

A publication of  
**Growing New Farmers**

**A northeast service providers consortium**  
GNF Professional Development Series #208



**Program:** The Dr. George Show: Bringing the Generations Together in a Family Business

**Organization:** NY FarmLink, NY FarmNet, Department of Applied Economics and Management @ Cornell University

**Targeted to:** Explorers

**Dates:** November 22, 2002 and November 21, 2003  
(Program ran from 12:15 to 5:00 p.m.)

**Need**

To improve and enhance the communication between agricultural students who plan to return to their family farms and their parents who own and operate those farms.

To meet that need, Dr. George Conneman, Cornell Professor Emeritus, presented an entertaining scripted Talk Show that presented the points of view of both the senior and junior generations. The Dr. George Show focused on the topics of family communication and getting the transfer process started.

**Program Development**

Objectives

- To present an educational – and entertaining – conference.
- To highlight attitudes and expectations of both generations, and possible change those where necessary.
- To serve as an ice-breaker for farm transfer talks between students and family.
- To help both generations recognize that businesses are going to change.

Staff

Program planning committee members included: Steve Richards and Karin Jantz, NY FarmLink; Wayne Knoblauch, George Conneman, Dave Galton and Jason Karszes, Cornell; Bernie Erven, The Ohio State University; Don Rogers and Gary Snider, Farm Credit; and Cathy Sheils, NY FarmNet.

Description

The Dr. George Show is an educational program focused on farm transfers from the point of view of both the senior and junior generations. It was designed to explore and answer the following questions:

1. Is the family farm business right for both the senior and junior generations? Have the sons and daughters assumed that the family farm was their future? Had their parents assumed that they would come home to the farm?
2. Had the students and parents talked about their expectations for the future? This is a harder discussion to initiate. The program planned to show students how to talk to their parents about their expectations and to help parents talk to their kids coming home after college.
3. How can the two generations work together once a son/daughter returns to the farm? The senior generation needs respect for the business that they built over the years. The junior generation needs to be trusted to take on new business responsibilities and challenges. How does a farm family business accommodate both of these desires?
4. How do families start the farm transfer process? Even after points 1 through 3 are addressed, the actual transfer process still must take place. The Dr. George Show addressed these questions in this area: How long should Mom and Dad wait to start transferring the farm? How long should the kids work before they are allowed a “piece of the business?” What are the preliminary steps that need to be taken?

### **Funding**

The Stanley Warren Teaching Endowment Fund provided funding. New York FarmLink applied for and received a grant for \$9,000 earlier in 2002.

### **Partners**

NY FarmLink, NY FarmNet, Farm Credit, Cornell University Department of Applied Economics and Management, PRO-DAIRY, Cornell University Department of Animal Science, New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, SUNY Cobleskill and SUNY Morrisville

### **Outreach**

- 500 full-color glossy brochures were distributed to students at Cornell, SUNY Morrisville and SUNY Cobleskill. They were also mailed to students’ families.
- 12 posters were prominently displayed in elevators, stairwells and other locations at Cornell, SUNY Cobleskill and SUNY Morrisville.
- Cornell Cooperative Extension educators and Farm Credit and New York FarmNet consultants were all invited to attend.
- Consultants were asked to invite any farm families with whom they were currently working on farm transfers.

### **Analysis**

#### **Successes:**

More than 200 people attended the first Dr. George Show in 2002 and 150 in 2003. A majority (122) of 2002 attendees completed a survey, designed to measure how well the program met its objectives. The surveys indicated the Dr. George Show was a resounding success.

Here are some of the results:

Q: Will this program help you move forward in your farm transfer discussion?

YES: 96.8%  
NO: 2.4%  
N/A: 0.8%

Q: Do you understand the “other generation’s” point of view better now?

YES: 92.6%  
NO: 3.3%  
N/A: 4.1%

Q: Would you like additional information regarding farm transfer mailed to you?

54 people requested additional information and left their contact information.

### **Challenges:**

Even though attendees responded positively, on the whole, to the Dr. George Show, to repeat the program presents at least three challenges:

1. Convincing parents to attend the program. Although the Dr. George Show had a good mix of senior and junior generation participants, students far outnumbered parents. Many students wished that their parents could have attended and asked if the program could be repeated next year or in a different location or at several locations.
2. Comments on the survey showed that we could fine-tune the location and the time of the program. Maybe it should be held on a weekend, was one comment. On the whole though, the surveys contained very few negative comments. Negative comments on content and length of the program were offset by positive comments on its length and content.
3. It is not certain that Warren Teaching Funds, which made the Dr. George Show possible, will be available year after year. Survey results make us hopeful that the program will be repeated:

Q: Do you think that this program was a good use of Warren Teaching Funds?

YES: 98.2%  
NO: 0.9%  
N/A: 0.9%

Q: Do you think that this program should be held for students next year?

YES: 98.2%  
NO: 0.9%  
N/A: 0.9%

### **Next Steps**

Investigate other funding sources if The Warren Teaching Funds are not available. Consider a weekend presentation, and look at possible locations throughout the state, particularly areas with more available parking.

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