



## Seeking opportunities in the remote learning environment

The opportunity to make up for my personal dereliction of duty in teaching my teenagers life skills and holding meaningful discussion regarding our family vision for the future has been an amazing gift resulting from our mandated home stay. Thankful to have this second chance, I brainstormed how this same opportunity could be exploited in the remaining weeks of my classes; that is, to take full advantage of the fact a majority of our students found themselves completing the semester together with their families on the home farm or ranch.

I enlisted the aid of Crystal Schaunamn, an extension agent in McIntosh county, North Dakota, a certified Farm Succession Coordinator, and co-author of the NDSU Extension program called Design Your Succession Plan. I asked students in our introductory agricultural finance course to invite their families to our scheduled class on succession planning. More than three dozen students had one or both parents with them during this remote class period conducted with Blackboard Collaborate Ultra.

Crystal described succession planning as a continuous process that involves transferring knowledge, skills, labor, management, control and ownership between generations and as including business, retirement, transition and estate planning. As she discussed the process, she shared a number of detailed examples, including those from her own participation in the succession planning process. The focus on the practical aspects clearly resonated with students and their families. One student noted, "I have been to many succession planning workshops and heard speakers and they always tell you the why you should do it but don't necessarily get into the nitty gritty on how to go about it. Crystal included details as they apply to us and I can now use this information to talk with my grandma about what she is planning for our farm."

Crystal stressed that communication is the cornerstone to a successful succession plan, and that getting generations together to talk openly and honestly about their wants, needs and goals is critical. The value of communication was seconded by students and their participating parents. One student noted, "An unexpected silver lining from being back home as I complete schooling is the communication that has opened between my parents and me. I hope to take over management of my family's farm down the line and discussion with my peers in the classroom and their families led to conversations that we all agreed were much needed. Being intentional with having my parents attend this course has made all the difference with our communication about the farm's future, as well as provided them insight into what this "new normal" of online schooling is like." Several students

reported a meaningful family discussion about succession of the farm or ranch ensued immediately after the class period adjourned. An important focus for many was in response to the discussion regarding the difference between equal and fair when there are family members who return to the farm and those who do not. This topic, often challenging to broach within the family, was a natural conversation when raised by an invited speaker during class.

The teaching tip is to think outside the box, brainstorming for ideas as changes in circumstances create not only challenges but opportunities for enhanced learning. How can we benefit from the student learning environment include the family? For more information about NDSU's succession planning materials and workshops visit [www.ag.ndsu.edu/succession](http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/succession).

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