

NSW DPI

• FOR RURAL WOMEN & THEIR FAMILIES •

The Country Web

AT THE CROSSROADS

NUMBER 46 AUTUMN 2008 FREE NEWSLETTER



2008 RIRDC NSW Rural Women's Award
winner Tracey Knowland from Brooklet



Let's make it happen – together

Rural Women's Network

DECISION MAKING ■ SUCCESSION ■ CLIMATE CHANGE ■ FOOD MILES

THE COUNTRY WEB

The Country Web is produced by NSW Department of Primary Industries Rural Women's Network (RWN) and is distributed free, three times a year. For more about RWN see page 5.

EDITING/DESKTOP PUBLISHING

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CONTRIBUTIONS

Letters, stories, poems and photographs from rural women and their families are always welcome.

FREE MAILING LIST

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ADVERTISING

14 500 Country Webs are produced each edition. We welcome advertisements and offer very competitive rates. Contact RWN for more information. Sponsorship and insert options are also available.

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COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS

See page 23 & 29 for competitions.

1. Information on how to enter and prize details form part of the Terms & Conditions. By entering the competition, entrants accept these Terms & Conditions. 2. To enter, you must provide your full name and postal details, and in 25 words or less answer the competition question. 3. Entries must be posted to the stated address by the stated date. 4. This competition is a game of skill. The best answer as judged by the RWN will win. The judges' decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. Prizes cannot be transferred or redeemed for cash. The winner will be notified by mail within 14 days from the judging date.

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*By Sally Green,
NSW Minister for
Primary Industries
representative,
RWN State Advisory
Committee*

People, in particular women, encounter many crossroads in their lives. Whether it be from changing homes, partners, loss of a loved one, becoming parents, carers, grandparents, retirement and then of course the new buzz word 'climate change' where we must learn to cope with new weather patterns, economic and social circumstances. This edition features articles that will assist you in coping with some of these crossroads.

An interesting article on *Helping kids make smart choices* by Michael Grose, explains that decision-making requires practice... something we as adults do every day without batting an eyelid! Children need guidance in formative years and hopefully they will learn to make informed choices when the time comes for really important decisions later in life. Whether it be choosing the food they eat, the music they listen to, or the sport they play, each will make decisions and face the consequences of these.

Employing overseas workers is an option when labour is short or family members retire. The article on this provides vital information for employers. Not having the correct guidelines can be a disaster and can cause some serious problems.

Succession planning is a very complex issue that requires expert assistance and is not easy to do. It is essential for the future of farming families and has to be continually reviewed. In this article advice is given on what needs to be identified and what decisions need to be made. There is also an article on simple steps to take if you are considering leaving the farm and how to go about managing change.

Managing climate change or global warming for the future and dealing with possible economic and lifestyle changes are challenges which we all face. This article gives some tips on where to look for solutions.

I had the pleasure of attending the RIRDC Award Dinner at Parliament House. The standard of the two finalists was excellent. Congratulations to the winner Tracey Knowland from Brooklet, who will attend the 2008 National Nursery and Garden Industry National Conference and undertake a study tour of Victoria's

largest wholesale production nurseries to look at sustainable growing methods. Tracey's business is working in partnership with Trees Impact Pty Ltd to grow Hills Weeping Fig for the future replacement of existing fig trees in Hyde Park, from cuttings taken from historic trees in selected parklands within the city of Sydney.

Enjoy this edition of The Country Web and I'm sure you will find many interesting articles to savour over a cup of coffee.

CROSSROADS

The significance of crossroads
Be it a turning point in life
A time filled with indecisions
Where problems can run rife
Thoughts turn in all directions
Things not easy to resolve
If only life could be more simple
And the crossroads more controlled
But life has many turnings
Change appears round every bend
As strife at the crossroads threatens
Here is hoping for a peaceful end.

JEAN OPPERMAN, PASCOE VALE

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MAY 2008

2-4, *TOCAL* Total Field Days

Visit the RWN stand at the Field Days. More information: www.tocalfielddays.com

24-25, *CONDOBOLIN* SOFT course*

27, *CANBERRA* 2008 RIRDC Rural Woman of the Year

Announcement of the national winner at a Celebratory Dinner at Parliament House

JUNE 2008

3-4, *FORBES* SOFT course*

24-25, *BINGARA* SOFT course*

* Shaping Our Futures Together (SOFT) is a 2-day interactive self development workshop run by the Rural Women's Network (RWN) to upskill women living in rural communities. For more details about the course, see the RWN website.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The theme for the next edition of The Country Web is 'Youth'.

If you have stories, poems, pictures or information of interest, we would love to hear from you.

We'd also like to hear your words of wisdom for today's youth and advice you were given as a young person that has proved useful in your life.

Contributions are required by 30 May 2008 for publication in August 2008.

Send your stories to:

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Locked Bag 21, Orange NSW 2800
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ACCEPTING LIFE'S CHALLENGES

There are many crossroads in life. My health took me through very significant crossroads.

In 1999 I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I quickly underwent treatment and life became normal again. I continued running my farm and organizing my two children (my husband had been killed in a car accident when the children were young).

Five years later, the same diagnosis. This time the offending breast was removed. Surely they must have it all this time. I went back to my farm.

In 2006, I sold the farm and began refurbishing houses. Last year I became aware of a growth at the base of my neck. Many scans and a biopsy revealed the return of breast cancer. At this point I felt that I had reached a critical crossroads.

Which direction to take? Oncology offered chemotherapy and other drugs. In the opposite direction lay natural therapies.

At times I felt sad that my children, aged 20 and 22, might have to continue without a mother and father but I had brought them up to be independent and resourceful and this helped my decision making.

I really only had myself to consider, it was my life and my decision. I selected and underwent treatment and I felt and looked great but my energy levels were low. I had to accept my new physical state and be prepared to take it easy without feeling guilty.

Prior to Christmas my doctor ordered new blood tests and these revealed that the cancer markers had made a dramatic reduction. For my family this was the best Christmas present.

Life is a challenge; it is how we accept that challenge that denotes our life's enjoyment. I have now retired and I love writing that on forms. I now have time to join the girls for coffee, catch a movie or

simply chat over the front fence. I still get up early and walk my dog off-lead before the ranger is out of bed. I recently retrieved a 22 year old tapestry from the cupboard and it is nearly finished. I love my new life, its just bad luck that I had to get cancer to make me appreciate it.

An extract from a letter sent by Kerry Russell, Griffith

CONFRONTING DILEMMAS

The meaning of this phrase 'at the crossroads' has changed a lot over the centuries. Once, a person found to be practising evil, such as witchcraft, was hung at the crossroads on the fringes of town, symbolising expulsion from society and acting as a warning to travellers coming into town that there would be no toleration of wrong doing.

Something of this historic fear remains in the expression even today and causes a frisson of aversion when faced with serious dilemmas. Now the phrase 'at the crossroads' means a dilemma is to be confronted upon which one's life or the quality of one's future life may depend.

Sometimes a feeling of paralysis descends. Paralysis prevents analysis. It is important to realise that paralysis results from shock. When the shock wears off, given time and reflection, the decision-making process can then begin.

When I was diagnosed with terminal cancer I didn't experience shock at the time. I had not seen the suffering that cancer causes so I reacted by saying: 'I'll beat it.' In my case the decision was intuitively fast. Perhaps my response would have been very different if I'd known what lay ahead – but isn't that true of most decisions we make?

After I overcame stage four cancer, my GP said he was impressed by the way I took responsibility for myself. He remarked that many of his patients threw in the towel when

they were diagnosed with cancer.

This caused me to ask myself 'Why did I act this way at this particular crossroad?' At other times I have not been so decisive. Perhaps the threat to one's life, when one holds it dear, is highly mobilising?

My crossroads helped me realise what self esteem is. It is not ego, arrogance or non-altruism. It is doing all we can, the best we can, and learning from life leading us to self correction and self development. It seemed as if all the events of my life led to and contributed to my instant decision to fight for my life at the crossroads.

In other situations, there is a strong reason to tarry at the crossroads until one is sure of a decision. Having issues unexamined, being ruled by emotions alone or being afraid of one's incapacities or life circumstances, is not a good basis on which to make a decision. Each person must take whatever time they need. When the issue has matured in the mind the decision can be made.

Finally, don't blame others for decisions you make. It is too late for blame after the event anyway. Never release control over your destiny to another. Being master of oneself can be learned. We cannot control others. We cannot control external events. We can control our reactions to such issues. This will provided a sound basis for a good decision.

An extract from a letter sent by Helen Bell, Berkeley

CONTACTS AND NETWORKS

I happened by a copy of *The Country Web* today and started flipping through it. I just wanted to pass on how impressed I was with the range of really useful and relevant information it communicates. It's not just a chatty magazine but full of motivating, inspiring and practical articles and a vector for so many other services for people to link into. This is truly

a substantial publication and more people should know about it. I can only imagine the wealth of contacts and networks you've established through the years while compiling this magazine and the effects on people's lives. Congratulations!

Anonymous

COMPETITION WINNERS COUNTRY WEB NO.45

Bad hair days

J Magner, Tenterfield
L Hayden, Trangie
M Hollingworth, Deepwater

Girlstuff

L Forrester, Griffith

I carried the teapot

D Harley, Merimbula

Pamper pack

G Brown, Lower Belford

Resilience

L Campbell, Dubbo
M Hollingworth, Deepwater
D Boughton, Moree
D Harley, Merimbula
J Duddle, Milvale

St Judes

G Teale- McEvoy,
Coonabarabran
G White, Orange
S Mansell, Bourke
U Elliot, Dubbo

West: people and places

R Daley, Berridale



from Sonia's desk



The RWN team: Sonia Muir (Coordinator), Danielle Goolagong (Project Officer) and Wendy Bortolazzo (Assistant Coordinator).

The Rural Women's Network (RWN) is a statewide government program within NSW Department of Primary Industries and is based at Orange. RWN works in partnership with individuals and agencies to share information and promote action on rural women's issues. The RWN:

- provides information and referrals;
- supports the development of local initiatives;
- works with rural women and families to identify and bring attention to priority issues;
- develops projects with other agencies to address needs;
- provides a medium for networking and information sharing;
- promotes the profile of rural women;
- provides a two-way link between government and rural women; and
- provides policy advice.

Contact information

Phone: 02 6391 3620

Email:

rural.women@dpi.nsw.gov.au

Some years ago my husband and I were on a driving holiday in Cuba. With very little spending on infrastructure over the past 50 years, Cuban roads are in disrepair and a constant challenge. Most streets, and even major highways, have no signposts. Upon reaching crossroads we just had to guess the correct direction. After many extra long diversions we eventually cracked the 'Cuban code' and began to pick up the ubiquitous locals fringing the roadsides looking for lifts. The plan was simple. Using local knowledge and our meagre Spanish we found the right roads and got to our daily destinations without the previous lengthy detours.

This little anecdote can be a metaphor for dealing with some of the crossroads of life. Sometimes it can be good to float along aimlessly, especially when on holidays. But ultimately we probably need to get where we want to be. Asking for help along the way is a very good strategy. Other people can give us ideas and help to point us in the right direction. We just need the courage to ask.

We cross little roads every day. Making decisions are a part of daily life... will I go for a walk this evening? Will I have bacon and eggs or fruit for breakfast? Will I sit with a quiet cup of tea and nurture myself before I tackle the day? We are choosing how to move forward and perhaps considering the

consequences of those actions. Sometimes these actions will affect others but often they are just about us. If I don't go for my walk I will become unfit. If I eat bacon every day my cholesterol will go up and if I don't take time out for myself I will fall in a heap and be unbearable to live with. Crossroads are part of life. The sooner we manage the small decisions and gain some confidence we will be better equipped to manage those inevitable bigger crossroads ahead.

You are now at a crossroads. This is your opportunity to make the most important decision you will ever make. Forget your past. Who are you now? Who have you decided you really are now? Don't think about who you have been. Who are you now? Who have you decided to become? Make this decision consciously. Make it carefully. Make it powerfully.

Anthony Robbins

I love this quote. Anthony challenges us to stop and take time out to create a virtual crossroad. He urges us to

move out of the past and look forward thinking about who we are and where we'd like to be.

Sometimes when facing a crossroad we can spend too much time agonising over making the 'right' decision and fearing a 'wrong' choice. Once a decision is made it is beneficial to move on in a positive way and not spend time pondering other possibilities which can lead us into a negative cycle of doubt or guilt and erode our self-belief.

The RWN's *Shaping Our Futures Together* (SOFT) courses focus on helping women to build confidence and think about changes they may like to make in their lives. The workshop also provides tools to work through the process of setting goals and putting personal action plans into gear. The list of upcoming SOFT workshops is on page 3. We are also working with the Drought Support Workers to pilot a similar workshop for men so watch this space for more information on how this goes.

This edition of *The Country Web* aims to get us thinking about the many types of crossroads we may face throughout our life. Tackling these challenges is not something to fear. We can decide how we want our life to be. I look forward to crossing roads with many readers during 2008.

RWN COORDINATOR

Visit the Rural Women's Network internet site at www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/rwn



Simple first steps to managing change

By Sonia Muir, Coordinator, Rural Women's Network, NSW Department of Primary Industries

Change is ongoing and will keep happening throughout your life so you have to learn to deal with it.

Change may be both positive and negative; under your control or out of your control. Examples include new government legislation, staying or moving to another area, leaving the farm or changing enterprises, getting married or living together, reviving or leaving a relationship, changing career paths, having a child. It all boils down to choosing a way forward.

It is natural for you to feel uncomfortable at times of uncertainty when you face a crossroad and tough decisions have to be made.

When we are threatened by changes, we often look for someone or something to blame, particularly if the causes of our circumstances are imposed on us. It is important you accept when factors causing change are beyond your control, and move on.

It is also easy to fall into the trap of self-blame or focus your anger on the actions of others, but if you want to move forward and successfully take control, you must learn to manage change and make decisions or the change will manage you, or worse still others will make decisions for you. Isolation, secrecy and fear of being judged can be major barriers to making these decisions or seeking help.

Initially you have two choices in managing change: either you act, or you don't act.

Doing something may be difficult, but think – what would happen if you did nothing?

By clarifying the issues, talking it through with those affected by the change and seeking help you will get a clear picture of the options available. Remember that generally change is easier to manage if there are supportive relationships with everyone involved.

HOW TO TAKE THE FIRST STEPS

Here are some ideas to get you started on the decision-making process. When you have ticked all the boxes you are well on your way to managing change!

- Have you focused on what you can change?
- Have you got as much information as you can to create a clear picture of what the issues are and who is involved?
- Have you discussed the issues with everyone involved (your partner, your family – including the children, trusted friends or professionals) to find out what they think or how they feel?
- Have you taken on board their comments and established some options?
- Have you considered the financial health, environmental, personal, family, relationship and happiness aspects of these options?
- Have you discussed these options again with everyone involved, and agreed on some of these to explore further? (Have a reward planned for the end of this discussion, for example going out for dinner.)
- Have you sought out those who have professional expertise in the various aspects of the options you are considering?
- Have you developed an option and presented it to everyone involved and listed any 'for and against' issues surrounding the decision?
- Have you developed a clear decision which everyone understands and agrees to follow through? If not, are you prepared to carry the burden alone and have you thought about the consequences of this? ■

SOME HELPFUL RESOURCES

■ **Australian Government Fishers and Farmers Assistance Line** provides advice on a range of programs and services offered by Centrelink.

Phone: 1800 050 585

■ **Country Care Link (CCL)** is a confidential service providing legal assistance and counselling. For country people travelling to Sydney, CCL can arrange a volunteer to meet them and provide transport, make hospital visits and help find short-term accommodation.

Phone: 1800 806 160

■ **Lifeline** provides a free 24 hour confidential telephone counselling service 7 days a week.

Phone: 13 11 14.

■ **Challenge of Change** is a one hour DVD/video for rural families in business to help manage change.

Phone: 07 41 59 6240

Website: www.highresolutions.com.au

In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity

Albert Einstein



Making decisions: stop, look, listen

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When it comes to decision time, apply the rules of the road. Unfortunately, you can't go in all directions at once and you need to decide which road to take. As you approach these key junctures, you need to pay more attention, heeding oncoming traffic, and evaluating the need for a change in direction. Fail to take these measures into consideration and you may end up making a wrong turn, or worse, end up in an accident.

So it is with life. Ignore the intersections in your personal or professional world, and you risk failure and wreckage. Just as you must adhere to the rules of the road when you're behind the wheel, so too must you use the same principles as you reach key decision points in your life.

■ **Use a map.** Your personal mission statement, like a good map, will set the direction of your journey. Consult it often. You need to know where you are headed or any road will take you there.

■ **Read the signs.** Highway signs warn you of approaching intersections and what's coming up ahead so that you can be prepared. Don't ignore them. It is normal to be apprehensive as you come to these crossroads. Don't let that apprehension freeze you, but let it strengthen you for the decisions that need to be made and the actions that follow. Make sure that you take advantage of all the resources you have to make the most informed decision. Look for insights beyond your specific industry, consult others, read – anything that will help you be more prepared.

■ **Look at the dash.** The gauges in your car warn you if you're about to run into trouble. Are you going too fast? Do you have enough fuel? Are you running too hot? Are you in the right gear? In your daily travels, don't forget to make sure you and your vehicle are in top working order. You can't make good decisions or take advantage of all the opportunities if your car is running out of petrol, or if it needs maintenance. Likewise, if you're tired and run down and you've ignored your family and friends and failed to invest in the intellectual, the emotional, and health aspects of your life, you may quickly find yourself on the road to ruin. And as you approach an intersection, don't forget to use your turn signals; in other words, communicate.

■ **Stop.** Negotiating a crossroad means complete and total focus. This is not the time to be looking back and wondering about what might have been. Now is the time to pay full attention, to look squarely ahead at what is to come. Slow down, and even stop, to make sure you're making the right turns and moving toward your destination. It's too easy to get so wrapped up in the busy-ness of business that you keep it in cruise control and blow through the intersections. In the haste to get there, you miss critical junctures. You want to keep moving, to plough through projects, to finish your 'to-do' list. Stopping can keep you from going in the wrong direction, expending and wasting an unusual amount of energy heading off in an unproductive direction.

■ **Look.** You need to have a clear vision of what lies ahead so you can make a better decision on which route to take. Often just a small shift in perspective changes how you react to a situation or condition and affects the way you approach the intersection. Consider the story of the small town that rested on the border between Canada and the United States. Each country claimed the town as its territory. Finally the matter was brought to court, and the judge decided in favour of the United States. At the end of the trial, as people left the courtroom, an old man was overheard commenting, 'Oh, thank goodness. I just don't think I could have survived another one of those cold Canadian winters!'

■ **Listen.** Your hearing will improve if you stop and look around. You need to be still and listen. What do you hear at this intersection about what's going on in your life and the lives of those around you? As you evaluate the pros and cons of each option, determine which direction matches your resources. Then make the decision.

■ **Shift into gear.** By all means, make a decision. Do something. You run risk of being bombarded from many directions if you stand indecisive at a crossroads on the road or in your career. Like it or not, decisions have to be made. Even refusing to decide is a decision. It's decision by default, but a decision that nevertheless affects the road you are traveling. Indecisiveness often leads to disappointment, despair, and lethargy when people believe they have given up control of life to the forces that affect their lives. Rather than being in control, they are being controlled by the events that surround them.

■ **Don't look back.** Indecisiveness may continue after a decision is made. Too much time and energy can be wasted speculating on whether the decision was the right one. All of us have wondered about 'The Road Not Taken.' You have speculated about how life would have turned out differently if you had taken the other road. If you make a wrong turn, adjust your course and get back on track at the earliest opportunity. When an archer misses the mark, he turns and looks for the fault within himself. Failure to hit the bullseye is never the fault of the target. To improve your aim – improve yourself.

■ **Stay focused.** After you negotiate an intersection, you breathe a sigh of relief. But always realise another one awaits us. Some are closer together than others. You make it through some intersections almost without thinking. Others are extremely difficult. Whatever the degree of difficulty, follow the rules of the road.

Whether major or minor, points of decision are life's intersections. Do not approach them reluctantly or with hesitation. To do so is to be doomed. A reluctance to commit at crucial moments may result in putting things off too long and risk never doing them. Some opportunities come and, if you fail to take advantage of them, they may never come again. Follow the blacksmith's advice, 'Strike while the iron is hot.' That is the only way you can choose your direction and shape your life. ■

Simple first steps if you are considering leaving the farm

By Sonia Muir, Coordinator, Rural Women's Network, NSW Department of Primary Industries

Things beyond your control may have contributed to this decision.

While there are a number of responses farmers can make to manage change, perhaps the most traumatic is leaving the farm, which will most likely involve a sense of loss, making grieving necessary. How you react to this loss will depend on many things.

It is important to work through feelings as they are likely to get in the way of sound decision making and clear thinking. These emotional reactions can also change over time. You and members of your family may feel sad, angry, frightened, relieved or even guilty. This is all normal.

Even though you and your family are going through the same changes, be aware that individuals will cope in different ways because everyone has different levels of life experience and coping thresholds. It is very important that you involve everybody affected by major decisions such as leaving the farm, so their ideas and feelings can also be considered.

Speaking with other professionals can also help.

A USEFUL CHECKLIST BEFORE MAKING ANY MAJOR DECISIONS

- Have you discussed the issues and options with everyone involved (including the children) to find out what they think or feel?
- Have you agreed on some options to explore further?
- Have you considered the financial, health, environmental, personal, family, relationship and happiness aspects of these options?
- Have you sought out professionals who have expertise concerning the options you are considering?
- Have you developed a clear decision which everyone understands and agrees to follow through? If not, are you prepared to carry the burden alone?

If you do decide to leave the farm it can be useful to spend some time in favourite places on the farm, either alone, or as a family and say 'goodbye'. Perhaps take photographs of special places to later prompt happy memories.

Remember that things beyond your control may have contributed to thinking about this decision, so you are not to blame and you need to give yourself time to accept any changes.

FORMAL RECOGNITION OF YOUR SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

For people wanting to explore off-farm work opportunities, or perhaps study or retrain through TAFE, a college or university, it is important to know about Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) or Recognition of Current Competencies (RCC). RPL and RCC mean you don't have to go through the process of learning things a second time, and you can get credit for what you already know. You may have been in charge of the books and the budgeting in your family farm business, yet have no formal business management qualifications; or you may have maintained all the farm machinery but you don't have formal qualifications or a certificate. By getting these skills recognised you can expand your future career and employment options.

Going through RPL and RCC is a simple process to recognise the skills and knowledge you have gained in one or more of the following:

- formal study through education or training;
- informal study for fun or personal interest;
- life experience;
- work experience;
- company-based training;
- industry-based training.

To gain RPL or RCC you usually have to pay an assessment fee or administration charge and provide evidence of knowledge and skills, usually by completing some paperwork. It may also involve attending an interview. Remember that you will probably have lots of skills gained both on and off farm over the years which can be recognised and used in other areas, so seek advice about RPL and RCC and collect information about the job or course you would like to do. ■

SOME HELPFUL RESOURCES

- **Myfuture** provides a range of information on career options, education and training, work, contacts, funding and more.
Website: www.myfuture.edu.au
- **TAFE NSW**. Phone: 13 16 01
Website: www.tafensw.edu.au
- **Community Colleges** offer over 12 000 courses throughout Australia.
Website: www.course.com.au
- **Australian Association of Career Counsellors**. For counsellors in your area phone 1800 222 390.
Website: www.aacc.org.au
- **Rural financial counsellors** assist farmers and small rural businesses seeking confidential, free, independent financial advice and information.
Website: www.ruralcounselling.org.au



SUCCESSION: Sustaining families and farms

The following information is from a free booklet by Judy Wilkinson and Lyn Sykes, funded by the GRDC. The booklet contains information from various advisers' perspectives, checklists and case studies to depict different family structures and situations. The booklet is available at: www.grdc.com.au under 'Publications'

Succession planning is often a complex issue for farm businesses. There is a need to plan, a need for expert assistance and it is important to keep family relationships intact while working through the business decisions.

Developing a succession plan that meets the expectations of all involved is not easy. Succession planning is like any other plan: the earlier you start, the more options you will have.

The most important principles involved in a succession plan are:

- to work out what the exiting generation wants to do – where they'll live and what they'll do in retirement – if succession is an option
- to identify the needs and aspirations of each family member in each generation
- to build, maintain, and if necessary, repair relationships between family members
- to manage expectations amongst family members
- to look at transferring management and control of the farm over time
- to sort out how to transfer ownership of the farm
- to consider what agreement there should be for the incoming generation and what provision to make for the non-farming children.

To start planning now, visualise your future as you would like it to be.

For the older generation, some questions to ask are:

- When do you want to retire and what do you think you will need to live on?
- When do you want to hand over management of the farm?
- When do you want to hand over ownership of the farm?

For the younger generation, it is important to consider if farming is what you really want to do and can the farm cater for expected expenses such as school fees, lifestyle, holidays, etc?

The people involved need to agree on a pathway to establish the broad direction, understand the desired direction of each family member, collect information and develop a plan.

A lot of time is spent worrying about legal structures. Many people get confused when they look at the combination of trust, partnership, company and sole trader models which may be used.

Once the size of the task is understood then the structures and the number and nature of entities required is reasonably easy to identify.

A will is not a succession plan. Consideration must also be given to ownership of the assets and also the management and control of the business. This should include:

- a consideration of the current business structure and the alternatives to include the younger generation
- remuneration of those who 'work' in the business
- regular business meetings
- transfer of land (in stages if necessary) taking into account needs such as housing.

There are as many solutions to succession planning as there are farming families. Communication is the key.

No changes should be made to ownership or structure without accounting, taxation and legal advice.

Remember to review, and review again. Nothing stays the same. Review your plan against changes in your life. ■

Other resources

RURAL SUCCESSION PLANNING BOOKLET

Another free booklet that addresses: what's involved in a succession plan, communication and planning, assets and priorities, fairness and processes.

A copy can be ordered at: www.anderssens.com.au/news.html or by calling 07 3234 3100

LET'S TALK

An initiative of the Rural Women's Network, the videos below can be ordered by phoning 1800 025 520. Cost \$27.

■ HANDING ON THE FARM

Handing on the Farm, developed as a home study program, looks at the importance of farm succession planning and its benefits. It looks at farm production, financial security, relationships and individual wellbeing as a direct result of farm succession planning.

■ COMMUNICATION FOR FARM FAMILIES

Good quality communication is vital for smooth business and personal relationships.

This video demonstrates various aspects of the communication process in order to develop and strengthen communication networks. It covers self-esteem; meaningful, sociable and trivial levels of communication; mediation; and how to conduct a family meeting.

Employing overseas workers explained

By Fiona Clarke, Immigration Liaison, National Farmers' Federation

As family members move off the land, farmers may find they are looking for skilled labour from a relatively small local labour market. Australia's immigration program offers a range of temporary and permanent visa options to help farmers meet skills and labour needs.

For farmers new to the idea of sponsoring overseas workers, expert guidance can be found through a dedicated immigration liaison contact. Fiona Clarke is seconded from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) to the National Farmers' Federation to help farmers fill positions through skilled migration.

The secondment recognises that farmers operate with specific needs and often need the right kind of labour at key times.

Fiona says agricultural producers may need help to identify suitable visas and map out future pathways for overseas workers. Visa options will vary according to the type and the duration of the work.

'I can answer questions and provide information on how to find the right forms and prepare applications,' she says.

'Many farmers want to know about their obligations, the costs involved, what regional concessions exist and how they can make the process as fast as possible.'

Hosted by the NSW Farmers Association, Fiona has travelled around Australia meeting individual farmers and presenting seminars free of charge to farming groups and organisations. Since July 2007, Fiona has provided phone and email support for hundreds of enquiries about visa types and requirements.

DIAC also has a number of state and territory based Regional Outreach Officers who are able to provide information and help to farmers in regional areas.

EXPOS TO FIND SKILLED WORKERS

One of the most common questions Fiona receives is how farmers can find overseas labour. In addition to the online Harvest Labour Information Service (www.jobsearch.gov.au/harvesttrail) for seasonal workers, DIAC hosts Australia Needs Skills expos to provide a way for farmers to find skilled people.

The expos are held both in Australia and overseas. In September 2007, nearly 8000 people attended the Sydney expo looking for employment opportunities and visa information.

A London expo was held on 15–16 March 2008.

SEASONAL WORK

The Working Holiday visa is an important source of seasonal workers for Australian farmers. In 2006–07, more than 134 000 Working Holiday visas were granted, including second Working Holiday visas.

This visa is currently available to passport holders from Belgium, Canada, the Republic of Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hong Kong SAR, the Republic of Ireland, Italy, Japan,

Republic of Korea, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Taiwan and the United Kingdom.

In February 2008, the Minister for Immigration announced that negotiations were under way with other countries to expand the Working Holiday program.

Working Holiday visa holders who complete three months work with a primary producer in a regional area are eligible to apply for a second Working Holiday visa.

On 31 October 2007, a new agreement allowing US nationals to visit, travel and work in Australia came into effect. Australia is the first country with which the USA has entered into a Work and Holiday agreement.

The Work and Holiday visa allows a stay of up to 12 months and work with any one employer for up to six months. It is estimated that the number of applications from US citizens for this visa will grow to 30 000 over four years.

International students are also entitled to work for up to 20 hours a week during term and unrestricted hours while on holidays.

EMPLOYER SPONSORED

Once a farmer has found a worker with the right skills, sponsorship is often the next step. The farmer will need to be approved as a sponsor and

the position will need to be approved as a skilled position. The final step is for the worker to apply for a visa.

Employer-sponsored visas include the Temporary Long Stay Business visa, available for three months to four years, and the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme, which is a permanent visa.

Farmers may choose to sponsor on a temporary visa initially as these are generally faster to process than permanent visas. They may then consider sponsoring for permanent residence at any time, as long as the worker has at least diploma level skills.

INDEPENDENT

International students may apply for permanent residence without an employer to sponsor them if they meet a points test. More information is available at: www.immi.gov.au/skilled/general-skilled-migration/visa-options.htm

Business Skills visas allow experienced business people from overseas to buy into or set up farming businesses in Australia. Overseas farmers are eligible once they have achieved prescribed levels of ownership, turnover, employment and investment.

State and territory governments may offer business people support in applying for these visas under the Business Development Sponsorship.