

Success starts with our children



Family Business

By GREG WOLF

IN most of production agriculture, we have reached a time where far fewer of our children are expected to someday enter into the management and ownership of an operation. We have seen the graying of the farm population and relatively fewer numbers of young people coming back into rural communities and farm production.

However, we can be thankful that some do want to come back; some can, some will and some must! It is worth thinking about our children and grandchildren — whatever their ages might be — in light of what we can do to cultivate their potential for future success.

Interest them

Generating interest from young people speaks of the attitude and passion we exhibit regarding our profession in agriculture. It includes showing enjoyment and thankfulness for what is most meaningful to us in rural life, in spite of its limitations and even hardships. Impressions are made in youth that are lasting, based on whether a dad, mom or grandparent genuinely enjoy and ex-



Key Points

- Parents must cultivate children's desire to return to the farm.
- Interest, include and involve youth who express that desire.
- Eventually, children will begin to prepare themselves for success.

perience satisfaction in what they do.

Our attitude also is manifested in our relationships with others. Conveying to our children an awareness of the value that many others are contributing to the success of our operation — from family

members to employees to lenders to consumers — will influence their own attitudes and interests in being a part of what we have and do.

Include them

In addition to showing our interest positively to our children, it is important to include them in our farm life. I have many fond and varied memories of childhood farm life.

Along with memory making, however, there is an opportunity in childhood to begin absorbing the lessons of production, business and life. There

may be “more caught than taught” with children, but both can happen when they are regularly included in the routines of farm life. Although it requires humility and patience to do so, it is wise to include them not just in the tasks of production, but also in some of the business and decision-making processes, whenever their ages and interests make it appropriate to do so.

Involve them

What begins as inclusion should normally grow into involvement when children are given — and take — responsibility in a manner that develops their capabilities. Every situation is different, but all young people need to experience growing into greater responsibilities in an environment of support, supervision and safety, so they can make mistakes along the way, learning consequences without condemnation.

This is vitally important. It is through gradually growing involvement that youth begin to feel a satisfying sense of the value of their contribution, and they begin to prepare themselves for the process of succession that must take place if the operation is to succeed in future generations. Succession of management and ownership is an ongoing process, often beginning with children.

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