Developing a mission statement for your agricultural business

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One of the most important and most overlooked components of a successful farm business plan is the mission statement. Whether it is a production method, such as organic farming, a specific commodity such as livestock or vegetable farming, or a target market such as local or high-end consumers every farmer has a unique philosophy and set of circumstances which steers their business decisions. These unique circumstances often craft the “who, what, why and how’s” that ultimately help develop a farm business plan.

To set goals and standards, a farm business needs a vision and a mission. The vision looks at the future and asks what kind of business the farm wants to be. It is a source of inspiration and provides clear decision-making criteria. Some questions the owner can ask to help develop a clear company vision are:

- What values do I hold that I will not compromise?
- What characteristics do I want to portray to people?
- What principles do I stand for?
- How do I want to be seen or thought of when I interact with people?
- What do I want in life?

The mission focuses on the firm’s present. It lists the broad goals for which the firm was formed.

- Why does the firm exist?
- What is its purpose?
- What does the firm do? Why does it do it?
- For whom does it do it?
- It identifies the company’s products, services, and customers.

A mission statement should focus less on what activities happen on the farm and more on what the business will accomplish for its customers, employees, and owners. In a market-driven economy, a good mission statement describes what consumer need will be filled. How the firm’s products and services will do this better than the competition is the customer value proposition. This market-driven approach to business is different from the production-driven approach taken by many managers in the past. When times were less competitive, managers could produce high-quality products and then find a market for them. Now, firms must first identify a market need and then grow products that satisfy that need, at a price customers are willing to pay and will still return a profit to the business.

A mission statement should be short enough so people can easily remember it. The mission statement is the mechanism for making clear to everyone the company touches the answers to the following question:
• Why am I here?
• Where am I going?
• How can we beat or avoid competition?
• A mission statement can be used to unify the people involved in the business around a common direction and understanding of the purpose.
• It can be used as a foundation or measuring stick for making decisions.

A mission statement is a short concise statement that describes the core purpose of a business.

**Description of Uncle Steve’s Farm:** Uncle Steve’s farm is located in beautiful Hunterdon County. The farming operation consists of beef cattle raised for sale to various customers in New Jersey. Steve is dedicated to the ethical treatment of his animals and is a strong believer in organic production.

**Uncle Steve’s Farm Mission Statement:** Uncle Steve’s Farm is dedicated to raising animals in an environmentally sustainable fashion with the strictest attention to animal health and comfort. These practices ensure a superior quality organically raised beef product for our customers and a picturesque healthy environment for our neighbors.

**Description of Mrs. Greenjeans Greenhouses:** Mrs. Greenjeans Greenhouse is a small greenhouse business located in a fairly rural area in Anywhere, USA. Mary Wilson, the manager and owner of the greenhouse, recently bought the business from Bill Smith who had reduced production to only bedding plants in the spring. Mary plans to produce bedding plants, but to also expand production to include poinsettias, hanging baskets, perennials, and garden mums to have crops almost year-round. This will improve cash flow, keep customers coming back for products all year, and help keep the same employees most of the year. She will produce her own plugs and rooted cuttings in the winter so that she can ensure the top quality demanded by the retail garden center market.

**Mrs. Greenjeans Greenhouse’s Mission Statement:** Mrs. Greenjeans Greenhouse will produce and distribute unique high-quality greenhouse products to serious gardeners within a 200-mile radius around Anywhere, USA. We will pursue continued market penetration through a commitment to quality and value.

**Description of Jalma Farms:** Jalma Farms is a seasonal business owned and operated by Alma and John George in Cape May County, New Jersey. It is roughly 130 acres including a 30 acre Magnolia Lake, Mill Creek which is fresh water as it enters the Lake and becomes salt water when the Lake empties back into Mill Creek then going off to the Sea. It is Alma’s Family Estate, with 2 historical houses and other buildings. There are approximately 50 tillable acres currently about 25 acres are planted with a fruit orchard of 2000 Beach Plum Trees and 500 Black Chokeberry as well as Christmas Trees, Rye grass, nursery and seed beds. Our goal is to derive a comfortable living, have enough to maintain the Estate while preserving good land stewardship. They sell the fresh fruit and are also making the fruit into a value added food product can dramatically increase their gross sales.
Jalma Farms Mission Statement: **Jalma Farms** is committed to a sustainable Native Fruits Orchard while preserving open space and protecting sensitive fresh and salt water ecosystems.

**Description of B & B Livestock Farm, LLC:** **B & B Livestock Farm, LLC** is a small, family farm that has been in operation in Lebanon Township, New Jersey since 1991. They strive for quality and excellence and produce NATURAL food and are committed to animal health, food safety, and environmental stewardship. All of their farm animals are HORMONE FREE, STEROID FREE, ANTIBIOTIC FREE, and STRESS FREE. The sell all natural farm fresh brown eggs, natural grain fed beef, all natural pork, free range roasting chickens, and fresh turkeys for Thanksgiving.

**Mission Statement:** **B & B Livestock Farm, LLC,** is a quaint family owned farm dedicated to recognizing our customers’ needs by producing healthy, superior-quality, all natural food for the local consumer. Our high standards and commitment to cleanliness, animal health, and environmental stewardship allow for a relaxed, stress free environment for our animals and visitors alike.
## Mission Statement Worksheet

1) What type of farm business do you have?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business Type</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Livestock farm</td>
<td>Species:__________________________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grain farm</td>
<td>Type:______________________________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forage or hay farm</td>
<td>Type:______________________________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetable farm</td>
<td>Type:______________________________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery</td>
<td>Type:______________________________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenhouse</td>
<td>Type:______________________________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tree fruit</td>
<td>Type:______________________________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversified Operation</td>
<td>Describe:__________________________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>__________________________________________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2) Describe features that make your products unique or better than the competition. Examples are:

- Raw farm product
- Semi-processed
- Branded product
- Superior performance
- Availability
- Size
- Quality
- Fresh
- Product mix
- Varieties/new variety
- Types
3) Describe benefits to the consumer that make your products unique or better than the competition. Examples are:

- Long lasting
- Heart healthy
- Low in sodium
- High in vitamins
- Fragrant
- Sweet
- Pesticide free
- Others
- Others

4) Select the words or phrases that describe your farming practices.

- Organic
- Natural
- Sustainable
- Conventional
- Hormone free
- Grass fed
5) What words or phrases best describes the principles or values that guide your choice of farming practices?

Sustainable
IPM
Green
Local
Environmental stewardship
Profitable
Fresh
Healthy
Natural
Rural heritage
Efficient
Community involvement
Quality
Other explain ____________________________________________

6) What words or phrases best describes how you sell your products/services?

Community Supported Agriculture (C.S.A)
Direct retail sales
Wholesale

Farmers market or tailgate market

Pick-your-own

Experiential (agritourism or entertainment)

Other describe _________________________________

7) What words or phrases best describes your customer base?

Local consumers

Retail outlets

Restaurants

Specialty crop consumer Describe _________________________________

Ethnic markets Describe _________________________________

8) What words or phrases best describe what you want your farm to be known for?

Family atmosphere

Freshness

Humane

Friendly service

High quality

Superior quality

Honesty

Integrity

Progressive
Welcoming
Picturesque

Other explain _____________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________

Briefly describe what makes your farm unique?
_______________________________________________________________________

Develop a mission statement using the words or phrases that you selected above.
_______________________________________________________________________

Resources:

- Center for Farm Financial Management, University of Minnesota AgPlan:
  https://www.agplan.umn.edu/

- New users need to "Register" (under the Login button).

- Also see: Rutgers Farm Management Website To Market, To Market
  http://aesop.rutgers.edu/~farmmgmt