



Furthering Families

What happens when a farm family loses their life's work?

The loss of any job is a stressful event. But when your job is also your way of life, as farming typically is, the loss can be even more devastating. To lose your farm is to lose a critical part of your identity.

The loss of a family farm is a life-altering event

Losing a farm is so serious that it can be compared to the loss of a family member. There are many different reasons that a farm is lost: debt, low prices, diseases, or other issues. After the loss of the farm, you may begin to question yourself and the decisions you made. This could cause a number of different feelings:

- Potential guilt for the farmer who questions his or her decisions
- Trust violation and personal loss
- Anger, resentment, and a sense of betrayal towards individuals or larger institutions

The loss of a farm is a challenging, frustrating event, usually with few clear-cut answers about why it occurred or how it could have been prevented. Recognition and acceptance of the farm loss is a long, hard road with good days and bad days. It is not a single event, but is a process. All areas of your life may be affected:

- The loss of the family farm will likely affect your role or place within your community.
- Your personal pride may be damaged, and your abilities may be called into question.
- Your financial and economic situation may be altered potentially affecting future plans. Long- and short-term planning may seem very difficult to do under such uncertain circumstances.
- Relationships with your family and friends may change. Some relationships may even become strained or be in conflict as you move forward away from the loss.

The loss of the family farm is stressful

In addition to the loss of the family farm, all of these other changes within your life can cause an extreme amount of stress. The stressful changes are potentially overwhelming for you and your family leading to a crisis situation. However, with these changes comes opportunities. Things *will not* and *cannot* be the same as they were before the loss of the farm. Many activities and events will be markedly different. Remember the following as you move forward through this difficult stage in your life:

People experience loss in many different ways. In general, though, they go through the following stages of grief or loss with some consistency. These stages are gradual and a part of a process that takes time:

- Shock and denial
- Fear and panic
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Despair
- Acceptance
- Incorporation (becomes a part of everyday life)

You may experience a number of different feelings and reactions that are normal such as:

- Feeling tired, having trouble sleeping and eating, having headaches, or feeling dizzy
- Having trouble focusing on things or working through problems. Your memory may be affected, and you may have trouble remembering familiar people and places.
- Feeling guilty and helpless, or becoming overly sensitive. You may doubt yourself and your choices, and you may become moody or angry.

After the loss of the family farm

The loss of the family farm is an enormous loss for you and your family. In order to move forward, you will need to make other, new changes for your future success such as determining what you want or need to change and develop a specific plan to change it. Is it a new career? A new home or living situation? Develop a series of action steps that you or your family need to take to make these changes occur.

- Pick one change at a time so that the changes are manageable.
- Develop an action plan, specifying what steps need to be put in place for changes to occur
- Carry out your action plan.

References

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- Farmer, Val. *Loss of Farm like a death*. *Farmers' Advance*. March 6, 2002.
- Griffore, Robert J. & Phenice, Lillian A. *Bovine Tuberculosis: The Perspective of Farm Families*. 2001.

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- Evaluate how the change is working after a week, a month, and long-term.

Learn to let go of those things that you have no control over. Know the difference between what you can change and what you cannot. It is not healthy to spend time dwelling on the things you may have no control over. Develop a list of the things that you do have control over, and post this list in an area where you are able to see it regularly.

These are tips for coping with the stresses of change:

- Structure your time by keeping busy with your everyday activities. Try to live your life as normally as possible.
- Talk to close friends and family members. In addition to those who have been affected by the loss of the farm, it is important to talk to others who may be able to offer you a new or different perspective.
- Avoid using drugs, alcohol, or nicotine.
- Write down your feelings in a journal.
- Use deep breathing when you start feeling stressed.
- Make time for yourself as often as possible. Do the things that you enjoy and that calm you down. Take a morning walk, talk with a close family friend or relative, or do whatever hobby or activity that interests you.
- Take life one day at a time knowing that you will get through this.
- Use this time to reflect on the changes that are taking place in your life. Reflect on what has occurred focusing on the positive.
- If your stress levels are worrying you or members of your family, consider a visit to your doctor or other health care professional in your area.