






Ag Legacy

The Broken Gate: Finding Meaning in Your Ag Legacy

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Welcome to another Ag LEGACY recording.

Ag LEGACY is a series of presentations and other online materials intended to assist rural families in creating their own legacy by beginning the thought process and opening the lines of communication.

Today's recording will address the topic The Broken Gate: Finding Meaning in Your Ag Legacy.

Today's speaker

John Hewlett

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I'm John Hewlett Ranch/Farm Management Extension Specialist
in the University of Wyoming Department of Agricultural & Applied Economics

I will be your speaker for today's AG LEGACY presentation

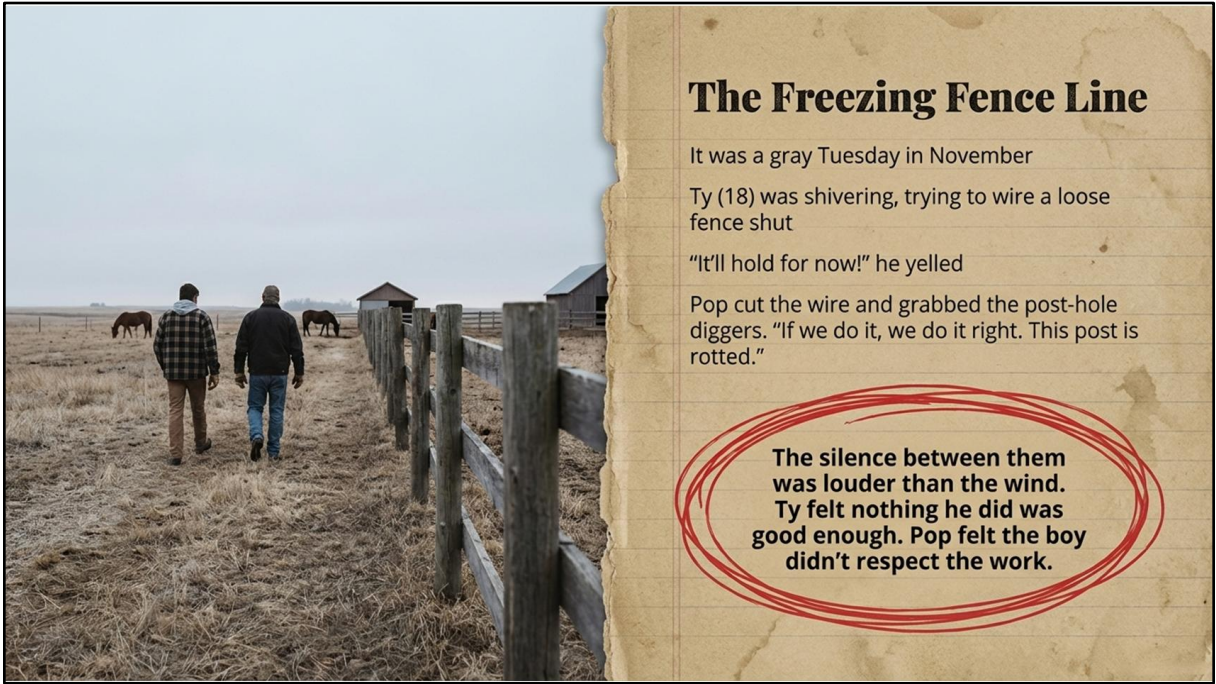


Thank you for joining this discussion on the Finding Meaning in Your Ag Legacy. Chances are you're here, because you care deeply about the future of your farm or ranch. But you also know that working with family is not always easy.

Let's take an in depth look at this topic that is so close to home for many of us. Let's focus on how to rebuild family communication. If you have ever experienced conflict on the farm—whether it is an argument over how to do a chore or a silent dinner table—you are not alone.

Transitioning a farm from one generation to the next involves a lot of moving parts. But Ag Legacy materials show it is not the taxes or the debt that break a family business; it is the breakdown of relationships and communication.

Today, we will walk through a simple, six-step blueprint to help you reduce conflict, get everyone on the same page, and protect your family's legacy.



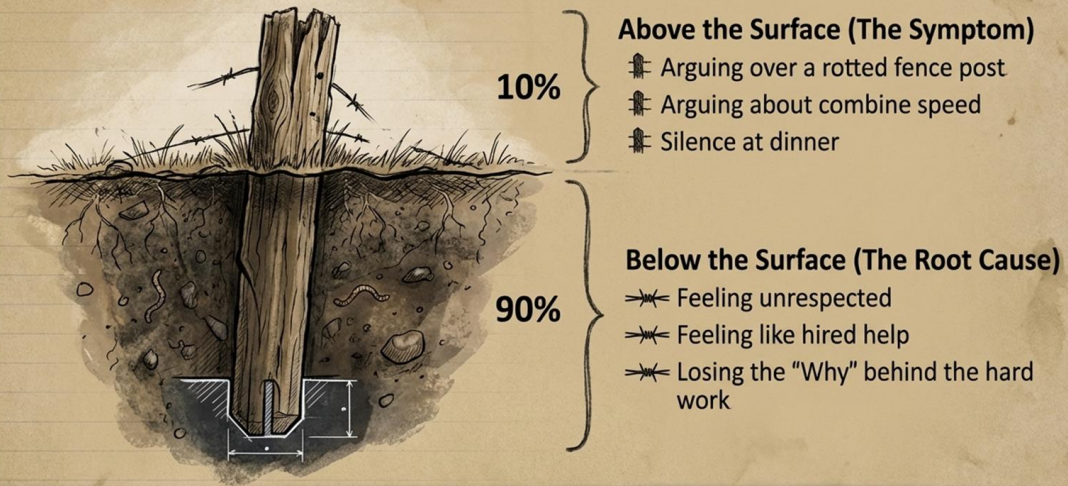
Let's start with a story. It was a gray Tuesday in November, the kind of day where the wind cuts right through your coat. Eighteen-year-old Ty was shivering, holding a spool of barbed wire. He yelled to his grandfather, Pop, 'It'll hold for now! Let's get in the truck.'

But Pop didn't answer. He cut the wire Ty just twisted, grabbed the post-hole diggers, and said, 'If we do it, we do it right. This post is rotted'. Ty threw his hands up in frustration.

The silence between them was louder than the wind. Ty stood there feeling like nothing he ever did was good enough. Pop dug in silence, feeling like the young man didn't respect the land or the hard work.

Does this sound familiar? Have you ever had a moment like this on your operation? The truth is, Ty and Pop weren't really fighting about a fence post. They were fighting because they had lost the shared meaning behind the work they were doing.

Diagnosing the Real Fight



They weren't fighting about a chore. They were fighting because they had lost the meaning of the work

When we have conflicts on the farm, what we see and hear is usually just the tip of the iceberg. Look at the illustration on the screen.

Above the surface, which is only about 10% of the problem, we see the symptoms. These are the arguments about a rotted fence post, the disagreements about how fast to run the combine, or the icy silence at the dinner table.

But below the surface is the other 90%. This is the root cause. This is where people feel disrespected. This is where the younger generation feels like they are just hired help. This is where family members feel like they have lost the 'Why' behind all the hard work.

If we only try to fix the 10% on top, the conflict will just keep coming back. To truly resolve family issues, we have to look below the surface.



When families start planning for the future, they often say, 'I just want us to be happy'. It makes sense. Conflict is exhausting, and we want it to stop.

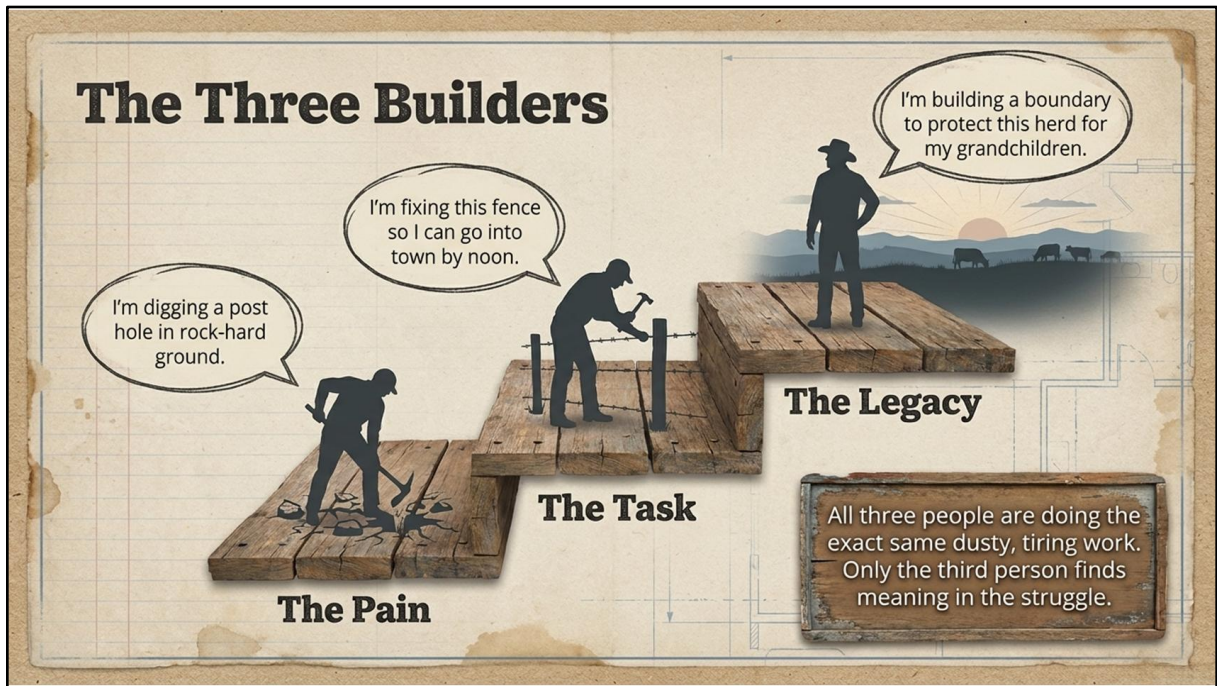
But making happiness your main goal is actually a trap.

Happiness is a feeling, and feelings change like the weather. If your only goal is to feel good, you are going to be very disappointed when it is time to have the hard conversations required to pass the ranch to the next generation.

Meaning is different. Meaning is a direction. Meaning is what holds your family together in a storm.

Research comparing happiness and meaning shows that meaning stays strong even when life is incredibly hard and the bank account is low.

When you focus on meaning instead of just happiness, you might still disagree, but you are much more likely to disagree with respect.



To really understand meaning, consider the story of the three fence builders. A traveler saw three people working on a fence line on a hot, dusty day.

He asked the first person, 'What are you doing?' The person grumbled, 'I'm digging a post hole in rock-hard ground.' That person only saw the pain.

The traveler asked the second person. The man said, 'I'm fixing this fence so I can go into town by noon.' That person only saw a task.

Then the traveler asked the third person. The older woman smiled and said, 'I'm building a boundary to protect this herd for my grandchildren. I'm keeping this land in the family'.

All three were doing the exact same hot, tiring work. But only the third person found meaning in the struggle because she was focused on a legacy.

The Danger of the 'One-Person Legacy'



A very common problem on family farms is what we call the 'One-Person Legacy.' Look at the picture on the slide. This happens when only one person truly owns the meaning of the farm.

The senior generation carries the heavy weight of history and past sacrifices. Meanwhile, the next generation feels the exhausting weight of constantly needing to prove themselves. And the off-farm family members feel the weight of being left on the outside.

If the meaning of the farm only belongs to one person, any transition plan will feel like a hostile takeover to everyone else. That is why shared meaning must include everyone in the family.

Use the Right Tool for the Job



Operating Meetings

Focus on daily chores and immediate tasks.
(Not for legacy planning)

Business Meetings

Focus on debt, taxes, and legal documents.
(Too stressful for finding meaning)

Family Council Meetings

Focus on values, future direction, and giving everyone a voice. Include off-farm family. Keep it to 45 minutes.

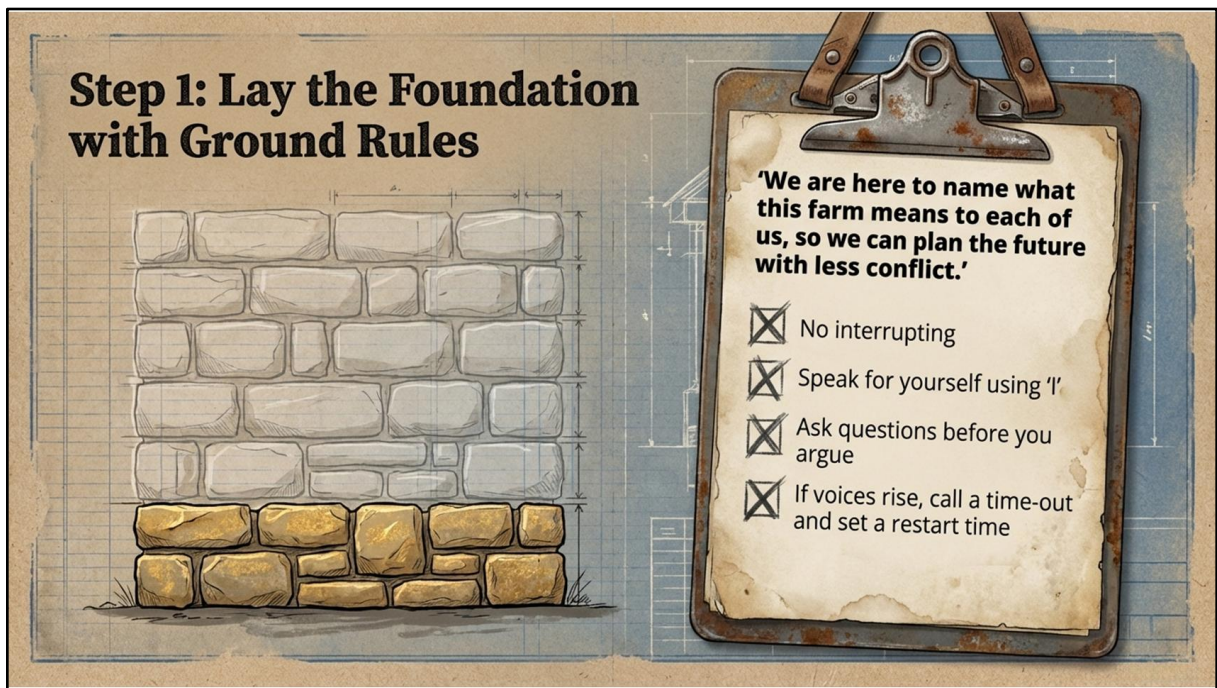
So, how do we fix this? How do we build shared meaning? First, you need the right tool for the job. Many families only meet when there is a crisis, which just makes conflict more likely.

We recommend three types of meetings.

First are Operating Meetings, where you talk about daily chores—like a toolbox for immediate tasks.

Second are Business Meetings, where you look at taxes, debt, and legal documents. This is too stressful for finding meaning.

Third are Family Council Meetings. This is where you focus on values, future direction, and giving everyone a voice. When you are starting to work on your legacy, you must use a Family Council meeting. Keep it to about 45 minutes, and be sure to include your off-farm family.



Now we begin our 6-step blueprint to rebuild communication. Step 1 is to lay the foundation with ground rules. You need a safe place to talk.

Start the meeting by opening with one clear sentence: 'We are here to name what this farm means to each of us, so we can plan the future with less conflict'.

Then, agree on four simple rules:

Number one: No interrupting.

Number two: Speak for yourself using 'I' instead of pointing fingers.

Number three: Ask questions before you argue.

Number four: If voices rise, call a time-out and set a time to restart.

These rules build a strong wall that keeps the conversation productive.



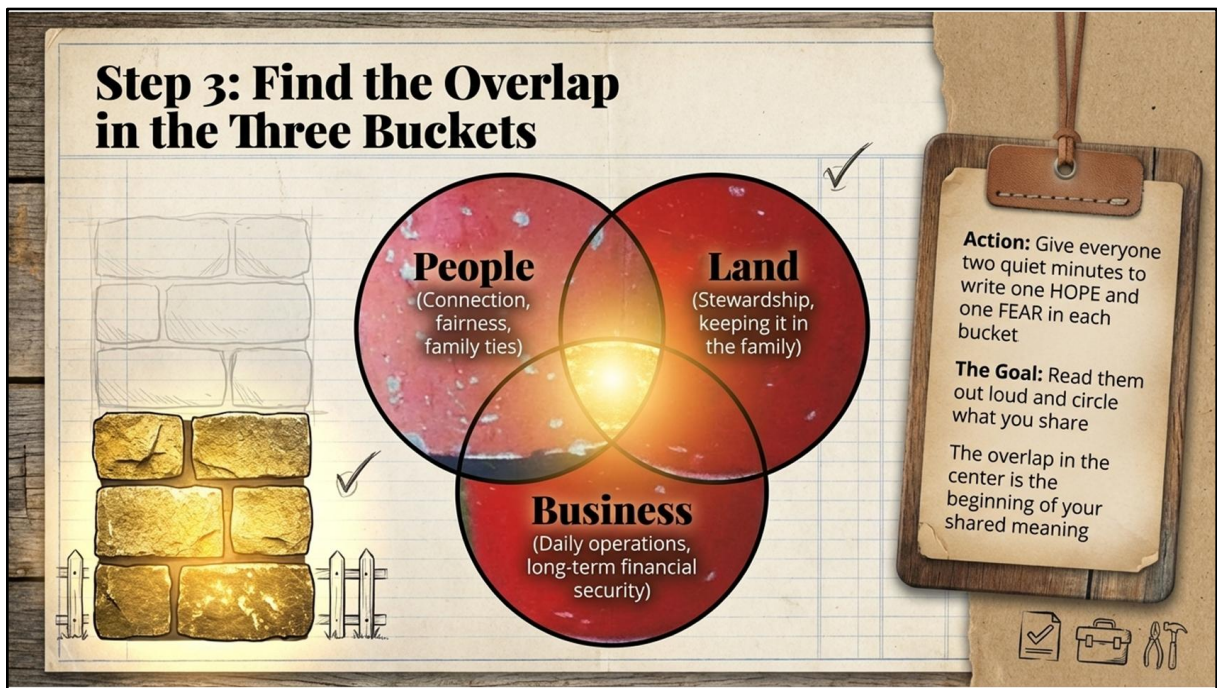
Step 2 is to share stories, not arguments. Stories pull meaning to the surface naturally. Go around the table and have each person answer two simple questions.

Question one: 'What is a moment on this operation that made you proud?'

Question two: 'What is a hard season that changed you?' And remind off-farm family members that they should answer this too, even if they weren't living on the farm at the time.

Here is the Golden Rule for Step 2: No debating. No correcting. Just listen. When someone finishes, you simply reply, 'I heard you say [fill in the blank]. Is that accurate?'

This guarantees that people actually listen instead of just waiting for their turn to argue.



Step 3 is called the Three Buckets Exercise. Draw three columns on a piece of paper or a whiteboard: People, Land, and Business.

Give everyone two quiet minutes to write down one hope and one fear for each bucket. This is important because the folks working on the farm might focus heavily on the business and daily operations, while the off-farm family might focus more on fairness and family ties.

Read them all out loud and circle the things you share. When you place hopes and fears side by side, you will almost always find overlap. That overlap is the very beginning of your shared meaning.

Step 4: Name Your Core Foundation Values

Values are what you believe are important. Go around the circle and name them. The ones that get repeated are your shared foundation.

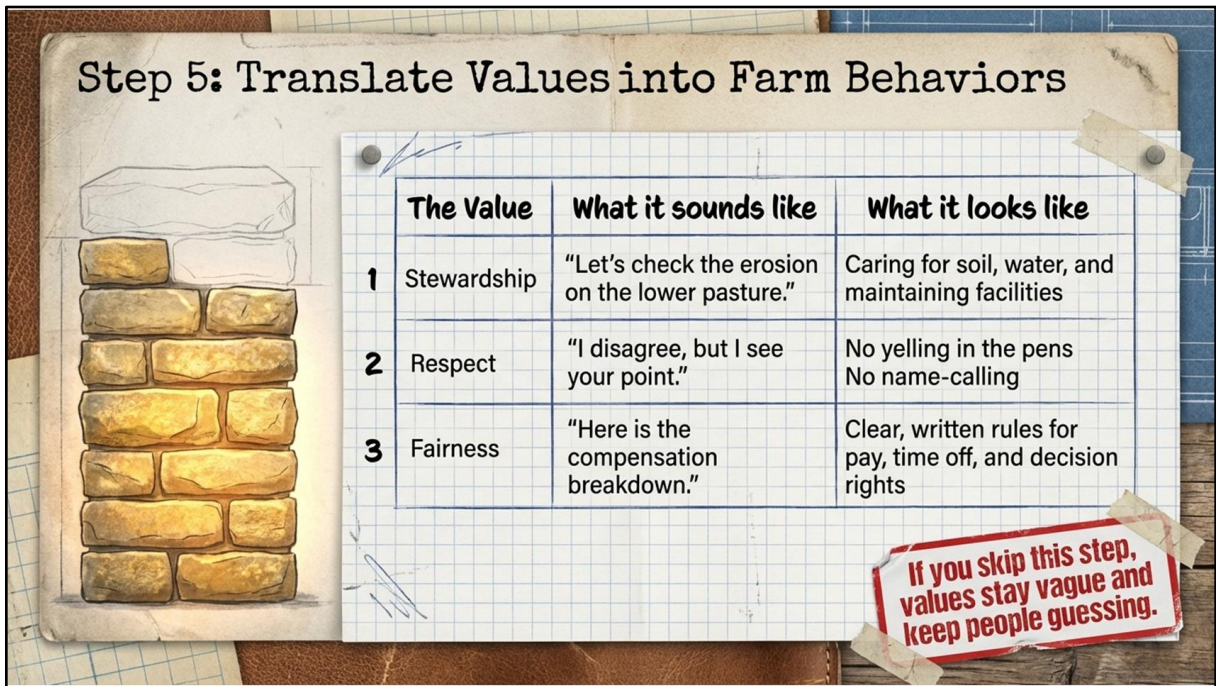


Step 4 is to name your core foundation values. Values are simply the things you believe are important.

Go around the circle and have everyone name a few values. You might hear words like Stewardship, Respect, Honesty, Fairness, Financial Stability, or Learning.

Write them all down. As you share lists, you will notice certain words getting repeated. The values that repeat are your shared foundation. Clarifying these core values is a critical step before you ever sign legal papers.

Step 5: Translate Values into Farm Behaviors



	The Value	What it sounds like	What it looks like
1	Stewardship	"Let's check the erosion on the lower pasture."	Caring for soil, water, and maintaining facilities
2	Respect	"I disagree, but I see your point."	No yelling in the pens No name-calling
3	Fairness	"Here is the compensation breakdown."	Clear, written rules for pay, time off, and decision rights

If you skip this step, values stay vague and keep people guessing.

Step 5 is where the rubber meets the road. You must translate those values into actual farm behaviors. If you skip this step, values stay vague and keep people guessing, which leads right back to conflict.

Take each shared value and finish this sentence: 'On our farm, this value looks like...!'

For example, if your value is Stewardship, what does it sound like? 'Let's check the erosion.' What does it look like? Caring for soil, water, and maintaining facilities.

If the value is Respect, it looks like no yelling in the pens and no name-calling.

If the value is Fairness, it looks like clear, written rules for pay, time off, and decision rights. Make these behaviors crystal clear.

Step 6: Write Your Shared Meaning Statement

Our farm legacy means
[Insert Shared Value], so
we will [Insert Core
Behavior/Goal].

Build one short sentence that includes everyone. Put it in writing. If someone can't support it, ask: "What would need to change so you could?"

Example:

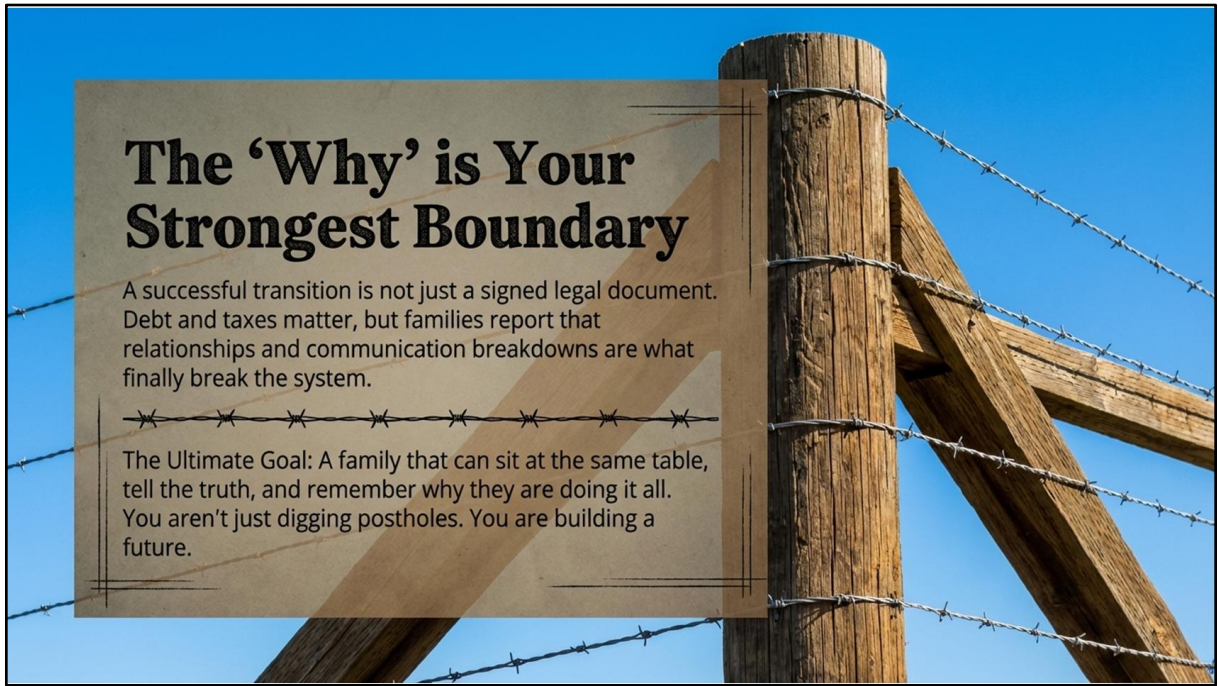
"Our farm legacy means protecting this land for the grandchildren, so we will prioritize soil health over short-term yields."

Finally, Step 6: Write your shared meaning statement. You are going to build one short sentence that includes everyone, and you are going to put it in writing.

Use this template: 'Our farm legacy means [insert shared value], so we will [insert core behavior]'.

For example: 'Our farm legacy means protecting this land for the grandchildren, so we will prioritize soil health over short-term yields'.

Once you write it, ask the room: Can everyone support this? If someone says no, don't get angry. Simply ask, 'What would need to change so you could support it?' Keep working at it until you have a version everyone can live with.

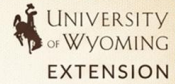


As we wrap up, I want to remind you that the 'Why' is your strongest boundary. When the younger generation doesn't understand the 'why' behind the work, they feel like hired help.

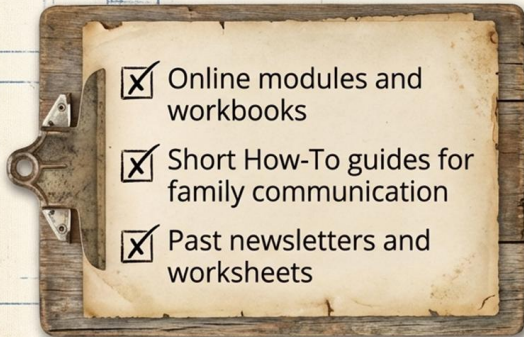
A successful farm transition is not just a signed legal document. Yes, the debt and taxes matter. But it is the relationships that will make or break the system.

Your ultimate goal is to be a family that can sit at the same table, tell the truth, and remember why you are doing it all. When you share the meaning, you aren't just out in the cold digging postholes anymore. You are building a future together.

Grab Your Blueprint



You don't have to do this alone. Get free tools made specifically for farm and ranch families.



URL: AgLegacy.org



Email: Information@AgLegacy.org



**Ag
Legacy**

You do not have to do this alone. The tools to help you rebuild your family communication are available right now.

Ag Legacy offers free tools made specifically for farm and ranch families going through transitions. You can access online modules and workbooks, short How-To guides for family communication, and past newsletters that cover all these topics step by step.

Please visit AgLegacy.org to find these resources. If you have specific questions, you can also email Information@AgLegacy.org.

Remember, the legacy you leave isn't just the land—it's how your family treats each other while taking care of it.



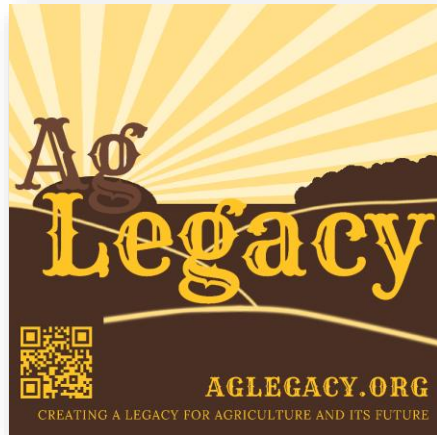
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If you have found this presentation helpful, we also recommend that you check out the newsletter on the same topic. You can find it on our website at AGLEGACY.org.

And while you are there, be sure to check out our other materials including modules, newsletters, and additional materials to help you in creating your own Ag Legacy.

THANK YOU!



Thank you for tuning in!