

I Want to Be a Rancher

Q I am almost 12, and I want to be a rancher. How do I ask Dad and Grandpa what happens next? How do I make sure I'm responsible enough?

A You are already demonstrating a great deal of maturity and responsibility by asking how to talk to Dad and Grandpa about your goal of one day becoming an active member of the family ranching operation. I congratulate your insight and sincerely hope my answers help.

The answers I offer aren't simple. It won't be easy to engage the adult generation in meaningful conversations regarding the future, especially as it relates to succession. From Dad and Grandpa's perspective you're still very young, so it will seem too soon to talk about your career. During the next several years many unforeseen factors may change your intentions. So it will be up to you to follow your dreams and create the life you desire.

Dad and Grandpa will wrestle with many thoughts and emotions before they have a serious discussion with you about the future. To them you'll always be a son or grandson, so they will treat you as younger and less experienced. They will rely on the experiences and feelings they remember from when they were your age. I say this not to discourage you but to help you understand them better.

Remember, Dad and Grandpa are also father and son. They'll have different points of view on the how, when and what to teach you. New ideas will not always be welcome, but if you understand their point of view you can position yourself to become a successful partner in the operation.

Please keep the following three points in mind as you think about your future and visit with Dad and Grandpa. First, ranching is not a birth-right, it's a privilege. Many children think that Mom, Dad, Grandma or Grandpa owes them a place on the ranch or a stake in the business. Nothing is further from the truth. These privileges are earned.

Second, the business of ranching is more demanding than ever before. A successful rancher must know the business side of ranching as well as the physical work. The ag industry is undergoing massive change and facing numerous challenges. Success requires a sharp mind and an iron will.

Third, the ability to work with others is an important skill for an aspiring rancher. Coworkers respond to good leaders who know how to get their hands dirty and have the ability to communicate well with others.

Become a leader. Starting right now, I recommend that you begin to act like the leader you hope to become. That's how you earn respect.

Good leaders are good followers. They know it takes a team of dedicated people to run a great organization.

Good leaders are good learners. They understand that achievement is built on the skills and abilities of each person in the organization.

Good leaders are good workers. They work hard and do their jobs with enthusiasm.

There are a few questions you should ask Dad and Grandpa that will



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help you to better understand the ranch, their outlook on the future and your role in the growth and development of the operation.

Ask Dad:

■ "What is the best agricultural college in the nation, and how do I best prepare to attend?"

■ "If money were not an issue, what would you do to grow the ranch?"

■ "Looking into the future, what skills and abilities will be necessary to run a 'world class' cattle operation?"

Ask Grandpa:

■ "Please help me write a history of our family's ranch—including how the ranch started, what has changed throughout the years and the important milestones."

■ "What are the most important responsibilities on the ranch?"

■ "Who is the best rancher you know, and why?"

From your brief note, it sounds like you already have a good head and strong will. If you apply those traits responsibly, Dad and Grandpa will respect your intent and take your interests seriously. Please let me know how your conversations go. If I can ever be of help to you again, don't hesitate to contact me.

The Results Are In

We are sifting through your responses to the Farm Journal Legacy Project Survey. It is obvious that "maintaining family ownership" is very important (78%), and the biggest reason is not money or security but rather preserving your "way of life" (83%). During the next several months, Kevin Spafford will answer many of your survey questions in this column; others he'll address personally with the individual reader. Some of the more common issues will be covered through the succession planning documentary series. Please keep us informed about your experiences and continue to tell us how we can help.

Kevin Spafford is a certified financial planner whose firm guides farmers and agribusiness owners through the succession planning process. He is the author of *Legacy by Design: Succession Planning for Agribusiness Owners*. To pose questions and comments, contact Legacy by Design, 2550 Lakewest Drive, Suite 10, Chico, CA 95928, (877) 523-7411 or legacyproject@farmjournal.com.