



BUILD WHAT LASTS
AgStrat Strategic Solutions

When Ego and Expectations Collide

5 tensions that can derail a family farm transition before the real succession conversation even begins

Farm succession conversations often look like they are about land, ownership, money, or management. Usually, they are about more than that.

For the older generation, the farm may represent a lifetime of work, sacrifice, risk, identity, and security. For the next generation, years of working in the business can create expectations about leadership, ownership, income, and the opportunity to build something of their own. Neither side necessarily has bad intentions. But **pride on one side and expectations on the other can become a toxic combination.**

1 The farm may be more than a business to the older generation

Someone who has spent forty years building a farm does not simply wake up ready to hand over the keys. The farm may be where they proved themselves, built their reputation, created financial security, and learned that their judgment could be trusted. Succession also forces an uncomfortable reality: their season of leadership will eventually end. What looks like stubbornness or control may sometimes be an attempt to protect identity, relevance, security, or a life's work. Understanding what they believe they are being asked to give up matters.

ASK YOURSELF: Beyond money and assets, what would I feel like I was losing if I were no longer the primary decision-maker?

2 The next generation needs more than a promise of 'someday'

The younger generation may have spent years working on the farm while trying to raise a family, build wealth, and create financial security of their own. They may also see opportunities to expand, add an enterprise, use technology differently, or create a new revenue stream. Those ideas may not reject what the previous generation built. They may be an attempt to answer, **'Where is there room for me to build something of my own?'** Eventually, 'just be patient' stops being a succession strategy.

ASK YOURSELF: Does the next generation have a believable path toward greater leadership, income, and ownership - or simply an expectation that their turn will eventually come?

3 Time served does not automatically create entitlement - or readiness

A next-generation family member may reasonably think, **'I have worked here for fifteen years. I have earned this.'** Maybe they have. But years of service alone do not automatically create the judgment, financial understanding, people skills, or risk-management ability required to lead the farm. At the same time, the older generation cannot keep moving the finish line. If the answer is 'you are not ready yet,' there also needs to be a clear answer to **'What would ready look like?'** The goal is neither entitlement nor indefinite waiting. It is earned progression with clear expectations.

ASK YOURSELF: Have we clearly defined what someone must demonstrate to earn greater leadership, compensation, and ownership?



BUILD WHAT LASTS
AgStrat Strategic Solutions

4 Different generations may define risk and fairness very differently

The generation that built the farm may think, **'You do not understand what it took to get this.'** The next generation may think, **'You do not understand what it costs to build a life today.'** Both may be right. One generation may see preservation; the other may see missed opportunity. Fairness is just as complicated: equal ownership among children, reward for years worked on-farm, market compensation, retirement security, and inheritance can all point in different directions. **Unspoken definitions of fairness are dangerous because everyone assumes their definition is obvious.**

ASK YOURSELF: What do I mean when I say 'fair' - and have I asked the other people involved what fair means to them?

5 Do not use ownership to solve problems that are really about something else

Families often tangle together several different questions: **management** - who makes decisions; **compensation** - what someone should earn today; **opportunity** - whether the next generation can build new revenue streams; **ownership** - who will eventually own the assets and business; **retirement security** - what the older generation needs; and **inheritance** - how family wealth passes to farm and non-farm heirs. These issues affect each other, but they are not the same question. Separating them often creates more options.

ASK YOURSELF: Are we trying to solve several different problems with one conversation about who owns the farm?

What Nobody Says Out Loud

Succession becomes especially difficult when each generation develops a private story about the other.

The older generation may think: 'They do not appreciate what I built.' 'They have not taken the risks I took.' 'They think they are entitled to what I spent my life earning.'

The younger generation may think: 'They will never let go.' 'Nothing I do will ever be enough.' 'I have sacrificed years for something that may never become mine.'

Once those stories harden, every disagreement becomes evidence. A cautious decision becomes **'Dad will never trust me.'** A request for ownership becomes **'My son thinks he is entitled to my farm.'**

"Enough humility to consider that your interpretation may not be the whole story."

Progress can begin when the older generation can say, **'I am having a harder time letting go than I expected,'** and the younger generation can say, **'I have expectations that we never actually agreed to.'**

BEFORE YOU TALK ABOUT WHO GETS WHAT

WHAT DO I NEED? What do I actually need financially, professionally, and personally from the next stage?

WHAT DO I WANT? What would I like to see happen if everything went well?

WHAT AM I AFRAID OF? What outcome am I trying hardest to prevent?

WHAT HAVE I ASSUMED? What promises or expectations do I believe exist that may never have been clearly agreed upon?

WHAT AM I WILLING TO CHANGE? What control, expectation, behavior, or preferred outcome am I personally willing to reconsider?

Answer these individually first. Then compare answers - not to immediately negotiate, but to understand.

START THE SUCCESSION CONVERSATION

Farm succession is more than a legal or financial transaction. AgStrat helps farm families work through the leadership, ownership, economic, and human questions that need to be understood before a durable transition can be built.

If your family knows a transition conversation needs to happen - but is not sure how to begin it productively - reach out to AgStrat to start a confidential conversation about the next step.

Leadership | Stewardship | Succession | Legacy

Contact AgStrat: virgil@agstratsolutions.com