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## Utah State University Extension Farm and Ranch Succession Program

Joshua Dallin  
*Utah State University*, [joshua.dallin@usu.edu](mailto:joshua.dallin@usu.edu)

Jacob Hadfield  
*Utah state University*, [jacob.hadfield@usu.edu](mailto:jacob.hadfield@usu.edu)

Matthew D. Garcia  
*Utah State University*, [matthew.garcia@usu.edu](mailto:matthew.garcia@usu.edu)

Ryan Larsen  
*Utah State University*, [ryan.larsen@usu.edu](mailto:ryan.larsen@usu.edu)

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## **Outcomes of the Utah State University Extension Farm and Ranch Succession Program**

Joshua Dallin  
Extension Assistant Professor  
Box Elder County  
[Joshua.Dallin@usu.edu](mailto:Joshua.Dallin@usu.edu)

Jacob Hadfield  
Extension Assistant Professor  
Cache County  
[Jacob.Hadfield@usu.edu](mailto:Jacob.Hadfield@usu.edu)

Matthew Garcia, Ph.D.  
Extension Beef Specialist  
[Matthew.Garcia@usu.edu](mailto:Matthew.Garcia@usu.edu)

Ryan Larsen, Ph.D.  
Extension Agriculture Economics Specialist  
[Ryan.Larsen@usu.edu](mailto:Ryan.Larsen@usu.edu)

*Major program theme:* Farms, Agricultural Economics

### **Abstract**

The transition process of farms and ranches presents many unique challenges to producers. In response, Utah State University (USU) Extension has leveraged resources developed by other states to form a farm succession team to provide a unique Extension-driven program that offers educational training, tools, and strategies for Utah farm and ranch producers.

### **Introduction**

In 2016, 80% of all owner-operated land nationwide was owned by individuals who were 55 years or older (Bigelow et al., 2016). This staggering statistic, coupled with the reported average age of producers in Utah being 58.7 years old, explains why Utah farm and ranch producers have listed succession planning as one of the most important programmatic needs from USU Extension (USDA NASS, 2017; Narine, 2019).

The succession or transition of farms and ranches presents many unique challenges. Often, producers are unfamiliar with the succession process. In response to this gap, USU Extension has

developed and modified educational tools and training that allow producers to create their own unique succession plans pertaining to business, retirement, transition, and estate planning at a pace that is comfortable to them. The workbook tool, when completed, also offers significant financial savings to the farm or ranch producer.

### **Response**

In response to the demonstrated need for a Farm and Ranch Succession Program, USU Extension developed a team consisting of a Beef Extension Specialist, Farm Management Specialist, and two County-level Extension faculty. The combined skillset of the team and their existing relationship with producers contribute to the program's effectiveness. To best serve producers, the USU Extension team traveled to North Dakota State University to receive training and certifications on farm transition and succession topics. As a result, resources were developed and/or modified to best meet the needs of Utah producers. The USU Extension Farm and Ranch Succession program began in December of 2019. Tools were provided through PowerPoint modules and a workbook adopted from North Dakota State University (NDSU, 2021).

### **Participants**

Participants attending the training were a mix of both owners (older generation who controls farm and ranch assets) and successors (potential heirs to the farm and ranch). Ages of participants ranged from 24 to 74 years old. A total of 30 participants from five (5) counties attended trainings, with 60% being owners, and 40% being successors. These participants were the target audience for the program.



Participants completed face-to-face interactive sessions spanning three days for an average of three hours per day. Trainings were held in Box Elder, Cache, and Rich Counties.

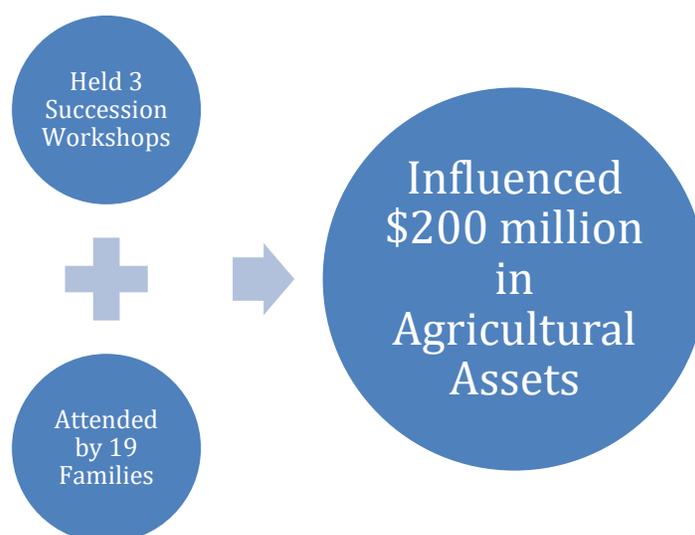
### **Outcomes and Impact**

An existing evaluation tool was used to measure short-term outcomes of the Farm and Ranch Succession Program (NDSU, 2021). Evaluation results represent workshops completed in three counties. After completing the training, 100% of participants strongly agreed succession planning is important, 87% strongly agreed that they know the value of developing a vision for

their farm and ranch legacy, 90% strongly agreed that developing the next generation farmers/ranchers is extremely important, and 73% strongly agreed that they know what information is needed to meet with a professional to create a farm succession plan.

As a result of the workshop, 100% of participants stated that they intend to start a conversation with their family about succession planning, 86% plan to form a vision for the future of the family farm/ranch, 79% intend to gather information/documents that are needed for succession, 83% were already visiting or intend to visit with a professional about their succession plan, and 90% of participants intended to use the workbook to begin their succession plan.

Producers attending the Farm and Ranch Succession Program held over 60,000 acres of agricultural land. To date, 19 Farm/Ranch Families have participated with approximately \$200 million in agricultural assets.



### Public Value

The USU Extension Farm and Ranch Succession program has received positive testimonials from participants. While attendees reported an increase of knowledge about succession planning, one participant said, *“the tools given allowed us to make a lot of progress by talking and not fighting about the topics.”* Another attendee mentioned, *“I’m here to preserve my farm and my family... had my grandfather created a succession plan, I may have a relationship with my cousins and other family. Because of lack of preparation our family was torn apart by greed... I don’t want that to happen to my kids.”*

The program team is continuously adjusting program activities based on participants’ feedback. Some adjustments include modifying subject matter, shortening meeting times, and lessening the overall program to two days. In response to COVID-19, this program has also been modified to

be delivered virtually to ensure accessibility and participants' safety during the pandemic. The Farm and Ranch Succession program have gained momentum and is currently being planned for replication across the State. In 2021, it is projected that the program will be delivered in at least three new counties and repeated in existing counties due to its demand by producers. The program team has set goals to evaluate mid-term and long-term impacts by conducting follow-up evaluations to participants that have completed the program. The need for farm and ranch succession is evident across the state of Utah, and USU Extension is making a deliberate effort to expand relevant education and resources to producers.

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