

WATER STREET SMARTS

April 26, 2011

Having a Vision and Mission for Your Farm

KRVN's Ken Rahjes speaks with Mike Gustafson, Water Street Solutions Chief Operating Officer

Q: Today we're going to talk about *vision* and *mission statements* and why they're important to a farming operation. Mike, can you take a minute to define what exactly *vision* and *mission statements* are?

A: I sure can, Ken. Talking about a vision and a mission statement seems a little out of place for a farm operation until you realize they can provide the direction and guidance for the decisions made on the farm. Now, the vision statement provides the picture of the ideal future state of the farm; it's not about what the farm operation is today, but what you hope it will become. The mission statement, though, is more concerned with the overall aim of the farm operation; it's a simple statement of the farmer's reason for being in business.

The vision and mission statements answer questions like: "Why do you farm?" "What do you do in your farm operation?" "What is your farm's purpose?" "What beliefs and values do you hold?" and they define your farm's operations.

Q: Can you explain why creating a vision and a mission statement for your farm is so important?

A: The vision and the mission statement are developed so that everyone in the farm operation has a clear understanding of what you want the future to look like. It's like the scene from *Alice in Wonderland* when the Cheshire cat asks Alice where she wants to go, and Alice answers, "I- I don't know." So the cat answers Alice, "Then it doesn't matter. If you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there."

So whether your operation is two people or 20 people, each person should have a clear understanding of what the farm's overall vision and mission are, in order to move the operation forward in the same direction. On a day-to-day basis, everyone on the farm makes some kind of choices; when they know what the big picture is, the answers can become more clear.

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Q: This still sounds a little abstract. Can you put this into a perspective that might be a little easier to relate to?

A: Think about planning a perfect vacation. That would be the vision. Let's say that we're going to visit California. That would be the mission. So we could take a tour across Western Nebraska, go through the Rockies, pass through Nevada and then arrive in California. Regardless of the route, establishing a mission to travel from Nebraska to California gives us a clear, common understanding of where we're headed.

Q: So what are some practical tips that farmers can use to develop their operation's vision and mission statements?

A: First, they need to take a look at the operation and do some forward-thinking about how the operation looks in the future, say about five or ten years down the road. And then second, have every person involved in the operation take time to define the operation's beliefs and values. Then, each person should answer the questions that we talked about earlier.

Once everyone has answered these questions individually, bring everyone involved in the operation together to discuss their input. Your team will see what makes your operation unique. Together you can begin to purposefully build the legacy that's your farm.