

Four Tips for Communicating with Family About Your Farm Legacy

1. *Communicate Early and Often*

- * **Start as early as possible** and **keep it up** through the years. Your circumstances will change, and so may the decisions you make on your journey to transfer the farm.
- * Once you make significant decisions, you may even need to **communicate them repeatedly**. Gilmore City farmer Linda Lynch reports her children haven't always remembered what she and husband Bob have told them about their farm transfer plans – after all, they are at a different place in their lives.
- * Jane Juchems, who farms with husband Rick near Plainfield has the goal of **no surprises** for the family's farm transfer situation: "Our kids will never get a phone call where we say, 'we sold the farm today.' We will always talk to them about it beforehand."



— Jane and Rick Juchems

2. *Walk a Mile in Their Shoes*

- * **Start by listening** – fully listening – without thinking about what you will say next. Can you listen with an open and soft heart before moving forward to state your own position?
- * **Emotions** about the future of farms **run deep**, and hurts and disappointments often go back to childhood.
- * Do those of us non-farming siblings truly listen about the commitment of farmers like Ron and Dot Dunphy, who have spent a lifetime of blood, sweat and tears improving their own farm? Can those of us who groomed one child for farming **truly listen** to the hurt that might be there for the non-farming heirs?



— Ron and Dot Dunphy

3. *Use the Best Communication Tool for the Job*

- * Many experts recommend **face-to-face family meetings**. If you can all get together and have productive meetings, like the James family, PFI members from Durango, Colorado, do, that is wonderful.
- * Other technologies – **emails, letters, phone calls** – **might work as well**. Would it be easier to share what matters most to you through a letter? Use email to give people time to think and craft responses? The younger generation communicates in different ways than the older generation does – we will all have to adapt.
- * **All important decisions should be documented** and shared, if appropriate, as our hearing and memories are not always sound.



— James family

4. *Get Outside Help*

- * Farm transfer is tricky. Often times it is better to have **an independent facilitator** for family meetings or discussions, and to help you work through farm transfer.
- * Martha Skillman is a PFI Farmland Owner Award winner who inherited farmland near Knoxville with her sisters. She sought that help when the sisters set out to decide on the future of their farmland, which includes selling to the James and Julie Petersen family. The Shivers sisters used a social worker for 14 years to **help them negotiate their differences**. Says Martha: "With a group of heirs, differences appear even if their goals are the same. It's to our credit that we got professional help."



— Charlotte Shivers and Martha Skillman