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# Family Communication in Ag Operations: Getting the Cards on the Table

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**FAMILY COMMUNICATION IN AG OPERATIONS:  
GETTING THE CARDS ON THE TABLE**

Randy McKee  
Estate Planning Services, Inc.  
Rapid City, SD

**Discovering what everyone REALLY wants!**

- 1. Why communication is so important.**
  - A. Saving the family relationships
  - B. Avoiding the Family Feud
    1. Have to back this up with a plan and with good documents
  - C. Producing desirable outcomes
    1. Starts with having a plan
    2. Plan does not have to be carved in stone
    3. New techniques offer flexibility
      - A. Trusts
      - B. Durable Powers of Attorney
      - C. Business Entities
  
- 2. Why we have difficulty communicating.**
  - A. Control
    1. Fear of loss of control
    2. Fear someone we don't like will have control
    3. Learned poor communication behaviors from predecessors— parents, grandparents, uncles, etc.
  
  - B. Families are not trained in communication skills.
    1. Recent survey of Ag families ranked their performance low in the following areas:  
Handling arguments  
Fair criticism  
Family problem solving
    2. Arguing is not Quarreling
  
  - C. Extended families
    1. Typically one or two stay on place and others are gone – possibly urban
      - a. Those children off the place are usually not interested until something happens
      - b. “Outside” children are often disconnected with place and their spouses are simply not knowledgeable about family operation
    2. Mistrust or dislike son-in-law or daughter-in-law
    3. Jealousy among siblings

3. **The downside of not communicating.**
  - A. The Family Feud
  - B. Producing undesirable outcome
  - C. Years of time
  - D. Legal battles and costs
  
4. **Sure, but how do we do it.**
  - A. Providing understanding of differences between Arguing vs. Quarreling
  - B. Respectful listening
  - C. Family Vision Matrix®
    1. Share vision of future from each perspective
    2. Ask for what you want
    3. Everyone has opportunity to participate
      - a. Example of vision matrix
  - D. Family meeting
    1. Held in neutral place
    2. Use professional facilitator
    3. It's all about getting the cards on the table and giving each family member the respect they think they deserve
  
5. **Every family has strengths and weaknesses.**
  
6. **Examples – Purdue Study – Sharon DeVaney, PhD**
  - A. Paternal, Autonomous
  - B. Attitude, Preparation, Timing, Behavior
  - C. Direct Control, Indirect Control, No Control

[www.ces.purdue.edu/farmtransfer](http://www.ces.purdue.edu/farmtransfer)

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The Family Vision Matrix® is available in booklet form with directions.