

Farmland Choices Key to Prosperity

Tom and Irene Frantzen

Editorial published in the *Cedar Rapids Gazette* (June 16, 2014)

There is a tremendous farmland transition about to take place.

Fifty-six percent of Iowa farmland is owned by people over the age of 65, according to Farmland Ownership and Tenure Report, a report by Mike Duffy from Iowa State University. Mike also reports that 30 percent of Iowa farmland is owned by those more than 75 years old.

This coming land transition concerns us greatly. Farmers who rent land (a majority of us) are in a precarious position: When their landlords pass, many heirs will want to cash out quickly, leaving farmers struggling or unable to find the financing to purchase land.

The situation is equally severe for those who farm with their families. Many farmer landowners plan to divide their land equally among offspring. Their farming offspring may not be able to buy out the other heirs who want to sell the farmland to “cash in” on their inheritance.

Practical Farmers has commissioned a play, to be premiered July 12th, to call attention to the many issues surrounding farmland transfer. The play presents a number of different ways farmland owners have planned for – or failed to plan for – farmland transition.

A few years back, we began to think about the future of our Chickasaw County farm. We did some soul-searching, a lot of research and had even more conversations, and came up with a goal for the future of that farm: ... *long-term protection for a true Iowa family farm that has significant conservation features blended into a working landscape.*

With that goal established, we were able to decide what would happen with the farm when we are gone. We communicated all of this with our three children, one of whom farms with us. We are clear that to divide up this farm and sell its assets off to the highest bidder is in complete conflict with our goals. Our children understand this.

Our Frantzen Farm has a story that started 100 years ago. Our farm is profitable, and we provide sustainable employment. It is a good place to work and an important part of a rural community. One hundred years ago, it was carved out of a chunk of tallgrass prairie, and it has been changed enormously in many different ways since.

We hope farmland owners around the country will join us in paying attention to the results of their farmland transfer decisions. Will that land transfer result in a farm viable enough to help a family make a living? Will it help repopulate rural areas with people, plants and animals? Or will it lead to further land consolidation and decimated towns and natural communities?

Farmland transfer is about putting your values into place, and Practical Farmers is stepping up that conversation through this play, “Map of My Kingdom.” As the play’s character says, many farmers “don’t talk much about money or anything else And land transition takes talk – a lot of talk.”

Fellow farmland owners, please join us. Let’s start talking.

