and calves without known preconditioning status over the last fifteen years, shows that the average premium paid ranges from around \$10 to over \$20 per hundred. With some of the highest premium price paid in the last high cycle in 2014. That said, this data set alone would indicate that preconditioning demands a premium price. However, basic economics says that a profitable decision requires that the revenue added by preconditioning must outweigh the cost added by preconditioning.

Preconditioning has benefits for those looking to sell their calves and to those retaining ownership. On average, preconditioning can cost the producer \$35 to \$60 dollars per head depending on the protocol implemented. This number is subject to change due to a variety of factors but gives a reasonable range for discussion purposes. Using the lower end value of \$10 per hundred weight in premium, on a 600-weight feeder calf, gives an added value of \$60 using some cowboy math. This math shows that at minimum cost recovery is possible in addition to the health and performance benefits.

Promotion of calf growth and improved health status are benefits both to the producer retaining ownership and to a buyer purchasing cattle. Researchers in Texas evaluated feedlot closeouts and found that calves that had been preconditioned for 45 days or longer had: 7.2 percent improved feed efficiency, \$29.47 per head lower medicine cost and 3.1 percent lower death loss. Oklahoma researchers found that preconditioned calves had a 22.4 and 2.9 percent lower morbidity and death loss respectively when compared to calves with little to no health management history.

The question becomes why would cattle buyers pay premiums for calves that are already costing more money to purchase? The simplest answer is risk, something that continues to grow within the industry in many ways. The whole point of preconditioning calf health programs is to prepare calves for better performance as they move through the system. That improved performance is measured in lower death loss, fewer health issues, and better gain— in other words, lower risk.

As prices move upward, the cost of death loss as well as the opportunity cost of lost performance also increases. Buyers who pay premiums for preconditioned cattle are paying to lessen that risk. And as prices move higher, the premiums that they are willing to pay for that decrease in risk will generally rise in response to the rising economic risk.

So, the answer to the question of will producers be rewarded financially for preconditioning calves would be a historical "Yes". While marketing calves off the cow may yield positive returns, particularly in the current environment of rapidly rising prices, the case for preconditioning prior to marketing is still strong. To customize a plan for your herd's needs, always consult with your herd health veterinarian. The Iowa Beef Center has a good publication that lays out a basic framework for calf health from birth to weaning in [BCH-5475 "Preconditioning of Calves"](#).

Laura Phillips
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

Prepare Your Lawn Mower for Winter

As fall hits, we start to end our mowing season. But before you completely move on from lawn mowing, there are a few mower maintenance steps before we let them sit idle in our sheds for the winter.

First, you will want to drain the tank of any gas-powered engine, or you can add a gasoline stabilizer to the tank. If gas is left in the tank untreated, it can become thick and gummy, causing issues for you in the spring.

Second, spark plugs should be replaced. Before putting the new one in, place a few drops of oil inside the hole to lubricate the cylinder. Battery terminals usually corrode during the season, so they should be cleaned with a wire-bristle brush before being removed and stored for winter. It is best to store the battery in a protected location, like a cool basement.

While you are doing this winter preparation, it is a good time to go ahead and do some other maintenance like sharpening mower blades. If there is major damage to the blades you may want to replace them. If you only see minor damage, you can either pay for them to be sharpened or sharpen them yourself.

To sharpen the mower blade, start by removing any dirt, grass, or other debris with a damp cloth and dry the blade. File or grind the blade down to remove any nicks from the cutting edge. If you have a grinding wheel, hold the blade against the wheel to match the existing angle, and run the blade across the wheel, applying light and even pressure as you go. A hand file will work similarly, just slower. With a grinding wheel, it is important to check that the blade is not overheating as you sharpen, as this could damage the blade. Check for major blade damage and replace what can't be fixed. Once it is sharpened, clean the blade with solvent or oil. Do not use water as it can cause rust.

Taking the time to care for your lawnmower now will save you time and money in the spring. If you have any questions about this, or other lawn care issues, make sure to reach out to your local extension office!

September 26, 2025

Teresa Hatfield
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

No news article this week.

September 26, 2025

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

No news article this week.

Heather Roenne
District Extension Agent, 4-H Youth Development

Happy New 4-H Year and the Joy of Volunteering

The Meadowlark Extension District is kicking off a brand-new 4-H year—and we're inviting YOU to be part of something truly special. Whether you're in Jackson, Jefferson, or Nemaha County, your time and talents can make a lasting impact on local youth. Last year, the Meadowlark District had 807 4-H members and Cloverbuds and 210 registered volunteers. 4-H is more than livestock and county fairs—it's leadership, STEM, cooking, citizenship, and hands-on learning that prepares kids for life. And none of it happens without volunteers like you.

At the heart of every successful 4-H program is a network of dedicated volunteers. These mentors, leaders, and supporters make the magic happen—from organizing events to guiding projects and cheering kids on as they grow.

Here's why volunteering in 4-H is more than just giving time—it's giving purpose:

- **Building Connections:** Volunteers form lasting relationships with youth, families, and fellow leaders. These bonds strengthen communities and create a sense of belonging. 4-H offers hands-on learning in areas like agriculture, STEM, public speaking, and community service.
- **Passing on Wisdom:** Whether you're a master gardener, a skilled woodworker, or simply passionate about helping others, 4-H gives you a platform to share your knowledge with the next generation. Volunteering brings people together across generations, backgrounds, and beliefs, creating a more connected and compassionate society.
- **Personal Growth:** Volunteering isn't just about teaching—it's about learning. Many volunteers discover new skills, gain leadership experience, and find joy in watching young people thrive.
- **Creating Impact:** Every hour spent volunteering contributes to a ripple effect of positive change. Our volunteers help shape confident, capable young leaders.

As this new 4-H year begins, clubs are setting goals, planning projects, and welcoming new members. It's a perfect time for families to get involved and for seasoned volunteers to re-engage—or for newcomers to take the leap. Whether you're helping at a 4-H club, organizing a fundraiser, or mentoring a teen, your time and energy matter. No prior experience with 4-H? No problem. We'll support you every step of the way. Contact your local Meadowlark Extension Office or visit www.meadowlark.k-state.edu/ to learn more.

If you're a parent, educator, retiree, or young adult looking to make a difference, 4-H offers a place for you. Your time, talents, and heart can help cultivate curiosity, resilience, and leadership in today's youth. Together, we can cultivate curiosity, compassion, and confidence in the next generation—right here in Northeast Kansas.