

In 2016, it was reported that nationwide 80% of all owner-operated land was owned by individuals who were 55 years or older (Bigelow et al., 2016). This staggering statistic, coupled with the reported average age of producers in Utah being 58.7 years old, explains the significant response from farm and ranch producers in Utah who have listed succession planning as one of the most important programmatic needs from Utah State University Extension (USDA NASS, 2017; Narine, 2019).

The succession or transition of farms and ranches presents many unique challenges. Often producers do not know where to begin. To assist with this gap, USU Extension has developed and modified tools and training that allow producers to create their own unique succession plans pertaining to business, retirement, transition, and estate planning at a pace that is comfortable to them. The workbook tool, when completed, also offers significant financial savings to the farm or ranch producer.

In response to the expressed need for a Farm and Ranch Succession Program, USU Extension comprised a team that consists of a Beef Extension Specialist, Farm Management Specialist, and two County level Extension faculty. This approach provides synergies based on skillsets and relationships with participants.

In order to best serve producers, the USU Extension team traveled to North Dakota State University to receive training and special certifications. From here, resources were developed and modified to best meet the needs of producers from Utah.

The USU Extension Farm and Ranch Succession programs began in December of 2019. Tools were provided through PowerPoint modules and a workbook adopted from North Dakota State University (NDSU, 2021).

Target Audience

Participants that attended the training were a mix of both owners (older generation who controls farm and ranch assets) and successors (potential heirs to the farm and ranch) (NDSU, 2021). Ages of participants ranged from 24 to 77 years old. A total of 60 participants from 11 counties attended trainings with 63% being owners, 37% being successors. These participants were precisely the target audience that the USU Extension team hoped to have attend the program. Participants participated in face-to-face interactive sessions (see *Figure 1*) and virtual online session that spanned two to three days for an average of three hours per day. Trainings were held in Box Elder, Cache, Emery, and Rich Counties. One on-line virtual training was also held to allow producers from across the State to attend.

Results

An adopted evaluation tool was utilized to measure short term outcomes of the Farm and Ranch Succession Program. Evaluation results below have been analyzed from workshops completed in four different counties, as well as one workshop completed online. The following results are a cumulative average of responses received.

After the training:

- 100% of participants strongly agree succession planning is important
- 87% strongly agree that they know the value of developing a vision for their farm and ranch legacy, a 40% increase compared to before the training
- 93% strongly agree that developing the next generation farmers/ranchers is extremely important
- 72% strongly agree that they know the information that they will need to prepare to meet with a professional, which is a 62% increase compared to before the training

As a result of the workshop:

- 100% of participants intend to start a conversation with their family about succession planning or are already doing it
- 95% of attendees plan to form a vision for the future of the family farm/ranch or have already done so
- 98% of participants intend to begin gathering information/documents that are needed for succession or have already done so
- 82% of attendees are already visiting or intend to visit with a professional about their succession plan
- 98% of participants intend to use the workbook to begin their succession plan

Impacts

Over 65,000 acres of agricultural land has been impacted by the farm & ranch succession workshop, 19 Farm/Ranch Families have participated, and an estimated \$200,000,000 in agricultural assets have been positively influenced (*see Figure 2*).

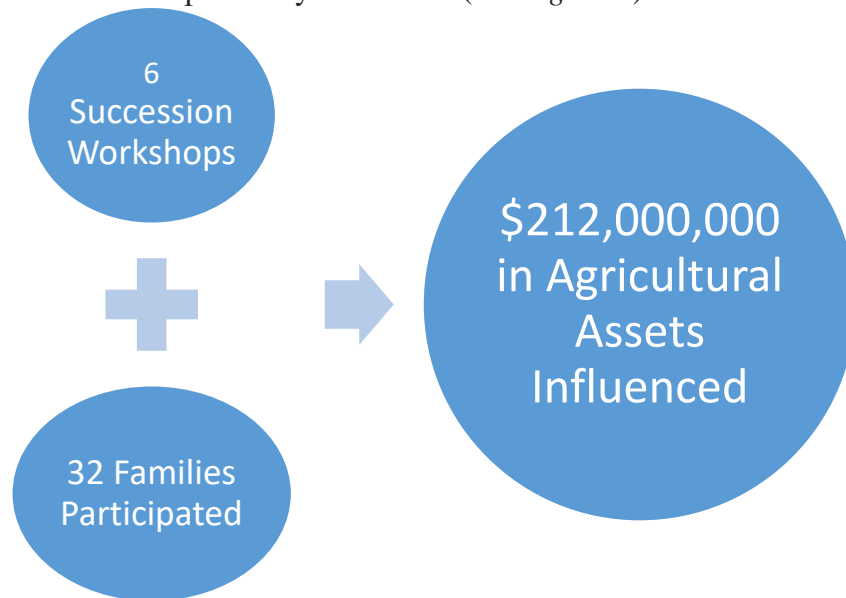


Figure 2: USU Farm and Ranch Succession Training Impacts

Public Value

The USU Extension Farm and Ranch Succession Team has received excellent evaluations and testimonials from participants about the program. Attendees have reported an increase of knowledge about succession planning. One attendee noted that, “we (her and her husband) talked all night about our potential plans”, she then remarked, “the tools given allowed us to make a lot of progress by talking and not fighting about the topics”.

Attendees have reiterated the importance of Farm and Ranch Succession Planning. One attendee mentioned, “I’m here to preserve my farm and my family... had my grandfather created a succession plan, I may have a relationship with my cousins and other family. Because of lack of preparation our family was torn apart by greed... I don’t want that to happen to my kids”.

Next Steps

Thanks to honest feedback from attendees, adjustments in facilitation time and focused topics are continually being made. These adjustments include: modifying subject matter, shortening meeting times, and lessening the overall program to just two days. In response to COVID-19, this program has also been modified to be delivered virtually. It is hoped that these modifications will allow for greater ease of accessibility for participants.

The Farm and Ranch Succession Program workshops have gained momentum and are now being planned for replication across the State. It is projected in 2021 that the program will be presented in at least three new counties and repeated, because of expressed need and popularity, in counties that have already participated. The Team has set goals to evaluate mid-term and long-term impacts by delivering follow-up evaluations to participants that have completed the program.