Purpose of the study:

To explore the decision-making and problem-solving approaches farm family businesses use in these changing times.

How information was collected:

In 1999 and 2000, 22 Minnesota farm families, who had been part of a larger 1997 farm family business study, agreed to be videotaped as they were posed questions as family business groups. The videotaping occurred in their homes and questions pertained to:

a) How decisions are made
b) Who makes decisions
c) How disagreement is handled
d) Business goals
e) Changes in the farm business
f) Who does what in the business

Who participated in the study?

22 Minnesota farm families participated, including 14 couples and 8 multigenerational farm families. The average age of the eldest male in the household was over 55 years old, and the eldest female was about 52 years of age. 18% of the oldest males worked in off-farm employment, and 60% of the oldest females worked off the farm averaging 31 hours per week.

Farm Description

These farm families owned an average of 577 acres and rented an average of 304 acres. The average farm acres in production in 1999 were 798. Fifty percent of the farm families reported total value of farm sales over $100,000. Field crops were 86% of farm sales, hogs were 41%, and dairy was 27%.

Future research:

The videotaped portion of the interview has provided helpful insight into understanding how farm families interact with each other and, in turn, how these interactions impact both family and farm outcomes.

We are currently studying the videotaped interactions of husband-wife couples compared to multi-generation farm families. We are also comparing family interaction by gender.

Initial findings are found below:

Husband and wives:

When comparing the eldest husband and wife in a farm family, we found the husbands showed more evidence of humor/laughter than their wives did. Yet at the same time the men also exhibited more externalized negative, or negativity expressed in the form of anger or criticisms about people or things outside the immediate setting.

Eldest women in the farm families, on the other hand, showed more positive mood than their husbands did.

Multi-generation and one-couple farm families:

The multi-generation farm families showed greater negotiation/compromise skills, which is a willingness to settle differences by being mutually open to change, than the one-generation couple families exhibited.