



Better farm family communication means happier families and more profit

Written for Grain & Graze 2 by Mike Roberts Communications, Research and Consulting

It was the end of a cold winter's day in Farrell Flat and I watched as the undiscussable was passed around the table from one farmer's calloused hand to that of his neighbor or his wife or maybe his son. OK, fair enough, better improve the picture! The undiscussable is actually Elaine Froese's **UNDISCUSSABULL™**, a soft toy in the shape of a bull that she uses in her farm family workshops as a talking stick. When you've got the bull, you've got the floor!

As each participant in the Doing the Tough Things Right workshop grabbed the bull by the horns, they stated what the day taught them about farm family communication, what positive action they were planning to make in their family and when they would commit to taking that action.

Elaine Froese is a professional speaker, writer and farm family coach from Canada, specializing in succession planning, whose expertise is sought after across North America. Elaine helps family businesses talk about the tough issues and act on them. She's a catalyst for courageous conversations, new scenarios and more profitable businesses. Many of her clients say: "I wish I had met you 10 years ago."

With the funding assistance of Grain & Graze 2, Agrilink's Mick Faulkner succeeded in bringing Elaine out to South Australia to work with farm families in the Mid North High Rainfall Zone Adaptive Management Group. In his welcome to the group at the start of the day, Mick made the point that although new technical advances in agriculture would continue to make incremental changes to crop and animal production, perhaps the potential for the biggest gains may lie in how we structure and operate the farm family business. The key to shaping our businesses to reduce or eliminate the roadblocks to better farm viability and profit is the ability to improve the communication between the people who have some stake in those businesses.

To illustrate that, Elaine told the group about research findings indicating that farms that held regular business meetings where everyone had a voice were 21% more profitable than those that did not.

Elaine says that farmers are accustomed to putting their crop in on time, being good stewards of the land and livestock and cultivating the ability daily to 'do the right thing'. They do, however, have a blind spot capable of causing much angst. "The tension resides around the lack of clear, open, conflict-free communication that would catapult businesses into more successful scenarios for future expansion, succession and legacy. Family businesses need to talk and ACT!"

Her book, *Do the Tough Things Right...How to Prevent Communication Disasters in Family Business*, reflects her extensive work and experience as a farm family business coach, columnist and regular conference speaker in Canada.

Better farm family communication means happier families and more profit

Some of the topics of Elaine Froece's workshop and her book include:

Fairness: "A family business is not a piece of pie. You don't take a viable farm and cut it into four equal pieces like a pumpkin pie!"

- "What is fair DNA pay? What do I get just for being the son? What value do you put on sweat?"
- "As a young girl, and later a young woman, I was overlooked! How do we treat the girls fairly?"

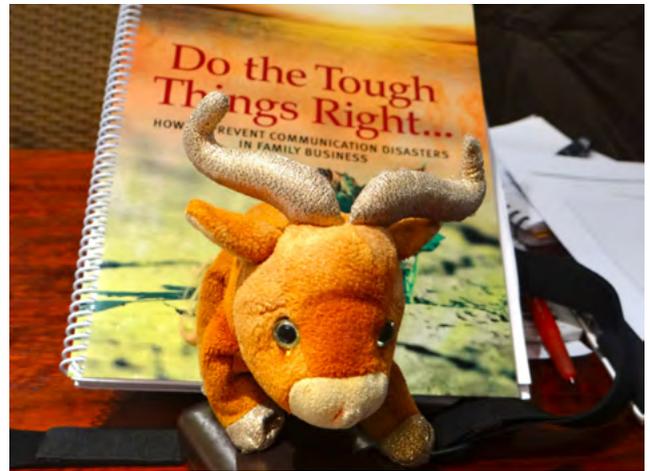
Finances: "Finances are a tough and critical thing."

- "Net worth is not the only indicator of the health of your business. I am also curious if you are rich in relationship and if there are fights about money."

Family Dynamics are as Important as Working Capital

• "Many farm folks are focused on building working capital. I advise you to pay attention to encouraging the heart of your business and work on growing relational capital, to increase your business's emotional bank account."

- Help to resolve farm conflicts
- Picking fights you can win
- Meet to make things happen
- Family business codes of conduct
- Talkers make more money
- Why should I be a better listener?
- Why is grandma a bully?
- Why fathers need to be good leaders



Family Respect and Forgiveness are Keys to Success

- Treat people with integrity
- What your daughter-in-law needs
- Respect for homemaking

Farm Estate Plans are About Your Death, NOT Succession Plans

• "A succession plan is about the transfer of labour, management and ownership which is best done when the founder is alive. An estate plan is about what happens upon the founder's death. The gap is the 20 years after the founder lets go of the business at 62 or 72 and lives longer than expected to 82 or 92. This is the lifestyle plan than many folks don't even think of."

- Enlighten your team of advisors
- Where there's a WILL there's a way
- Leave a how-to manual
- Is your funeral planned?
- Final gifts for mum
- Tips for widows

Fulfillment...A life with purpose and meaning.

• "People who are aligned with their passion and purpose can celebrate success because their business energy is renewable. Folks who are not passionate about the business anymore need to plan for change and a new life chapter."

Fear of Failure Looms Large, especially for men.

- Men have a fear of failure and women often have a fear of rejection
 - Breaking up is hard to do...firing your advisors.



Better farm family communication means happier families and more profit

- Why won't dad talk?
- Be the CEO of your farm...focus and execute.
- Gifts with strings attached
- Freeloading on the farm
- Don't split the farmyard

Feeling Good is Good for Business

- "Sometimes the best thing to do is to sleep on a major decision. I am amazed how many men avoid seeing their doctors, and therefore do not ensure their physical and mental health is helping, not hurting their ability to make sound choices for their business and families."

If that little snapshot of Elaine's workshop and her materials struck a chord with you PLEASE go to her website www.elainefroese.com and check out a wealth of information there in the form of blog posts, publications and video presentations. There are also many You Tube clips available on line and a great one to start with is her address to the Grain Farmers of Ontario: (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgYGz4oqy5Q&feature=c4-overview&list=UU-Mh-WGRaFXctrStXo8QNVw>).

Grain & Graze 2 has Elaine working with a group of South Australian farm advisors on her visit too. That will help to transfer some of her skills to augment the toolboxes of our own farm business advisory community. Grab the UNDISCUSSABULL™ by the horns and do something positive for your farm family business today!

