

Family Farm Decisions Everyone Can Agree On

By Kathy Daily

In the agriculture business, there are many decisions that have to be made. You mull over a decision in your mind for days, weeks, or even months. You feel you have taken everything and everyone into consideration and you finally arrive at your decision. You present the decision that you have given so much time and consideration into making to your family when "BOOM," the manure hits the fan. We've all been there. More often than not, you have probably reached the right decision, but others are having a hard time accepting it because they weren't involved. In all of the years that I have been managing people, one of the most important things that I have learned is that people don't like surprises.

Many decisions are based on emotions, attitudes, and perceptions rather than facts. In multigenerational farms, it's not uncommon for an elder family member to make all of the decisions. They have been on the farm the longest and that's the way their father and grandfather made decisions, so they are reluctant to listen to others' ideas. Their experience and knowledge are without a doubt some of the best input that your operation will receive. However, times have changed through automation, farming practices, and marketing philosophies. The majority of youth on the farm are now college educated and they are being exposed to ideas and trends that were unavailable to older family

members. As a result, the younger generation also has valuable input.

Family farm decisions are best made as a team, and the team decisions will only be successful if members are meeting on a regular basis. Set a regular meeting time, whether it's weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly, and stick to it. The meetings should be in a business setting, if possible, with an agenda. If there are materials to review, make sure there are copies for everyone. Keep notes of the meeting, including what was decided. It doesn't have to be anything elaborate, a spiral notebook is fine.

If you know a big decision is looming, don't wait until the last possible minute to bring attention to the matter. Emergency meetings rarely turnout positive. Start discussing the topic as soon as possible to give others time to mull over their thoughts and ideas rather than making a rash decision.

Wrong decisions are hard enough when times are good and the operation is profitable, but when times are lean, a bad decision made by someone else is hard to swallow. It can sometimes be the straw that destroys the operation.

Take measures today to start holding family meetings that encourage open dialogue and joint decisions.