Vision and Mission Statements

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An important key to any successful journey is to start with the end in mind. This is true whether the journey is a carefully planned vacation, the initiation of a new business enterprise, or the restructuring of an existing business. Two tools that are used to guide the business are a vision statement and a mission statement.

Vision Statement

During the strategic planning process, farm business managers should write a business vision statement and a mission statement. The vision statement indicates the characteristics of the farm in the future. The vision statement can help answer many questions about the business. In writing the business vision statement, the farm business management team is trying to arrive at a consensus about what they want the farm to be in the future. As such, the vision statement for the farm business provides a basis for leading the farm business into the future.

Most vision statements include some aspects of three important elements. The three important elements are a core ideology, an envisioned future, and recognition of service to stakeholders. The core ideology of the vision statement contains a statement about the firm's values and "reason for being". The envisioned future is a statement that describes what the future is like for the company if it achieves its most important goal. The final part of the vision statement is the recognition of how the farm business serves it's stakeholders including owners/creditors, employees, and its customers. It is important that a Vision Statement be able to stand the test of time and provide guidance to decision makers as they determine the direction of the farm in the future.

If you have never seen a vision statement, it may be helpful to review some examples. The following example is for MBC Farms, the case grain and livestock farm located in northern Indiana. The farm consists of 3,000 acres and a 250 cow dairy herd. In addition to the commodity corn and soybeans, the farm also produces high oil corn and food grade corn. The farm also produces hay and silage that is used in the dairy.

Vision Statement for MBC Farms
MBC Farms will be an agribusiness focused on the profitable, progressive, and sustainable production of premium quality identity-preserved grains, oilseeds, and dairy products. MBC Farms will be a respected, responsible neighbor and an asset to our community. We prefer a rural lifestyle and are willing to embrace change as a means to that end. MBC Farms provides the opportunity for our children and employees to participate in production agriculture either as owners and/or managers of the business

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The future envisioned by the MBC Farms' management team is influenced by the things they value highly. A key element of the visioning process is a reaffirmation of one's values. For MBC Farms, operating a profitable business is valued. They also value owning farmland, being good neighbors and gaining the respect of these neighbors. Providing opportunities for their children in the family business is also important.

The vision statement has the potential to provide guidance when unanticipated problems and opportunities present themselves in the future. Having given careful consideration to the future characteristics of the business, it is easier to make decisions about opportunities that arise at unexpected times. The vision statement also provides a useful starting point for developing a set of goals and objectives for the farm. The goals and objective of the farm business are those tasks that must be achieved for the long-term vision of the farm to be accomplished. Goals and objectives are discussed in the Implementing Strategies material.

Vision statement exercises

Several exercises have been developed to help stimulate and organize your thinking about your vision of the farm business. Take some time to answer the questions. Get other members of the management team to do the same. Set aside some time in which members of the management team can share and discuss their vision of the business. The final exercise asks you to write a vision statement for the business. This statement should be one that all members of the management team can agree with. If you would like feedback from class members for your instructor, feel free to circulate your statement to others. The statement's format, its length, or items included are not critical. The most important consideration in the development of a vision statement is its usefulness in managing your business.

Mission Statement

Unlike the vision statement, a statement focusing on the future, the business mission statement places focus on the current farm business. The business mission statement outlines "who we are, what we do, and for whom we do it." It provides a concise summary of the farm business's purpose. The mission statement deals with what the farm business is about and why.

Usually the mission statement will be very specific about selected key information concerning the farm business. Examples of key information include customers that are served, products that are produced, the nature of core business activities or competencies, and unique aspects or accomplishments. Any facts that are useful for characterizing the farm business in terms of what it is and what it does are fair game for inclusion in the farm business mission. In some cases the mission statement is reduced to only a short sentence or two.

Again, if you have never seen a mission statement, reviewing examples can be helpful. The mission statement for MBC Farms is presented here. The mission statement for MBC Farms is aligned with the vision statement. The mission statement focuses on the here and now, and it is streamlined. But the connection between the mission and vision are apparent in

terms of the focus on grains, specialty crops, and milk production, the focus on profitability, and the focus on doing the things necessary to provide a legacy.

Mission Statement for MBC Farms
MBC Farms is a producer of grains, oilseeds, specialty crops, and milk. Our mission is to be recognized by our business associates and competitors as one of the top producers in our area and to make sure that productivity translates into prosperity and growth for everyone involved with our farm.

Mission statement exercises

As with the vision statement, a series of exercises is provided to help stimulate and organize your thinking. As with the vision statement, getting input and ideas from all members of the management team is important. As with the vision statement, you are asked to organize your thoughts into a mission statement. Be sure that this statement is one that all members of the management team agree with. The exact format of the mission statement, the items included, or its length is not critical. The most critical aspect of the final product is its use to you in managing your business.

Final Comments on Vision and Mission Statements

Although many people have biases about what a good vision or mission statement should look like, this focus on appearances is generally not very helpful. Farm business managers should not get bogged down in technicalities such as how long or short each statement should be or how specific or general each statement should be. Instead focus on gaining a better understanding of yourself, your business, and the business environment in which you operate. Any way that you find to clearly express that newfound or rediscovered understanding will produce a useful statement.

The purpose of a farm business vision statement is to express management's vision for the future of the business in words that will provide direction and motivation to everyone involved in the business. An effective farm business mission statement identifies the essential elements of the current business. Since management of most farm businesses involves more than one person, the development of these statements becomes a communications tool for the members of the management team. These statements can also be used to improve communication with other business stakeholders.

More often than not, a gap exists between where the farm business is now and where it wants to be in the future. It is the recognition of this gap that gives strategic planning its power to provide direction and motivation for the farm business. Farm business managers must bridge this gap if the vision is to have any chance of becoming reality. They must evaluate implications of the gap and factor them into farm business goals and action plans.