**Why Participate in the ND Farm Management Education Program?**

Kara Wulfekuhle-North Dakota Farm Management Education Program Instructor, NDSCS

Why hire an agronomist to improve soil health? Why hire a diesel technician to work on your broken-down combine in the middle of harvest? These questions could be considered just as important as asking yourself, “Why participate in a program that can help guide quality management decisions?”

I am just 1 of 15 instructors with the North Dakota Farm Management Education Program. I currently work out of the Wahpeton location with an office on campus at NDSCS, servicing producers on both sides of the river. My husband farms alongside his dad, raising corn, soybeans, wheat, and sugar beets. As a farm management instructor and a farmer’s wife, I see first-hand the many benefits derived from participating in a program like what North Dakota has to offer.

The program is not a “one-size fits all” type of program. Every operation is unique as well as every operator. I work with a range of clients in size as well as knowledge base. Some producers are just getting started in their career and our main goal is to set up an efficient and accurate record-keeping system where other producers are maybe in the middle of their career or towards the end and already have their record keeping system. These participants might benefit more from a management perspective. Through enterprise analysis that we complete together, these more experienced producers might find corn is the most profitable crop on their farm. How do we capitalize on this? Do capital investments make sense? Will it help my operation become more efficient and profitable? I have helped clients make decisions for their operation that affect cash flow. For example, hiring full-time labor when you have only had seasonal help is a big decision, and it needs to make sense from a logical standpoint but also fiscally. I often talk about opportunity cost: If you hire someone full-time you now have given yourself the opportunity for more family time, or maybe you spend more hours generating income from custom work while your full-time hired hand fixes on equipment. What makes sense? What are your goals? What makes you happy?

I have had several clients tell me they appreciate the “third party” or “neutral party” view when it comes to putting year-end financial statements together. Almost every client has a good working relationship with their banker, but they still like to have another set of eyes review their numbers and financial position. On the flip side, I know bankers really appreciate their customers’ participation in a Farm Management Education Program because it saves them time during renewal season, and they know the extra steps we take to analyze data and observe what the ratios are indicating.

Personally, my husband and I find many benefits from the program. We are constantly updating our cashflow throughout the year as we incur expenses so that we are well aware of our break-even price per crop. I also encourage clients to do this with me or at home. Not only do we as producers benefit from services of the program, but I know our banker appreciates the time we take in putting our year-end financials together as well as our next year’s projections. I also know our accountant values the profit and loss report we give him from QuickBooks, rather than numbers written on a napkin.

Not only do you receive one-on-one instruction and direction, but you also have the opportunity to build your network. You might meet other neighbors and friends who also participate in the program or industry professionals through various events hosted by your local program. These might include informal marketing meetings where market strategies are discussed or more formal events where a marketing specialist or other specialist are brought in to talk about their field of work (i.e.: crop insurance, estate planning). These are typically free to anyone involved with their local farm management program.

The North Dakota Farm Management Education Programs are designed to provide education to farm owners and operators, or persons interested in farming. The purpose of each program is to assist clients in meeting their business and personal goals. Get in touch with your local instructor today to see what your program can do for you.

The North Dakota Farm Management Education Program provides lifelong learning

opportunities in economic and financial management for persons involved in the farming and

ranching business. Visit ndfarmmanagement.com, Facebook @NDFarmManagementEducation,

or contact Craig Kleven, State Supervisor for Agricultural Education, at crkleven@nd.gov or

701-328-3162 for more information. The ND Farm Management Education Program is

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