



Taking over the Family Farm: The Great Divide

Matt Lindermeier and his young family returned to the family farm when his father was within a few years of retiring. Noll and Lydia Lindermeier built a new house about two miles away, within view of their old house, where Matt lived with his family. Noll thought he was ready to do less work, and Lydia wanted to spend time with her grandchildren.

Noll was in the habit of waking each morning about 4:30 a.m. He would look toward Matt's house to see if he was starting his day. Noll expected his son to work just as hard and as many hours as he did while building the farming business.

Matt was willing to work hard at being a successful farmer, but he believed that sun-up was an acceptable time to start each day. He and his family liked to sleep in on Sunday mornings and they thought Sundays should be reserved for necessary chores, such as feeding cattle, and for family activities.

Noll was bothered by what he called Matt's "laziness." Rather than talk with Matt, Noll just went up to the farmstead and started working by 5:30 a.m. Matt was bothered when he would see his 70-year-old father doing physical labor so early in the day. His festering feelings, in turn, caused problems within the rest of the family.

After about a year of such problems, the entire family participated in a program sponsored by their county Cooperative Extension office. The program consisted of goal setting, interpersonal skills for farm families, and financial management. In this setting, the Lindermeiers came to recognize that they never talked about goals for the business, their expectations of each other, or when and how Matt would actually take over the farm.

One of the instructors met with the two Lindermeier families to help them work through a goal-setting process as separate families and for the farm business. Through their conversations, Noll realized that Matt was not lazy. He came to

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understand that Matt needed one day a week to sleep in and have good family time. Furthermore, Noll and Matt both came to understand that Noll was struggling with the idea of relinquishing control of a business he had spent a lifetime building.

Through their goal setting and conversations, the Lindermeiers decided on the following ground rules:

- It was okay for Matt to sleep in on Sundays. Noll would not come to the main farmstead on those days.
- A plan would be developed within six months as to how Matt would take over management of the business. Another plan of transferring ownership would be developed within the year.
- A family meeting would be held once a month to discuss business issues. The meetings would be held at Noll and Lydia's house on the first Saturday of each month beginning at 8 a.m.

After a year, the Lindermeier families seemed happy. Noll was enjoying his retirement, going to the coffee shop each morning, taking his grandchildren fishing, and traveling with his wife. Noll still helped with the farming and feeding whenever Matt needed him.

Matt was able to sleep in on Sundays. He was following the plans developed for taking over the farming business and had become more comfortable seeking his father's advice. The monthly business meetings were usually short, but everyone believed they were a good time to talk about specific, and sometimes sensitive, issues.