

Anna Sekine Will Your Land Stay in Farming?



Succession planning isn't just about who takes over. It's about whether your land stays in agriculture at all.

ACROSS THE COUNTRY, farmers nearing retirement are facing questions that go beyond financing: What will happen to my land? Who will care for it after I'm gone?

Between 300 and 440 million acres of farmland are expected to change hands over the next 20 years. What happens next will shape not just individual operations, but the future of rural communities and food production. When land leaves agriculture, it rarely comes back.

Don't Assume You Know the Successor

For many families, the hardest part isn't the paperwork. It's the assumptions.

At a recent workshop co-led by American Farmland Trust (AFT) in southern Indiana, a farming couple attended with their adult son, who works in the city as a pharmacist. During introductions, he shared how much he valued the land and his hope to keep it in agriculture.

That caught his mother off guard. She had assumed he wasn't interested and hesitated to bring up the farm's future.

That moment shifted the conversation. It also illustrates why so many succession plans stall before they begin. Not because families don't care, but because they haven't clearly said what they want.

Families often delay conversations because they think they already understand each other's intentions. As that Indiana example shows, those assumptions can be wrong, and costly.

Whether a successor is a family member, an employee, or someone outside the operation, the first step is making space for an honest conversation about goals for the land and the business.

Keep the Process Moving

Farm transfers can be complicated. They involve emotional, financial, and logistical challenges, and the process can stretch over years.

That's where outside support can help. In addition to legal and financial advisors, some farmers find someone who can provide resources, offer encouragement, and check in regularly to keep them on track.

At AFT, our Land Transfer Navigators (LTN) project supports landowners, farmers, and farm-seekers through this process with one-on-one guidance. In my role, I help individuals access useful planning resources, prepare conversations with family or business advisors, and connect with partner organizations. Basically, we're here to make the process a little less overwhelming and a lot more manageable.

Our broader network of navigators includes local and regional land trusts and conservancies, environmental councils, state departments of agriculture, and farm link programs that connect farm-seekers with landowners who have available land. Together, these organizations offer expertise, resources, and connections to help ensure your farm transfer goes as smoothly as possible.

Turn Intentions Into Action

If you're not sure where to start, focus on steps you can take in the next 30 days:

- Schedule a focused family conversation. Set an agenda: future of the land, interest in farming, and expectations.
- Write down your goals. What matters most—keeping land in production, family ownership, financial return, or some combination?
- Identify one outside advisor. This could be an attorney, financial planner, or succession facilitator who can help structure next steps.
- Explore available tools. Resources like AFT's Farm Transfer Toolkit and Land For Good's succession workbook can help organize decisions and outline a path forward.



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One farmer I worked with in Missouri had a general idea of their succession plan but hadn't put any specific goals or next steps on paper. Together, we used Land for Good's resources to map out their priorities for the land, break the process into manageable next steps, and compile a list of local partner organizations to contact. Having a clear plan made the process feel less overwhelming and gave them confidence to keep moving forward.

No matter where you are in the process, taking that first step toward succession planning is huge. With a little planning today, you can help ensure your land continues to produce, thrive, and support future generations. **AVG**

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