Multi-Family, Farm or Ranch Families Can Foster Resiliency during Tough Times

By Roger T. Williams

Increasingly, farm and ranch families are forming intergenerational operations (parents and adult children) or multi-family (brothers/sisters or unrelated adults) farming operations. These multi-family operations—whether they are partnerships, corporations or LLCs—can be seen as ways of gaining strength, flexibility and support for the arduous task of farming or ranching. They offer: multiple skills (one good with cattle, one with crops, one with machinery, one with finances), a larger labor pool during peak seasons, flexibility in taking vacations, greater brain power for making big decisions, social and moral support during difficult times, and camaraderie for the day-to-day work of farming or ranching. In short, these multi-family operations can help to create resiliency for farm or ranch families.

What Resiliency Is

Resiliency is the ability to bounce back from adversity, setbacks or life changes. Resilient people are energetically engaged with life, resistant to giving up in the face of problems that would overwhelm non-resilient people. The book Resiliency: How to Bounce Back by Tessa Albert Warschaw and Dee Barlow (New York: Master Media Ltd, 1995) outlines ten components of resiliency:

1. **Unambivalent commitment to life**: Resilient people have a positive attitude/belief that life is worth living and this gives them the passion and courage to bounce back from adversity.

2. **Self-Confidence**: Resilient people believe they can understand the world around them, set realistic goals and develop the skills to achieve those goals; they see problems and changes as opportunities for growth and learning.

3. **Adaptable**: Resilient people are adaptable and cooperative, able to modify their behaviors and habits to work well with other people and groups.

4. **Resourceful**: Resilient people know what resources are available or where they can turn for information and support in problem solving; they are imaginative in the way they use resources to solve problems.

5. **Willing to risk**: It isn’t always possible to know the outcome of actions in complex situations; resilient people take intelligent risks, grounded in real possibilities with a
good chance for success.

6. **Accept personal responsibility:** Resilient people don’t make excuses for their mistakes; they “own” their mistakes and, by doing so, turn them into positive learning experiences.

7. **Perspective:** Resilient people know what is important and what is not; they put their energy into core issues/activities; they dismiss—often with humor—insignificant issues.

8. **Open to new ideas:** Resilient people take in new information eagerly; they don’t have a narrow outlook on life or close their minds to ideas that would increase their capacity to learn/adapt.

9. **Are proactive:** Resilient people meet challenges with positive action rather than waiting until the only recourse possible is a reaction to actions already taken by others.

10. **Attentive:** Resilient people pay attention to the world around them; when you speak to them, they listen; they don’t shut out other views that might offer perspective on their situation.

It’s clear from these characteristics that a farmer or rancher needs to be at least somewhat resilient (adaptable, accept personal responsibility, open to new ideas, attentive) to participate in a multi-family operation. It’s also clear that a farmer or rancher could gain resilience during tough times by being part of such a multi-family operation: they could gain resources, perspective, new ideas and self-confidence by being part of a multi-family operation.

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