



Douglas Green Consulting Ltd

WINTER NEWSLETTER

Included in this issue:

- Family Business Meetings – could they help drive progress in your business?

Welcome to the Winter edition of the Douglas Green Consulting Ltd newsletter.

With Christmas now behind us, we are reminded of the challenges associated with working and living with family. Maintaining a professional relationship at work and making sure you have valuable family time outside of work is a difficult balancing act. So what tools are available to help with this? Many family businesses are now introducing regular family meetings to improve communication, understanding and progress. Read on to find out more.



Family Meetings – A help or a hinderance?



When asked what challenges they face, many farmers will state 'price volatility, recruitment and staff retention, disease threats, the weather and more recently Brexit'. However, more often than not communication and family relations will be overlooked. These can be huge influencers with regards to the success of a business. So why should they be given consideration and what can family farms do to address these challenges?

Family Meetings – do they really work?

When you live and work with the same family members it can be difficult to maintain a personal and professional life balance. However, family business meetings can help give structure to the business, improve communications and relations between all parties involved **if undertaken correctly!**



We asked those already undertaking regular meetings and they listed the following as some of the key reasons for introducing family farm meetings:

- ✓ Allows everyone involved in the business a chance to speak and offer their opinions
- ✓ Maintains communications between various generations of family
- ✓ Ensures everyone involved is up to date with all information and activities within the business
- ✓ Allows regular feedback on items actioned at previous meetings
- ✓ A chance to update everyone on the 'big picture' influences and how that might impact on the family business i.e. Brexit, Disease Risks, New Legislation etc
- ✓ Gives family members a platform to discuss challenges and find solutions together – a real 'team approach'
- ✓ A platform for feedback and praise

As a family you may already be discussing items at meal or break times, but a structured family meeting with a proper agenda will ensure everyone involved is aware of what is going on and enables action points for progress to be delegated and followed up.

Communication is key!

Lack of communication will drive inefficiency and resentment amongst staff, be it family or non-family staff members.



The Key to Success – how to structure your meeting



1. Less is more! - Decide who needs to attend the meeting, does every family member need to attend or just key members with briefing notes sent to other interested parties?
2. Appoint a chairman/facilitator – this can be someone independent to the business who will question points raised in a constructive way, or the family member who is most assertive and will keep the meeting on track **without dominating**.
3. Appoint a note taker for the meeting to write up and email the points discussed and action points.
4. Appoint a timekeeper – this person needs to keep an eye on the overall meeting time and ensure that time is given to each item on the agenda.
5. Use agendas – Ideally, agendas should be sent out before the meeting.
6. Ensure the location of the meeting is somewhere neutral i.e. farm office rather than house of one family member. Meetings could even be held off farm.
7. Set business targets/objectives at the start of the year and refer to them to ensure the business is moving forward. Do not be afraid to update if circumstances change.



The following outlines some key items that might be useful to include on meeting agendas. This will differ depending on the type of meeting you are carrying out.



Agendas – what should they include?

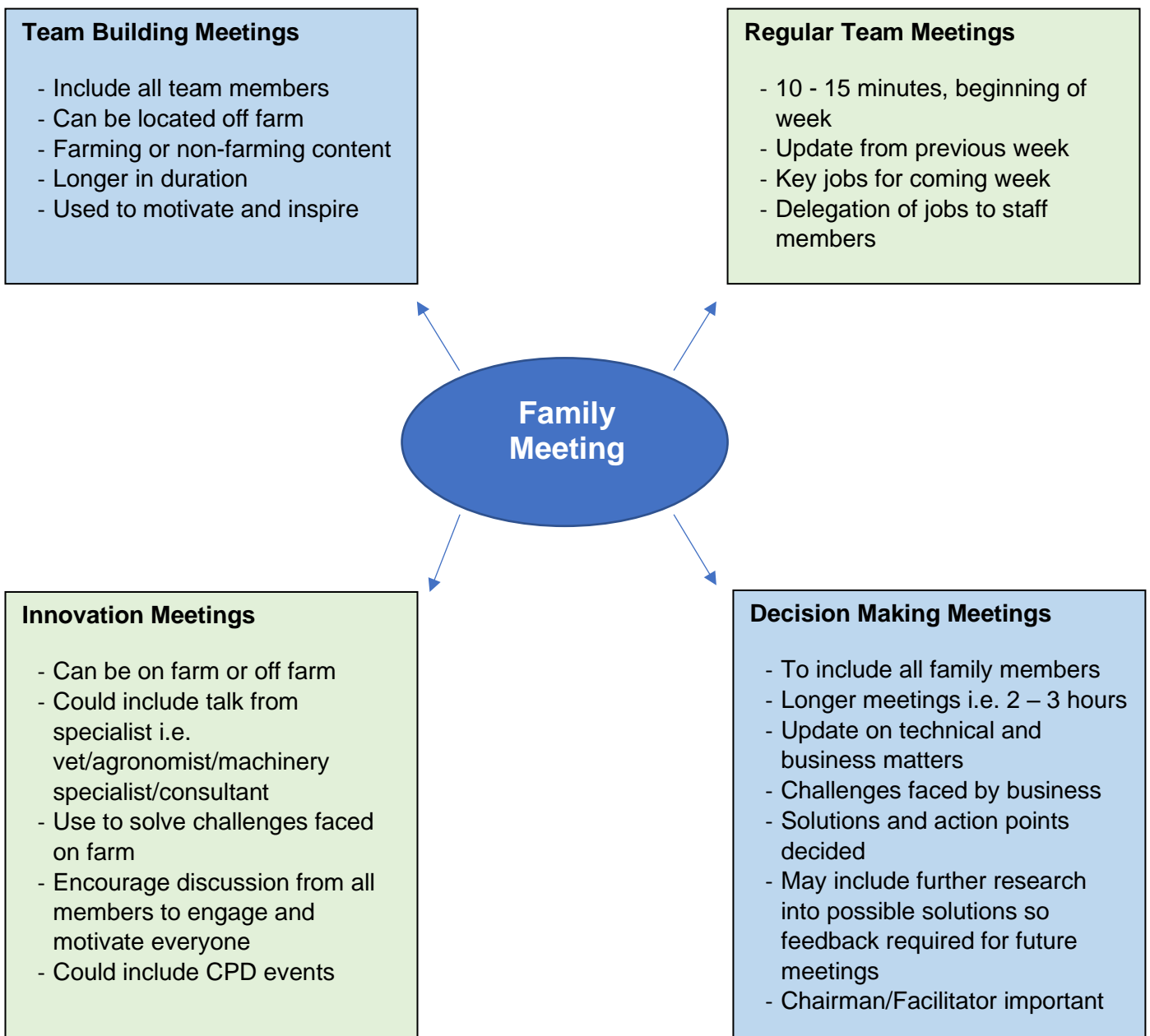


- ✓ Apologies
- ✓ Matters arising from previous meeting – this includes reviewing any actions raised
- ✓ New Business – this could include holiday/staff cover, new legislations that will impact on the business etc.
- ✓ Jobs to do during the coming week, allocation of jobs to staff members and deadlines
- ✓ General – This can include regular topics:
 - Technical – update on herd costings/vet visits/technical performance of herd
 - Business – update on cashflow monitoring/funding options/bank/capital spend
 - Staffing – staff progress/challenges/feedback on positive achievements of staff
 - Arable – contracting/cropping etc.
 - CPD – training courses/open days that might be of interest to staff or family
- ✓ Date and time of next meeting – include who needs to attend
- ✓ Close of meeting



But meetings always take so long.....

Meetings don't need to take hours! Short, succinct meetings can often be the most productive, but structure and discipline are required to implement this. Below are several different types of meeting; by setting your objective first you can decide which is most suitable in order to achieve your goal.



Do's and Don'ts

Do:

- ✓ Have an agenda
- ✓ Make sure everyone has the chance to voice their opinion
- ✓ Keep to time
- ✓ Have a facilitator or chairman
- ✓ Take notes and circulate after the meeting
- ✓ Make sure everyone is on time
- ✓ Stay on topic
- ✓ Be careful on choice of words, body language etc.
- ✓ Listen
- ✓ Set clear business goals
- ✓ Show trust by delegating

Do Not:

- ✓ Have a meeting for the sake of it!
- ✓ Get distracted
- ✓ Have phones or laptops at the meeting
- ✓ Get Personal
- ✓ Invite everyone – invite people who need to attend
- ✓ Assume everyone knows the roles, responsibilities and expectations of everyone
- ✓ Have favourites
- ✓ Keep changing business objectives – update if they are achieved otherwise set achievable goals with achievable deadlines

Always reach a positive outcome!



A positive outcome is the key to success with any meeting as this will help with motivation and the belief that it is possible to overcome the challenges.

Challenges faced by the business can and should be viewed in a positive light:

- Challenges bring opportunities for change and improvement
- Challenges offer a chance to secure the technical position of the business
- Challenges enable implementation of positive ideas and actions that will benefit both the staff and the business

A positive outcome will have a lasting impact on all those who attend the meeting.

Want a structured approach to your business, but not sure where to start?

It is estimated that 65% of family farms don't have regular, structured family meetings. Experience has shown us that communication is key and positive, well run family meetings can help to drive a business forward.

If you would like support on how to implement successful on farm business meetings, please contact us and one of our consultants would be happy to advise you further.

Call our office on 01666 817278

Or email

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