

# Self-help groups Neighbor to Neighbor

## Session 7—Living in two-generation farm families

### To get ready

Obtain the following:

1. Session 7 leader guide/discussion materials\* (one per group member)
2. *Keeping peace on the farm: Two-generation farm families* (PM 1292, optional, one per family; available from your county extension office or ISU Extension Distribution Center, 515-294-5247)
3. Newsprint and markers (optional)

This session will

1. help farm families understand how different family members perceive farm life
2. help family members appreciate contributions of other members to farm family life

\* Also available on the World Wide Web: <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/pubs>

Reviewed by Colleen Jolly, family life specialist, Iowa State University Extension.

### ... and justice for all

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File: Family life 3

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### Activities

- Greetings and settling in

- Introduction to session (leader reads out loud)

- Individuals read and complete

- Large group discussion

- Small group discussion

Divide the large group into four small groups. Each group should create a job description for a different member of a two-generation farm family.

- Large group discussion

- Read scenario

- Large group discussion

Discuss changes, possible conflicts, and solutions in this farm family scenario.

- Distribute to group (for home study, optional)

- Stretch time and refreshments

- Structured sharing time

Allow all group members a chance to speak by using a kitchen timer. Each person in turn gets the timer for approximately 5-10 minutes depending on the size of the group. Be flexible on those occasions when someone may need to take more than his or her share of the time.

Respond: What can family members do to make it easier and more fun to live in two-generation farm families?

### Materials

*Keeping family farms functioning*, p. 2

*Family satisfaction* (7A)

Questions, p. 4

*Job descriptions for family farm members* (7B)

*The main characters* (7C)

*Keeping peace on the farm* (PM 1292)

### Time

10 minutes

3 minutes

5 minutes

10 minutes

10 minutes

15 minutes

5 minutes

15 minutes

5 minutes

5 minutes

60 minutes

Approximate total = 2 hours, 30 minutes

## Keeping family farms functioning

### Introduction

The two-generation farm family is complex. Both generations may cherish the dream of working the soil together, but perceptions and expectations of each member's role often differ.

The older generation in the farm family may find strength and support by working together:

“We consider it a great privilege to have a son and daughter-in-law in partnership with us. We are very proud of them. We think it is important that they make the decisions and keep up with new methods.”

The younger generation may find working together to be more stressful:

“They (parents) set the goals we should aim for and think we should share their values, which clash totally with those of a young family. They want to have us under their thumb financially so they can call the shots.”

Living and working in two-generation families can create special problems. Boundaries between work and family, parent and child, male and female often are unclear. Who makes the final decisions? Where do one's loyalties rest? How are business conflicts separated from family conflicts? Farm family satisfaction often depends on how well these issues are resolved.

ISU Extension examined several of these issues. Extension staff from across the state provided names of two-generation farm families. These were defined as father and mother actively involved in farming with their son and daughter-in-law. These families were sent a survey asking them about the stress and satisfaction of two-generation farm family life. A total of 481 adults completed the questionnaire—128 fathers, 114 mothers, 136 sons, and 103 daughters-in-law. Most came from multi-purpose, grain and livestock farms. The average age of the older generation was 57. The average age of the younger generation was 29. The older generation had been farming for an average of 35 years and the younger generation for eight years. Activity 7A is based on some of the results of that study.

**Family satisfaction****Activity 7A**

The following questions may help you better understand your satisfaction level with living and working in a two-generation farm family. Answer each question based on your personal thoughts.

**How satisfied are you ...**

	<b>Not very satisfied</b>			<b>Very satisfied</b>	
a. with how close you feel to the rest of your farm family?	1	2	3	4	5
b. with your ability to say what you want in your family?	1	2	3	4	5
c. with your farm family's ability to try new things?	1	2	3	4	5
d. with how often others make decisions in your farm family?	1	2	3	4	5
e. with how much the other generation argues with each other?	1	2	3	4	5
f. with how fair the criticism is in your farm family?	1	2	3	4	5
g. with the amount of time you spend with your farm family?	1	2	3	4	5
h. with the way you talk together to solve farm family problems?	1	2	3	4	5
i. with your freedom to be alone when you want to?	1	2	3	4	5
j. with the flexibility in who does which chores in your farm family?	1	2	3	4	5
k. with your farm family's acceptance of your friends?	1	2	3	4	5
l. with how clear it is what your farm family expects of you?	1	2	3	4	5
m. with how often you make decisions as a farm family, rather than individually?	1	2	3	4	5
n. with the number of fun things your farm family does together?	1	2	3	4	5

**Now add the numbers that indicate your responses to determine your score:\_\_\_\_\_**

**Family satisfaction**

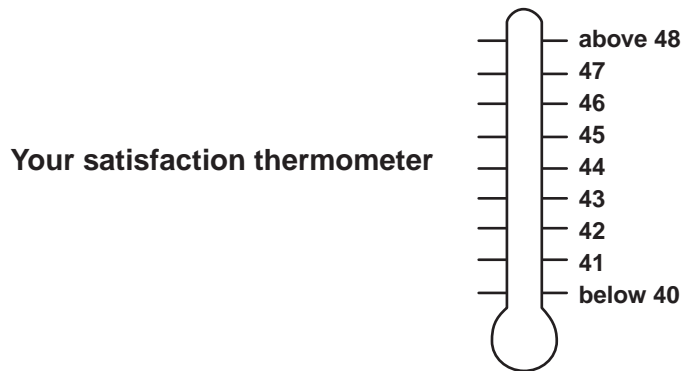
**Activity 7A, continued**

After completing the scale, total your satisfaction score. Mark your score on the satisfaction thermometer below. Compare your score with the satisfaction level of the appropriate farm family member shown in figure 1 (i.e., if you are the father in your two-generation farm, compare your score to the father score in figure 1). The figure 1 scores are the average scores from the study of 481 two-generation Iowa farm family members.

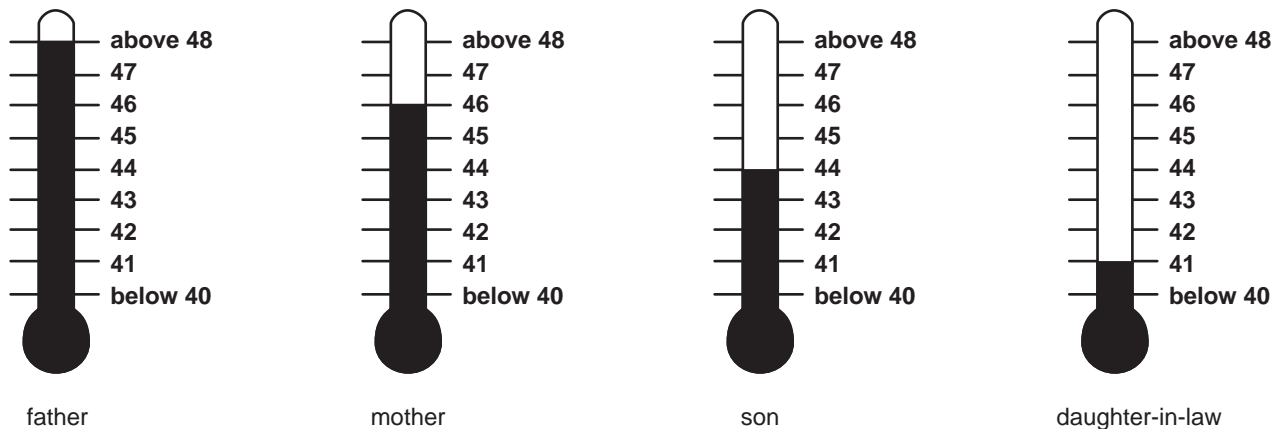
Remember, these scores are only averages from a particular sample of families. Your age compared with those described in the study might influence your score. Additional factors not mentioned in the study, such as off-farm work, more than two generations in the family, and how long you’ve been working together, also could influence your score.

**Group discussion questions**

1. How do you feel about your current satisfaction level?
2. Are there items in the scale that you can do something about to raise your satisfaction level?
3. Why do you think fathers appear to be most satisfied and daughters-in-law the least satisfied?



**Figure 1. Average scores compiled from a study of two-generation farm family members in Iowa**



## Job description for family farm members

## Activity 7B

Role stereotyping can lead to interpersonal stress and reduce family satisfaction.

Divide the group into four small groups. Have each group construct a composite “ideal” job description for the four members of a two-generation farm family.

- Group One describes requirements and qualifications for being the “father.”
- Group Two describes requirements and qualifications for being the “mother.”
- Group Three describes requirements and qualifications for being the “son.”
- Group Four describes requirements and qualifications for being the “daughter-in-law.”

Remember that these are “superperson” descriptions.

After 10 minutes, convene the total group. Share the “ideal” job descriptions. Think through the different needs and values of each family member. Then discuss what would be more appropriate and realistic job descriptions for each member and how they could use insights from this activity to enhance farm family satisfaction.

### Job description

**Position title**

**Major responsibilities of position**

**Required qualifications**

**Desirable qualifications**

**Must be willing to**

**Fringe benefits include**

## The main characters

## Activity 7C

There usually are four main actors in the two-generation farm family—father, mother, their son, and their daughter-in-law. The typical roles they play, and their wants and needs can help us understand the challenge of farming together.

Read the following character scenarios and, as a group, discuss the questions that follow.

### Father

He has worked hard for many years and has earned the love and respect of his children. He always has been in charge, and while he wants his son to take over the farm someday, it won't be for several years. He is grateful for his son's strong back and seems to be saying, "I need to start taking it a little easier, so you can do the physical part. I will continue to do the planning and decision-making."

While he plans to eventually turn things over, he wants his son to think like he does before he turns over any major decisions. Father started farming 35 years ago and has seen enormous changes in agriculture. It's hard for him to trust and accept many of his son's ideas. Father also is reluctant to really confront issues. He prefers to let Mother do the talking—he'll run the place.

### Mother

Mother really feels she knows and loves the two men—her husband and son. She raised her family on the farm and has a lot of memories of good and tough times. Sometimes she is disappointed when her daughter-in-law and son's ideas about home, routines, and child rearing aren't like her own ideas.

Mother has been working off the farm since 1988. However, she often is the one who acts as secretary and bookkeeper for the farm. She is very familiar with the financial condition of the operation. Because she knows the financial facts so well, she has a strong influence on decisions.

Mother often is caught in the middle of tense situations. Father pulls in one direction and her son in another. When she needs a friend to talk to, she feels she has no one.

### Son

After finishing a college degree in agriculture, he worked in agribusiness for three years. He has dreamed of returning to the home farm for a long time.

He enters the operation with enthusiasm for contributing his knowledge and hard work to the family farm. During his schooling, he and Father got along quite well. Father respected his information and often they bounced ideas for the farm back and forth. This made Son and Father feel good. Of course, Father was still in the driver's seat then and could do things his own way.

Once their partnership is formed, the son's ideas are subject to increased questioning. As time passes, friction may increase and Father has to defend his beliefs and practices while Son becomes increasingly frustrated.

## The main characters

## Activity 7C, continued

### Daughter-in-law

She is “new” on the family scene and may be treated as an outsider when it comes to family farm business. The extent to which she is left out of farm decisions can affect the marriage relationship. Whether or not the farming partnership “makes it” is somewhat influenced by Daughter-in-law’s attitudes, feelings, and level of commitment to the family farm.

She is uncertain about how to fit in. How should she and her mother-in-law share farm tasks when they are both working off the farm too? Can she ask her husband to share in household tasks if she is sharing farm work? Her off-farm job is an important part of her life as well as a source of income.

Often she is asked to live in an undesirable housing situation—an old house, a rented place close by, or a mobile home “temporarily” placed on the farmstead. She and her husband see their marriage as a partnership, and she trusts him to side with her should she disagree with her mother-in-law.

### Questions for discussion

1. What personal changes are occurring in Father’s life?
2. What personal changes are occurring in Mother’s life?
3. What personal changes are occurring in Son’s life?
4. What personal changes are occurring in the life of Daughter-in-law?
5. What are some potential sources of conflict in this family?
6. How can the conflicts be resolved? (See the possible answers below only if group cannot come up with any.)
  - a. Try to see things from the other person’s point of view.
  - b. Have the spouses sit down together to discuss goals and problems.
  - c. State goals and problems clearly, without blaming, to the other generation.
  - d. Schedule regular family meetings (perhaps once a month) with all members involved to discuss decisions and/or problems.