Getting Your Hands Back on the Wheel

Focus on ‘Controlling the Controllables’

Jon Jaffe, Farm Business Consultant
“It is not always about the finances...

Folks can also become overwhelmed with the intense workload that can lead to burnout (physically and emotionally). Often, a strategy for financial improvement is key, but sometimes just defining where you want to go helps put things into perspective.

And sometimes where we are going is defining an exit strategy; I’ve seen that bring peace of mind to folks as well.”
• Born and raised on a dairy farm
• Had my own dairy farm
• 36-year career with Farm Credit East, including 20 years as a lender and 16 years as a consultant
• Worked with hundreds of farmers in New England and New York
Experience

• Dealt with aftermath of suicide and unexpected deaths
• Said “no” as a lender
• Facilitated exit strategies as a consultant
• Focus on interpersonal and emotional issues
• Focus on both senior and junior generations
Farming Reality

- Farm business is often a 24/7 focus
- Even when not “working” many farmers think about what needs to be done
- Separating business time from personal time can be difficult, especially during the busy season
- Farming can be an emotional roller coaster

This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-NC
Remember Why You Are Farming

Family Heritage
Earning a Living
Love of the Land
Way of Life
Control the Controllables

- Most farm businesses deal with both controllable and non-controllable issues
- Need to understand which issues fall into each category
- Key is to treat them differently and minimize the non-controllable
What are your controllables?

- Record keeping: you have full control...maybe with some help
- The product you produce
- Developing expertise in your area of specialization
- Maintaining pride in your product
- Ultimate decision making regarding your farming operation
What are your non-controllables?

- Weather
- Competition
- Industry cycles
- Federal, state and local regulations
- Growing older/health issues
How do you effectively control the controllables?

- Develop a plan
- Follow the plan
- Use daily or regular lists
- “Bite that Frog” analogy
- Check off accomplishments
- Give yourself a pat on the back and mini rewards
MOVING NON-CONTROLLABLES TO CONTROLLABLES

- Weather – diversify, insure or hedge
- Competition – differentiate your business product
- Industry cycles – understand and plan for them
- Federal, state and local regulations – don’t spend time fighting them, but understand them and potentially use them to your benefit
- Growing older/health issues – work on staying healthy, utilize insurance, work smarter
Learn what others in your industry are doing about the challenges you are facing

Get help, especially with the controllables like record keeping

Be proactive in dealing with lenders and vendors as they are likely to be far more flexible

Family will help you if you let them

Confide in a friend, mentor, clergy, etc.
Changes won’t happen overnight
Put estimated timetables on projects
Flexibility
Determination
Monitor Your Progress Compared to Your Plan

- What areas are ahead of plan?
- What areas need to improve?
- What changes need to be made to your business?
- What changes need to be made to your plan?
Step Back for a 30,000 Foot View

- Are you making progress toward your big picture goals?
- Is your progress fast enough?
- What does your one to three year future look like?
THERE ARE ALWAYS OPTIONS

• ...even if they don’t seem likely or even possible
• You control your destiny
• Often a great sense of relief when the decision is made to “move on”
• Easier to look back than look forward

You are not alone!
Closing Thoughts & Questions

Jon Jaffe, Farm Business Consultant  
Jon.Jaffe@Farmcrediteast.com  
860.933.7303

Thank you!