

# **Agriculture's Future in the Hands of the Next Generation**

**Successful Succession Planning &  
Diversification on the Family Farm**

**An International Report prepared for**



By Léona Dargis

2011 Nuffield Scholar

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Nuffield Canada

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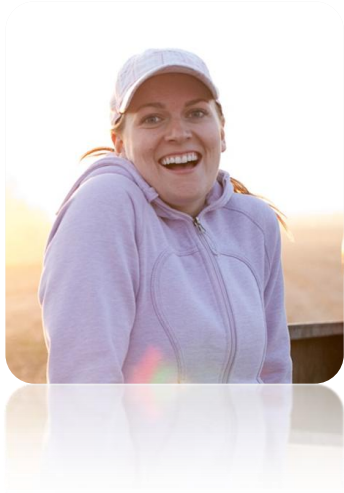
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To my parents  
Jean & Joanne Dargis  
for living life to the fullest  
while you were here.

# About the Scholar



**Leona Dargis** - This Canadian award-winning Olds College student is passionate about agriculture and life. Leona has struck a perfect balance in applying the time-honoured principles she learned within her farming family roots. Her parents, the late Jean & Joanne Dargis, taught their five daughters the powerful combination of education and enthusiasm in moving not only the agricultural industry forward but in truly living life to its' fullest.

2007 was a big year for Leona. She graduated with a Bachelor of Applied Science in Agribusiness from Olds College and without skipping a beat her leadership role expanded from provincial to international. Today she respectfully represents future young leaders from around the world as an elected Next Generation (NG) Honorary Trustee for the Royal Agricultural Society of the Commonwealth (RASC) where she has the honour of working with the President of the association, Her Royal Highness Princess Anne. Leona embraces the dynamics within leadership, enjoys experiencing cultural authenticity and is spontaneously creative in making the people around her feel empowered in achieving their dreams.

Still in her twenties, Leona is known as an accomplished world traveler. She lives with an outgoing and entertaining zest of life. She continues to travel the globe as a keynote speaker. Her presentations are as genuine as they are inspirational as she shares her secret in appreciating everything life has to offer and to always have fun.

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# Foreword

If you would have told me in 2006 that I was going to travel the world within the next decade I would have sarcastically laughed and said “No way!” Little did I know that the opportunities of being elected to the Canadian Young Farmers Forum (CYFF) and being selected to represent Canada at the Commonwealth Agricultural Conference in Calgary were going to lead me down a path of building a global network with people who shared a passion for agriculture.

In 2007, I was one of four CYFF board members who travelled to Chile and Argentina for an initiative sponsored by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA). Being an Olds College agri-business student, I was eager to learn from this global group of peers. It was then that I first learned about the Nuffield Scholarship from Andrew Broad, an Australian Nuffield Scholar himself. After doing a little research I learned that the minimum age to apply was 25; I was only 22 at the time.

Since then my four younger sisters and I learned the true value of perseverance because later that year we had the misfortune of losing our beloved parents and grandmother in a plane accident. Since then I am reminded of how lucky we are to have had the opportunity to learn from, to grow with and to love our parents for the time we did.

It brings a tearful smile to my face when thinking about all the triumphs and treasured memories created since harvest season in 2007. My sisters and I have celebrated two high school graduations, one college graduation and two weddings. Our time working together on the farm and the many evenings spent with family and friends offered us a sense of stability and encouragement. I am proud of all my sisters for becoming independent young women who have begun their journeys towards achieving their dreams.

It was a challenge to deal with matters of my parent’s unplanned estate however I approached the situation as a learning experience and have since helped families across Canada to understand the importance of having the ‘what if’ conversations. I am passionate about the future of agriculture and therefore chose to study Successful Succession Planning & Diversification on the Family Farm with a focus on the Next Generation as my Nuffield topic.

# Acknowledgements

Thank you to Nuffield Canada for providing me with this opportunity of a lifetime.

Thank you to my family and friends who gave me the courage to make the most of my time overseas and reminded me to always have fun.

Thank you to all the wonderful farm families that offered outstanding hospitality during my travels through Canada, New Zealand, Australia, United States, Singapore, India, United Kingdom, Zambia, Tanzania and Kenya.

Thank you to BDO Canada, DuPont, Association of Alberta Co-op Seed Cleaning Plants and Gateway Livestock Group of Companies for supporting me as a young speaker.

Thank you to Brenda Schoepp and Kim McConnell for being such amazing mentors.

Thank you to my cousin, Carmen Verrier, for helping me prepare for my Nuffield study and more importantly for your continued enthusiasm which gives me confidence.

Thank you to Reg Shandro for taking the time to review my report. I value your guidance and admire your hard work in influencing family farm succession throughout Canada.

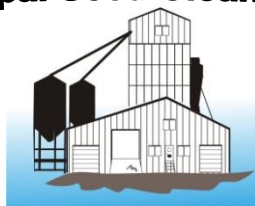
Thank you to my best friend, Katie Veldkamp, for helping me with the final edits of my report. You and your family have always been there for me and I will forever treasure the time we spend together, in person and online.

# Sponsors

I would like to acknowledge my sponsors, who not only contributed financially but offered their continued support and encouragement throughout my Nuffield adventure.



**St. Paul Municipal Seed Cleaning Association**



Personal Donation from Evalene Bowie

# Abbreviations

CAC	Commonwealth Agricultural Conference
CFBMC	Canadian Farm Business Management Council
CSC	Contemporary Scholars Conference
CYFF	Canadian Young Farms Forum
FCC	Farm Credit Canada
FTC	Free The Children
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IICA	Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture
NZYF	New Zealand Young Farmers
RASC	Royal Agricultural Society of the Commonwealth
SYO	Sarvodaya Youth Organisation

# Contents

- About the Scholar.....iv
- Foreword.....v
- Acknowledgements.....vi
- Sponsors.....vii
- Abbreviations.....viii
- Contents.....ix
- Executive Summary.....x
  - Background
  - Aims
  - Method
  - Observations
  - Recommendations
- Introduction..... 13
- Chapter 1: What makes this Next Generation different from the last? ..... 14
  - Education
  - Experience
  - Entrepreneurship
- Chapter 2: Why is Succession Planning so Difficult? ..... 23
  - Insecurities
  - Conflict
  - Fear of Change
- Chapter 3: Understanding each other’s Perspectives..... 28
  - The Parenting Generation
  - The Next Generation
  - Together as Family
- Chapter 4: Choosing to be Proactive ..... 34
  - Communication is Key
  - Trust & Respect
  - Attitude is Everything
  - Success in Succession
- Resources ..... 41
- References ..... 42

# Executive Summary

## Background

As a result of my experience in dealing with my parents' estate over the last five years, it sparked two interests of mine. The first was that every family should take the opportunity to have the 'what if' discussions and the second was the willingness and drive of the next generation is stronger than what the agricultural industry gives them credit for.

To say the least, I was an eager 25 year old applicant for the Nuffield Canada selection committee to consider; passionate towards learning about how the next generation is going to change our future in agriculture and what we need to do to enable them to be successful.

## Aims

The aim of this report is to educate all members in the agricultural industry to better understand the next generation and recognize the importance of taking a proactive approach towards succession planning. This report is a documentation of my experiences and observations accompanied by a few key learnings and some recommendations to strengthen family farms across Canada.

## Method

My approach was to visit family farms around the world which would be considered similar in nature to Canada so that the lessons learned would have optimum relevance. In addition, I visited developing countries as a result of my volunteer position as a next generation trustee on the Royal Agricultural Society of the Commonwealth (RASC). I am grateful to have travelled to New Zealand, Australia, United States, Singapore, India, United Kingdom, Zambia, Tanzania, and Kenya. I valued these experiences for adding a dynamic perspective to my study.

Sometimes I used an interview-style technique and others were simple conversations that took place at the kitchen table or in the farm 'ute' (truck) during a farm tour.

# Observations

I learned a lot from the countless discussions with farm families and as a result I took note of these important points.

- Education is necessary and taken for granted.
- The next generation is globally connected.
- ‘City Slickers’ make good farmers too.
- Communication is the foundation to strong relationships and businesses.
- Succession is change.
- Change is good; you need to want it for it to happen.
- Discuss what is in your Will with your family.
- What is fair is not necessarily equal.
- Conflict is a risk management tool.
- Diversity builds strength.
- The parenting generation needs to be decisive about retirement.
- The next generation needs to grow the business.
- Families can work together.
- It is ok to hire outside help, like an advisor/mediator.
- Collaborating on a common vision is necessary.
- Farm yard bullying is an unfortunate reality.
- Treat others the way you would like to be treated.
- Learn from the succession mistakes of others.
- Women are as capable as men.
- Perseverance is a virtue.
- Attitude is everything.
- Do what you love and love what you do.
- Be prepared to give more than you receive.
- Remember, life is short so why not make the most of it!

## Recommendations

1. Farm families need to be proactive towards the process of developing a successful succession plan. Communication is mandatory and this includes discussing what is in your Will with all parties involved. Developing a business plan including vision and goals will help clarify future direction of the business. Developing a retirement plan for the parenting generation includes discussing how and to whom the ownership and management responsibilities will transfer to meanwhile recognizing the financial support needed for the retirees. Learning how to work collaboratively will strengthen your relationships and legacy. If you haven't done so already, the time to begin the succession process is now. The first step is wanting to.
2. Everything about farming has evolved; and I expect that it will continue to evolve for as long as we live. We are no longer the poor peasant farmer. We are innovative entrepreneurs who are educated and experienced. We manage large and small scale operations with the use of genetic engineering and technological advancements. We are consumers of what we produce on this planet. No matter what our ethnicity, agriculture provides diverse opportunities for anyone to be a part of, organic or commercial. If the Canadian agricultural industry wants to be strong, we need to encourage and promote diversity while continuing to foster a supportive and successful environment.
3. Organizations that support the next generation can have a significant impact in today's society. Our younger demographic are savvy when it comes to accessing information on the internet. However the influential initiatives that have been created to promote sustainability, raise agricultural awareness and develop national/global networks are the ones that truly deserve the support from important stakeholders such as government, community and most importantly industry. As a result of my study, Canada does a poor job at supporting the next generation, especially when it comes to international learning experiences.
4. Take the time to listen to and appreciate each other's perspectives, both on farm and off. Try not to be so judgmental and try to find a way to work together. Being successful in life has a lot to do with fostering healthy relationships. Living a life full of happiness is better than not, so why not live the life you want and love the life you live!

# Introduction

My study began in New Zealand with attending the International Contemporary Scholars Conference (CSC) along with my fellow 2011 Nuffield Scholars. The dynamics of our group included: a strong-willed and inspirational Australian named Rob Cook, a very vocal and a little hard to understand Irishman named Shane Fitzgerald, a soft spoken French gal named Sarah Singla, a British royalty look-a-like named Alec Mercer, and a sweet yet unexpectedly funny Dutch girl named Djuka van der Maat. Conferences like this continue to impress me because no matter how many young agriculturalists are together, unforgettable debates and a few good laughs are sure to fill the room.

Having valuable conversations about significant topics such as subsidies & quotas, carbon & water footprint, sustainability & succession provided us with a platform for which we would be open to learn from a global network of ‘movers and shakers’ in our industries. Our challenge was to discover new things and share these new found ideas and aspirations. We were given advice to take advantage of every opportunity that presented itself while listening to and engaging the people around us.

With a packed suitcase and a blank note book, I began my Nuffield adventure in the Southern Hemisphere. I was willing to challenge my perceptions and current knowledge on what I believed about the next generation of young leaders and more importantly if they embodied the qualities of becoming successful successors.

# Chapter 1: What makes this Next Generation different from the last?

We are all aware that time continues to change our society which influences each new generation. As I enjoy learning about the past, I admire what is to come in the future. When we analyze each generation we come to realize that things will never be same. This is not a bad thing. If we as humans missed the opportunity of learning how to adapt then we would not be here; survival of the fittest, right?

So what makes this next generation especially different from the last? I have learned that there are three key factors that have enabled us to become the ambitious young leaders that we are today.

## Education

Canadians take having an education for granted. I was not surprised to learn that Canada is the only country in the world to have more than 50 percent of adults graduate with a tertiary education. In fact “Canada has managed to become a world leader in education without being a leader in education spending, which totalled just 6.1% of GDP in 2009” (M Sauter and A Hess 2012). Interestingly enough, we have forgotten to appreciate this privilege; unlike many other countries in the world where gaining access to a basic education is a mere dream.

## INDIA

When I travelled to India, I struggled in communicating with the rural farmers. I was trying to help them to understand certain fundamentals in animal husbandry and soil management that would make a significant impact in improving animal health and crop production yields. It was clear that the lack of education was limiting their ability to comprehend the knowledge I was trying to share. As this uneducated cycle continued, their children were forced to work as labourers to help relieve the stresses of earning a stable family income. Did you know that “India has some of the world's highest suicide rates, with many believing the biggest risk group to be rural farmers facing debt after poor harvests” (Associated Press 2012). Let’s think about that for a second.

I met uneducated Indian farmers who were monopolized into buying highly priced product from Monsanto including: seed stock, pesticides and herbicides. Imagine not being able to read or write.

How then are you supposed to know the mixing rates or safety precautions of certain hazardous products? In situations like this, can a global corporate powerhouse like Monsanto ensure a safe and sustainable agricultural environment like they claim? The answer is simple; they don't. This makes me wonder if Monsanto should be held corporately responsible for these fatalities that take place because of the lack of education. I lost count with the number of times I saw men and women with no respiratory protection while working in the fields with hazardous sprays.

It was interesting however to visit the 'untouchables' who lived in a forested reserve. They worked hard with what they had to become self-sufficient. I think they were almost better off than the average rural farmer because they did not have to face the stresses of dealing with agri-businesses.

The Sarvodaya Youth Organisation (SYO) was formed to promote and enhance sustainable rural, tribal and urban development, to create opportunities for the vulnerable and disadvantaged sections of the community and to enhance their socio-economic status. Rural initiatives, such as SYO, managed various projects focusing on participatory planning, demonstration, sight visits and capacity building with support from the Government of Andhra Pradesh. Small steps are being taken to empower farmers and help lift the agricultural industry and rural communities in India.

It was nice to see that progress is being made, however there is lots to be done.



*Picture 1: Turmeric field natural pest management demonstration, Warangal District, India*

## **KENYA**

To find yourself surrounded by a crowd of high energy school kids asking you questions about where you come from and what you do is extraordinary. After visiting a handful of schools in Africa, you cannot help but admire the students' infectious smiles and twinkle in their eyes. International charity and educational partner, Free The Children believes in a world where all young people are free to achieve their fullest potential as agents of change. They work to empower youth to remove barriers that prevent them from being active local and global citizens. Designed to meet the basic needs of developing communities and eliminate the obstacles preventing children from accessing education, Adopt a Village is a unique sustainable development model made up of five pillars crucial to community development:

- Education
- Clean Water and Sanitation
- Health
- Alternative Income and Livelihood
- Agriculture and Food Security

Together, these five pillars create a sustainable and holistic development model that helps to ensure children and community members are empowered to break the cycle of poverty.

A moment that will stay with me forever is the time I met Mama Jane. She is in charge of her family's 4 acres of land fenced with thick rows of cactus and staggered lines of barbed wire. She is also a leader in the community who spoke fluent Swahili and broken English. She told me that it was her dream that every family in her community own one cow. I immediately had an idea to share so I grabbed a stick from the side of the road knowing that my time with Mama Jane was limited. I drew the perimeters of her 4 acres and then 2 lines dividing the land into 4 quarters. I proceeded to explain that if she were to one day have more animals on the farm that she could manage and maximize grass growth by rotating the livestock from one parcel of land to the next with a watering station in the middle. Her reaction was priceless. She immediately gave me a hug and repeatedly said thank you. Mama Jane understood what potential benefits this new knowledge could have for not only her farm but the 300 other Mamas and their families in her community.



*Picture 2: Teaching Mama Jane about Rotational Grazing, Maasai Mara, Kenya*

I've noticed that in developing nations, such as India and Kenya, the children as well as adults are eager to learn if given the opportunity and as a result, they have this incredible drive to make a difference. Some children have told me that they aspire to become doctors and teachers with hopes of bringing sickness and poverty to an end. While a select few tell me about how they would choose a career in politics and how they envision political stability and economy prosperity for their home country.

Considering the challenges and environmental differences, I was highly impressed with the progress of these countries and I do not doubt their ability to play a significant role in the production of global foods in the future. Education is a catalyst for economic growth and strength. It provides as a building block to rural communities with the support of infrastructure and job opportunities. Living in a developed country has given us endless opportunities to grow and prosper. Our farming operations have become more efficient and productive with the help of technology and research. We learn new things when we read and we can share our thoughts and ideas when we write.

Acknowledging our ability to learn makes all this possible.

## Experience

Today's young leaders share many great learning and networking opportunities. The world has all of a sudden become a small place to live in and keeping in touch now takes little effort through various social media platforms. It was exciting to see and sometimes participate in the young farmer initiatives that were taking place in both Australia and New Zealand.

### AUSTRALIA

This beautifully authentic yet very westernized country has lots to offer. I felt encouraged being a young leader in agriculture and immediately noticed that it was because I was surrounded by so many like me. I was fortunate enough to have had existing contacts here through my involvement with the Royal Agricultural Society of the Commonwealth (RASC).

Youth group initiatives are supported by their agricultural societies on both a state and rural community levels. Their aim is to promote youth in agriculture through local shows, increase awareness and involvement of the agricultural industry, and support youth ambassadors in rural communities. To celebrate the bright future of Australian agriculture, a Youth in Ag Day is held every year during the Sydney Royal Easter Show which features events like:

- The Land Sydney Royal Showgirl Presentation
- RAS Rural Achiever Public Speaking Showcase
- Young Farmer Challenge and more...



*Picture 3: Youth in Ag Day Ambassadors at the Sydney Royal Easter Show, NSW, Australia*

Gaining support is necessary and fundamental for the growth of any youth organisation. What works best is receiving guidance through mentorship. The value in recognizing excellence offers encouragement and no doubt raises awareness about agricultural stewardship. The Rural Ambassador Competition is a National Competition aimed at young rural adults who have a passion for living and working in rural communities. This initiative has helped develop the ambassador's leadership skills and provided an engaging platform for promoting agriculture.

## **NEW ZEALAND**

I was keen to learn more about the New Zealand Young Farmers (NZYF) organisation and was impressed that they were able to collect a \$70/year membership fee. Similar to but more extensive than our Canadian Young Farmers Forum (CYFF), NYFZ is the go to place for all things 'young farmer'. They educate and raise agricultural awareness to the primary school kids through 'AgriKids NZ' and to teenagers through 'TeenAg'. I think this is a great way to unify efforts in creating an educated agricultural skill set in our upcoming generations of young leaders and entrepreneurs.

The NZYF promotes themselves as a social organization; to have fun with down to earth people. The development of personal and practical skills is accomplished through participation and achievement. Local young farmer clubs are initiated by volunteer leaders in nearly all rural areas. With 86 clubs across the country and a total membership of 1,524 the young farmer craze is still growing. Farming is cool among the next generations in New Zealand (NZ) and I found that people who weren't even farmers still belonged to the group. Each club has its own identity and does its own fundraising and/or sponsorship. Their local involvement is fundamental to rural sustainability. Local events take place from bi-weekly informal gatherings at the pub to seasonal formal social events. However the main attraction every year across the country is Young Farmer Contest, where the best skilled, most knowledgeable and well-rounded young farmers compete for the ultimate 'Young Farmer of the Year' title. Anyone who is a member of the NZYF (between the ages of 15-31) is welcome to compete for a piece of the outstanding contest prize value of over \$340,000.

In addition, NZYF produces a bi-monthly magazine named Young Country. This magazine is for young farmers and agribusiness leaders. It entertains, informs and inspires its readers with stories of people who live on the land or work with people who do. It brings stories of people who are

achieving success in their farming business while enjoying the unique lifestyle and character of rural New Zealand.

All very impressive.



*Picture 4: Regional Final Young Farmer Contest at Field Days in Fielding, New Zealand*

Operating a successful youth organisation takes dedication and drive. The support of local communities, industry members and governments are crucial. Engaging the general public is a part of the experience and as we move forward I believe that learning how to effectively and creatively communicate is becoming increasingly important.

The next generation face countless opportunities to gain new experiences which help develop their skills and build their networks. Together we can have fun and make a difference.

## **Entrepreneurship**

With today's abundance of reality television programming and the acceptance of creative expression, entrepreneurship has sparked a fire within many individuals. Being an entrepreneur is much more than operating your own business. It is about understanding your consumer and the marketplace, being organized and resourceful, and above all, it is being a leader who is willing to try new things and forge a new path. The spirit of being an entrepreneur has been more alive than ever, especially in the next generation.

We see many people starting up a new company for the main reason of becoming their own boss. Luckily in agriculture, we have had this privilege since the beginning of time.

## **SINGAPORE**

What I admired most about Singaporean culture is that they create opportunities within every challenge. It was fascinating to learn about the complexities within an urban agricultural setting and I marvelled at the passion set forth by its influential innovators.

Nyee Phoe is one of Singapore's oldest garden and landscape companies; they celebrated their centenary in 2011. In the beginning, Mr Eng recognized the immense potential of horticulture and floral business in what was fast becoming a concrete jungle. Now nestled in the picturesque and idyllic lushness of the Kranji Countryside, the company is headed by Mr Eng Ngian Hern and Mr Eliam Eng who belong to the third generation of the family business. Together with Petals & Leaves, a creative floral service, and Gardenasia, a nature-based events company, the Nyee Phoe Group continues to evolve and offer innovative experiences to Singaporean urbanites.

Experiences at Gardenasia are inspired by nature while focusing on a holistic and enriching approach. It is the perfect setting for a variety of events including garden weddings, corporate away-days, as well as hands-on lessons for children.

The secret to their success has been diversification.



*Picture 5: Kenny Eng leading community gardens project, Singapore*

It was natural for Kenny Eng to take on a leadership role within the family business. What I admired most about Kenny's situation is that he was given responsibility along with the capacity to take charge of the business and change things as he deemed necessary. Today their vision reads "To be a global best in Agritainment by letting Nature inspire lifestyle."

We have reached a time where simply thinking outside of the box is not good enough. We need to become tangible strategists and inventive trendsetters. If we expect our agricultural industry to thrive then we must expect the constant push for entrepreneurial ideas and accept the people who create this ever-changing force.

After discovering that the next generation is educated, experienced and entrepreneurial this lead me to understand a little more about why things are different in today's society. Being able and willing to learn new things, travel new places and explore new ideas provides us with a distinguished advantage in creating diverse futures.

## Chapter 2: Why is Succession Planning so Difficult?

It is no secret that all farm operations will transfer at some point in the future. This happens in one of two ways: voluntarily or involuntarily. Whether we like it or not, we cannot avoid this fate. When I asked farm families “Why is succession planning so difficult?” the response I received most often was “because we do not know where to start.” This inspired me to take a closer look at the reasons why this topic is so confrontational. I was not surprised to learn that it included hesitations like: personal insecurities, dealing with conflict, learning how to forgive and fearing change.

### Insecurities

The first reason why many people do not want to approach the topic of succession is because they are scared of the varied level of emotions involved and how it might change the family dynamics. It is common to see a mixture of dominant and recessive characters within the family and/or farm operation. The parenting generation may gravitate towards maintaining control of the farm operation while the next generation may want to focus on developing a healthy work/family life balance. Succession planning is a process and not an event. It is also about what is fair and not necessarily equal.

Feeling insecure about what you have and what you want is a challenge that must be overcome. If the intent is to have a successful succession then farm families need to focus on working together to develop a plan that everyone agrees to move forward with. The dominant characters must actively listen and the recessive characters must make an effort to talk about what they feel and think. Acting early to avoid resentment will save relationships and businesses.

Confidence plays an important role in how insecure a person may feel. For example, I met a family in New Zealand who operated a successful farming operation. The only problem was that the parents did not have the confidence to face the farming and non-farming children to tell them how they wanted to live their retired life and how they wanted to divide their estate if something were to happen. It was unfortunate that the children had taken seniority over their parents and did not recognize or appreciate their life-time of hard work and selfless giving.

I consider myself lucky to have Brenda Schoepp as a mentor and fellow Nuffield Scholar. I truly appreciated her article on farmyard bullying because I think it exposed the harsh reality of being insecure and the seriousness of how damaging it can be to someone's life. "Bully behaviour is for real on the farm and a huge concern for workplace health. Unlike other careers, the farm tends to hold on to its people, even to the point of breaking, because they feel they have no place to go. But any other place may be a safer, healthier, stress-free place that gives you time to think and grow. If you are being bullied please seek help from a trusted source." (B Schoepp 2013)

Constant criticism is a form of bullying. Let's make it stop.

Everyone has the ability to say and do something nice.

## **Conflict**

Conflict is a natural part of our lives and those who understand how to manage conflict with a results based approach will be more successful and ultimately live a life with less stress. Conflict occurs when there is a difference in values, needs, and/or opinions. However conflict itself is not the problem; it is how we choose to deal with it.

The first step in resolving conflict is acknowledging that a problem exists and identifying what it is specifically. It is important to discuss personal and relationship needs rather than taking sides. When taking a look at a broader perspective in agriculture, I believe that it is important that each sector of the industry take the time to work collaboratively instead of dictating what we think is best for one another. For example, it is common for grain growers to take a position against the quota system for dairymen here in Canada. I find this to be an unfortunate situation because after learning about how strong our dairy industry is because of the systems we have in place, I fully support the industry and the way it is currently regulated. It allows me to purchase fresh Canadian milk, yogurt and cheeses; and I'd like to keep it that way. We are all consumers of the produce we grow and at the end of the day I take pride in supporting Canadian businesses. Why should it be any different?

I enjoyed learning about the importance of conflict resolution and its relevance to farm families from two books. The first was created in partnership by Farm Credit Canada (FCC) and the Canadian Farm Business Management Council (CFBMC) called 'Managing the Multi-Generational

Family Farm’ and the second was compiled and written by Judy Wilkinson and Lyn Sykes from Australia called ‘A Guide to Communication for Farm Families’.

Within my research I was drawn to the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Modes. In conflict situations, a person’s behaviour is assessed along two basic dimensions: assertiveness, the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy their own concerns, and cooperativeness, the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy the other person’s concerns.

There are 5 Conflict-Handling Modes:

- *Avoiding – Leave well enough alone (Least Assertive and Cooperative)*
- *Accommodating – Kill your enemies with kindness*
- *Competing – My way or the highway*
- *Compromising – Let’s split the difference*
- *Collaborative – Two heads are better than one (Most Assertive and Cooperative)*

Think of conflict resolution as a risk management tool. As life and businesses become more complex and dynamic with different generations, genders and personalities, the likelihood of misunderstanding each other becomes greater. Therefore would it not make more sense to work collaboratively to engage and empower the individuals on your operation? Do you work together as a team? Do you focus on the things done right as well as deal with the things that could have been done better?

During family meetings the ultimate goal is to solve conflict where all sides win. Communication plays the lead role in achieving the desired outcomes while leadership and team building fosters a healthy working environment.

Highly developed conflict resolution skills provide improved outcomes in areas of:

- Giving and receiving feedback and constructive criticism
- Resolving disputes with a win-win outcome
- Resolving team unrest by reaching common goals
- Managing resistance to change by dealing with obstacles
- Implementing directives that are clear and understandable
- Achieving change with long term positive outcomes

Everyone wants to live in harmony. It is important to recognize the importance of certain attributes like forgiveness, acceptance and cooperation. Feeling resentment, anxiety and stress will negatively impact your mental and physical health.

## **Fear of Change**

Change is good right? Look where it has brought us and all the wonderful things we are able to do because we have learned to adapt. Succession is change. While change is necessary for survival, it can also be challenging and that's why we tend to resist it.

In Kenny Eng's example above, he was able to diversify and grow the family business because he was given the responsibility to manage and the authority to make decisions. This is a challenging aspect of transferring the farm operation and one that many farm families need to learn from.

In transition, the parenting generation may be left feeling like they are unwanted and may even fear their own mortality. Why is it that we increasingly fear death as we grow older? Shouldn't life be celebrated while we are still living and able?

A good friend and professional mediator, Reg Shandro and I once spoke about the saying "Older people know what it is like to be young but younger people do not know what it is like to be old."

Therefore, the next generation may not give the parenting generation enough credit when it comes to accepting change. If we take the time to listen to their stories and learn from their experiences, it may influence the way we understand their perspectives. We become better communicators when we acknowledge and understand each other. When we communicate more effectively then perhaps we will begin to accept change.

Madisyn Taylor wrote "The sense of feeling bored in life can be an indicator that we need to be proactive in creating change"



*Picture 6: My family, Harvest 2005, Alberta, Canada*

My sisters and I grew up in an environment of constant change. Our parents always tried new things on the farm and as a result the business has grown to what it is today. I remember when we were the first to try growing corn and have a feedlot full of Black Angus cattle; the neighbours thought we were crazy. Our parents took risks, calculated risks and the truth is you'll never know until you try.

So instead of feeling personally insecure, feel confident and proud; instead of finding yourself in conflict, focus on the bigger picture and work collaboratively, and instead of fearing change, be adventurous and discover new paths.

# Chapter 3: Understanding each other's Perspectives

Gaining perspective is a measurement of one's experiences. We become what we believe and for each succeeding generation this evolves. Our values, ways of communicating and priorities are different. This affects our work ethic, management styles and ultimately our perspectives.

The Veterans, who were born in 1922-1945, experienced the Great Depression and World War II which influenced them to be thrifty, disciplined and private. The Baby Boomers, born in 1946-1964, grew up under the influence of the civil rights movements and the Vietnam War. They represent the single largest economic group in North America and with their keen sense of adaptability they are likely to remain in leadership positions for longer than any previous generation. They look for a more direct and detailed style of communication.

Generation X, born from 1965-1980, lived through energy crisis, government cutbacks and the beginning of computers. They accept detailed directions and appreciate it when they are 'kept in the loop'. This generation can be the perfect bridge generation because they understand the work ethics and focus of the Baby Boomers while also understanding the culture views and values of the next generation.

Generation Y, born 1981-2000 have been influenced mostly by current affairs including terrorism, schoolyard violence and technology advancements. They accept diversity as they embody creativity and enjoy a team spirit. They expect quick advancements and it is important to have online connection 24-7.

Generation Z, born since 2001 have entered into a world of information over-load and represent the newest and most loved. They have adapted the philosophy of 'making a difference in the world'. This generation will no doubt aspire to do great things in the future.

Although we all belong to different generation groups, the key to understanding each other's perspectives is taking the opportunity to share stories and challenge ourselves to think of what it would have been like if we were in their shoes. It is important for all generations to do this.

With the parenting generation, the biggest question is how and when to get the succession process started. For the next generation, the key issues are the financial viability of the family business and gaining management control. In review, the following table summarizes points to consider between generations.

	<b><u>Parenting Generation</u></b>	<b><u>Next Generation</u></b>
<b>General Characteristics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Live to Work’ or ‘Work to Live’</li> <li>• Loyal Consumers &amp; Employees</li> <li>• Traditionalist</li> <li>• Micromanagers</li> <li>• Respect for Authority</li> <li>• Values Status</li> <li>• Team Approach &amp; Group Training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Work to Learn’</li> <li>• Willing to Change Frequently</li> <li>• Accepts Diversity</li> <li>• Technologically Inclined</li> <li>• Creative Expressionist</li> <li>• Educated</li> <li>• Individual Training &amp; Mentorship</li> </ul>
<b>Points to Consider</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Having faith and trust in the next generation, they will learn and grow as you did.</li> <li>➤ Misunderstanding the intention of the next generation; Listen to and respect their opinions.</li> <li>➤ Remembering that you have been in the next generation’s shoes at some point in the past.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The parenting generation wants to leave a legacy; Listen to and respect their wishes.</li> <li>➤ Find meaningful roles for the parenting generation after transfer of ownership and leadership.</li> <li>➤ Recognizing that you will be in the same position as the parent generation one day.</li> </ul>

## The Parenting Generation

Discussing the topics of succession and retirement with the family for the parenting generation raises difficult issues such as losing control of their business, making decisions about retirement and dealing with the realities of aging and death. This can sometimes come across as challenging their purpose and this becomes a frightful thing to want to deal with. What does it actually mean to retire? We hear comments like “the older we grow the harder it is to accept change” or “the older we grow the less patient we become.” Is this true?

I remember a time when Dad and I went out to visit a neighbouring farmer. You could tell that he was ready for a life of full-time fishing rather than full-time farming. We told him that we would be interested in one day renting or purchasing his land if the opportunity ever arose. The conversation then lead Dad to telling the farmer what he envisioned doing with his land and how we would need his help to remove some old fences.

I took away two important lessons from that day. The first was that Dad respected that this block of land wasn't just an area where the man had lived and farmed his whole life; it represented his sense of pride and held sentimental values. The second lesson was the importance in recognizing that you cannot take the land away from the farmer and that you needed to do your best in maintaining their purpose on the land. That is why Dad had asked him if he would help with taking down some old fencing.

We farmed that land the following year.

Let's evaluate a farming business in transition. Would it not make sense to respect the retiring generation's wishes and let them feel valued as they exit the business? Find something special that they still want to be a part of. The next generation will be able to experience a much smoother transition if everyone's differences are set aside to focus on common goals.

“Any generation will have a hard time transitioning out of something if they have nothing to transition to.” This is a direct quote from Reg Shandro during one of his farm succession presentations earlier this year. It is important that the next generation be considerate of this and the sensitivities around having these discussions. All is possible; the only thing that is required is an open mind and an open heart.

## The Next Generation

“Young, tech-savvy farmers and agricultural professionals that have business skills and entrepreneurial passion are leaders in ag communities across Canada. They’re the new generation and their dedication will keep our industry strong.” (Kim McConnell 2012)

There is definitely no shortage of optimism geared towards the next generation doing great things in the future. The question is, “Will they succeed and are they receiving the support they need?”

Social media has given individuals the power to share their interests, knowledge and ideas. The next generation who comes from the farm is passionate and able to promote a diverse industry full of opportunities. An online movement like #FarmVoices, initiated by the FarmOn Foundation, provides a platform for rural youth to share a part of their farming story. It is encouraging to see all the photos, videos and messages being circulated online in efforts to share a passion and/or raise awareness about a positive and promising future in agriculture.

I found it extremely interesting to meet and learn from passionate young agricultural leaders from around the world. I was most intrigued by those who grew up in the city and after graduating from high school chose to pursue a career in agriculture. They challenged my belief, and the agricultural industry claim, about this tremendous need for more young people. Are we putting ourselves in this position by not accepting young talent from the city?

I think we face a similar situation when we hear about how impossible it is to build a viable farming operation from the ground up and that the next generation is dependent on the parenting generation because of the need for high capital investments. This may be true for those who want to continue doing things as the previous generation did. What about creating new businesses and finding new ways? Starting something new and small is ok too.

There is nothing wrong with growing up in the city or wanting to begin a new venture in farming. If we as an agricultural industry want to be successful then we must continue to accept that innovation enables growth and being eccentric creates diversity. It is important that the parent generation be willing to understand this and the opportunities it will present. All is possible; all that is required is an open mind and an open heart.

## Together as Family

Differentiating what everyone expects between the family life and the farm business is an important aspect of succession planning. Having these conversations will help minimize discontent within family members and if some boundaries are established then the family can move forward in collective agreement.

Roles within the family can be casted as one of the three characters in Karpman's Triangle: the Persecutor, the Victim and the Rescuer. Most people move between all three roles with varying extremes, however it is common that once we find ourselves under stress we revert to a preferred role. A typical example is when the Persecutor (Father) complains about the Victim (Son) not completing a task and the Rescuer (Mother) tries to comfort both sides. To approach this situation in a proactive manner, the Rescuer must learn how to respectfully support, facilitate and encourage constructive communication. Some ask, "Is it logical to expect family members to work together?" My reply to that is, "Where there is a will, there is a way."

During my travels through Western Australia, I was ecstatic to stay in one place for more than 48 hours. My time with the Foss family was a trip highlight because not only was I welcomed with open arms I had the opportunity to work on their grain farm. I was glad to be spending some time in the tractor operating one of two seeding units. It was interesting to sit back and witness the personal dynamics of the Foss brothers working together on the farm. I found it suiting that each one of them had spent time away from home to gain outside, real world experiences. They also took the opportunity to learn specific skill sets like welding, mechanics and agri-business.

I discovered an important lesson from the Foss family; no matter how stressful things may have been on the farm, spending time together as family was important. Going to church on Sundays and enjoying a family barbeque where the kids played footy together in the yard and the parents shared stories, strengthened their relationships.

In addition, I admired the Foss' passion for community involvement in Bruce Rock, a small rural town. The wives held numerous volunteer committee positions and the kids played as many sports as they could.

"I believe farming nurtures the close family ties that make life rich in ways money can't buy."

A Farmer's Creed, Author Unknown.



*Picture 7: The Foss Family, Western Australia, Australia*

Family dynamics are always interesting and rightfully so because every individual brings a different perspective. These perspectives come from living different lives through travel and experiences, hardships and relationships. However when faced with challenges, progress can be made if families are willing to communicate effectively and share their goals.

# Chapter 4: Choosing to be Proactive

Succession planning can be a challenging process. It takes commitment and farm families must be willing to work together. This requires clear and concise communication, having trust and respect for one another and bringing a positive attitude to the table. The results are sure to be productive, uplifting and boost family moral.

## Communication is Key

“Once good communication is established among family members, problems can be solved. After all, every problem has a solution on its other side. The satisfaction that comes from solving problems together is a strong step in binding the family together. It also builds the confidence and trust that is the glue of relationships.” David Bork, Family Business Risky Business - Australia

“We believe clean, constructive communications are at the core of our long term success as a family. We encourage all efforts to further harmony, develop humour and perspective on life, balance long term concerns whilst enjoying the present, and to enhance caring and amicable relationships among family members.” Dr. Richard Kelley, Outrigger Chain of Resorts and Hotels – Australia

The Mouritz family from Western Australia made a point in having frequent family farm meetings. In addition, they also took the time to have an annual three day family retreat. Their retreat agenda included:

- Early Morning Walks/Swims
- Business Plan Overview
- Vision Writing (Individual and Group)
- Family Photo
- Relaxation and Stress Management Skills Speaker
- Tour of Local Businesses
- Revise or Write First Wills
- Meet with Industry/Political Representatives
- Inspirational Speaker
- Bringing Visions Together and Discussing How They Fit with Business Plan

It was refreshing to meet a family who made a continuous effort to keep all lines of communication open. This enabled both generations to discuss concerns and more importantly to acknowledge their accomplishments. They had worked out a process on how to deal with conflict and as a result the family relationships and the farm operations were strong and successful.

One of the most important factors in effective communication within the succession planning process is directly related to the Will. A good friend and professional mediator, Reg Shandro says “If you don’t communicate what is in your Will, it may be read as your last testament of love to your children.”

It seemed that every succession advisor/mediator that I’ve spoken to shared stories about the families who fell apart because they were unclear about how to deal with their parents’ estate. Greediness clouded their judgement and the in-laws created unnecessary tension. What is unfortunate about these situations is that almost all of them could have avoided their fallouts if they simply communicated better.

## **Trust & Respect**

I remember my parents teaching my sisters and I about trust and respect. We worked together on the family farm as a team. Mom and Dad trusted us to try our best, work hard and to make the right decisions. In return, we trusted and respected their advice and the decisions they made. They reminded us to always “Treat others the way we would like to be treated.”

Today, I try to lead by setting a good example.

As I travelled to Mount Isa, Queensland, I was excited to meet young women who worked on cattle stations, as Jillaroos, in Northern Australia. We had all gathered for the Women in the Pastoral Industry Career Workshop. This unique two-day workshop was designed specifically to empower women in pastoral roles, to identify their potential and take responsibility for career development and opportunities.

Imagine the energy of young, energetic Jillaroos working in a sector of the agricultural industry where women have never really been in before. I was motivated by these young women who aspired to create change and earn the trust and respect from their co-workers and more importantly their employers.

As a guest speaker at this workshop, I encouraged them to have confidence in themselves and if there was anything they wanted to achieve, even if it's never been done before, to go for it and just do it. Perseverance will lead to accomplishments.



*Picture 8: Women in the Pastoral Industry Career Workshop, Queensland, Australia*

“Perhaps the most powerful trend in the last fifty years is the unprecedented empowerment of women. The number of women members of parliament has gone from eighteen hundred to ten thousand since nineteen eighty. For the first time, half of our species is being liberated to bring their full genius, emotional intelligence and wisdom to every sector of our societies. There is perhaps no more powerful influence on the things I want to talk about tonight.” (R Patel Commonwealth Lecture 2013)

## **Attitude is Everything**

The Oxford Dictionary states that attitude is 1) a way of thinking or feeling about someone or something 2) a posture of the body 3) *informal* self-confidence or hostile behaviour. We are most commonly known for having a good attitude (positive) or a bad attitude (negative). Were you aware that over 50% of how we communicate comes from our body language? Almost 40% comes from the tone of our voice and a mere 7% comes from the words we speak. Attitude is comprised of how we feel, act, what we do and how we do it. The only person who controls all this, is ourselves.

“Farmers are notorious for living in the past and worrying about the future.” Reg Shandro. How do you think your life would change if you focused on living in the moment?

How often do we learn our lessons the hard way? Wish we didn't say hurtful things in a heated argument or wished we spent a little more time with someone who passed away? Farmers are so dedicated to the land and their animals that sometimes they forget about the people around them and what's truly important. My parents were passionate about life. They would always say "There is a time to work hard and there is a time to play hard."

Be spontaneous every chance you get.

I vividly remember when I was a teenager that the family would spend our summers camping at the lake with friends. One sunny day Dad and I drove back home to take a load of farm garbage to the dump. My Dad said to me "I'm sorry Ona for taking you away from having fun at the lake today." Without a pause I looked at him and replied "That's ok Dad, someone has to do the work." Immediately afterwards I could see how proud he was in my response. I didn't choose to have a bad attitude about doing work on a beautiful summer's day; instead I chose to be happy about the time I was spending with my Dad.

My sisters and I worked hard on our family farm with the focus of having pride in the work we do. Our parents would always give us positive encouragement.

Be passionate and positive about what you do because when you do this, you will find yourself surrounded by a community of individuals who are compassionate, supportive and would like to see you succeed. I admire the motto "Ensuring your own success by ensuring the success of the people around you."

During my Nuffield study I felt most inspired by the strong-willed victims of the earthquakes in Christchurch, New Zealand and the floods in the state of Queensland, Australia. Not everyone can say that they've experienced having their lives turned upside down when crops are ruined, homes destroyed and family/friends passed away. The farming families in the Lockyer Valley had new challenges to overcome since the floods. Their fields were infested with foreign weeds, household items and endless amounts of rubbish.

One of my favourite quotes during the movie *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (2011) is "Everything will be alright in the end. If it is not alright, it is not the end."



*Picture 9: First cauliflower crop in the Lockyer Valley after floods, Queensland, Australia*

When having a positive outlook in life we focus on the good things, believe that life's hardships make us stronger and teach us the true value of perseverance.

Remember: the things you take for granted someone else is praying for.

## **Success in Succession**

It is important to recognize that each farming business solution is unique and what works for one may not work for another. Wherever the family or the farming business cycle is, the time to start succession is now; because the alternative could be unfavourable if the process is triggered unexpectedly.

A successful succession plan is achievable when all stakeholders come to the table prepared to give more than they receive.

What is the future of your family and farm operation worth? Do you want to communicate effectively and efficiently? It might be difficult to have a family member facilitate these discussions, especially since they are most likely a stakeholder themselves. Therefore, I strongly recommend hiring an advisor or accredited succession mediator. Once beginning the process in developing a succession plan the goal is for every stakeholder to reach an agreement so that the process of moving forward can take place.

During my visit with Lyn Sykes from Australia she shared with me a resourceful book that she and Judy Wilkinson compiled and wrote called ‘A Guide to Succession – Sustaining Families and Farms’. Together Ms Sykes and Ms Wilkinson have many years experience working with farm families and as a result their aim was to empower people to make the right choices.

‘A Guide to Succession – Sustaining Families and Farms’ case studies:

1. Unhappy Daughter-In-Law
2. Father Feeling Over-Committed
3. Generational Conflict
4. Parents Ready to Retire and Move
5. Discomfort About Debt
6. Drought and Wanting to Sell
7. Poor Family History
8. Parents to Retire
9. Concern over Father’s New Wife
10. Poor Health
11. Different Ideas about Management
12. Decision to Leave Farming
13. Include Young Family Members
14. Concern about Profitability
15. Parents Need a Hand
16. A Sad Story – What happens when you don’t plan.

The purpose of this book was to help educate the agricultural industry on the realities of farm succession and offer encouragement that no matter how challenging it may be, there is always a solution.

There are many sections to develop within a succession plan, including:

- Facilitated family meetings to establish farm business plan, vision & goals
- Evaluate the current potential & need for growth of the farm business
- Retirement plan
- Ownership transfer strategies
- Communication plan
- Contingency plan
- Implementation plan... & More

The parenting generation must think about what retirement looks like, where to live and how much money is needed to satisfy the preferred lifestyle. The next generation needs full access to financial statements, confidence and support to take on management roles and commitment to be a successful successor.

There is a lot to consider when planning for the future, isn't there? Don't let this scare you. In fact, I hope this report has given you a little insight and perhaps motivation to be proactive.

How often do we catch ourselves making a comment about 'time' passing us by; and in most cases faster than we'd like? Our lives are busy with things to do, people to visit and places to go. As you may already know I am a big advocate of "Life is what you make it, so why not make the most of it?" I believe that success will come to those who work hard and happiness to those who are appreciative. Being spontaneous is always fun and communicating honestly is essential, two things that I have learned from two very special people in my life.

It is with an affectionate heart that I reflect on the past 5 years, as it seems almost surreal and somewhat ironic. As the eldest of five farm girls who persevered through the misfortune of losing our beloved parents, I am reminded of how lucky we are to have had the opportunity to learn from, to grow with and to love our parents for the time we did.

Not all families can say that adversity has brought them closer together.

In conclusion, I'd like to encourage farm families to celebrate life as it was in the past, as it is in the present and as it may be in the future because we are all a living legacy of those who helped shaped us.

# Resources

## Websites

Léona Dargis Website/Blog: <http://leonadargis.com/>

Nuffield Canada: <http://nuffield.ca/>

Reg Shandro - Farmacist Advisory Services Inc.: <http://regshandro.com/>

FarmOn Foundation: <http://farmon.com/>

New Zealand Young Farmers: <http://www.youngfarmers.co.nz/>

Canadian Young Farmers Forum: <http://cyff.ca/>

Gardenasia: <http://www.gardenasia.com/>

Free The Children: <http://www.freethechildren.com/>

Olds College: <http://oldscollege.ca/>

## Videos

FarmOn Foundation #FarmVoices:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=2TsQs40EoIk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=2TsQs40EoIk)

Ricken Patel Commonwealth Lecture 2013:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qHtMAVxS690&feature=youtu.be&a>

## Books

‘Managing the Multi-Generational Family Farm’ Courtesy of Canadian Farm Business Management Council (CFBMC) and Farm Credit Canada (FCC) 1997

‘A Guide to Succession – Sustaining Families and Farms’ and ‘A Guide to Communication for Farm Families’ Compiled and Written by: Judy Wilkinson and Lyn Sykes (The production of this guide is funded by the Grains Research and Development Corporation in Australia.)

‘Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument’ Written by: Kenneth W Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann, CPP, Inc.

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