

Taking Stock: An Environmental Vision for My Farm/Ranch or Business

Purpose: This discussion guide is meant to stimulate conversations around the environmental future of a farm, ranch or agribusiness. Since nearly every farm or ranch activity has some impact on natural resources, this is an integral part of your overall business planning. It is important to include family, business partners, employees, neighbors and local community, peers (other farmers or ranchers), customers, suppliers, regulators and policy makers in the discussion. This worksheet will help you write the “environmental issues” section of your policy statement (see Worksheet 2: Environmental Policy Statement Template).



This photo shows an area experiencing rapid development of suburban housing. Proximity to neighbors and the river (curved line) will be important issues affecting the environmental management on the farms in this area.

- 1. What quality of life do you aspire to have and how will your farm/ranch or business help you achieve it?** *This does not need to solely focus on environmental issues such as clean water/air or wildlife habitat. Creating jobs or a desire to pass an economically viable business to future generations are valid points in this discussion.*
- 2. Are there environmental issues in your local community, state or region for which agri-business is generally viewed in a negative way?** *What are the issues of greatest concern about your industry? What resources, especially those that could be impacted by your management, are valued by the public—ground/ surface water, air, habitat, a park, aquatic life, etc. How is your farm or business connected to those resources?*
- 3. Where do you feel your farm/ranch or business has the greatest potential for negative environmental impacts?** *If the worst-case scenario occurred—storm, flood, disease, human error—what do you feel are potentially the greatest environmental harms that could occur as a result of your business?*

What do you do to prevent these worst case scenarios? Are you confident you could manage them in a way that avoids or minimizes environmental damage?

4. Are there environmental issues in your local community, state or region for which farms and ranches are generally viewed in a positive way?

How does your farm/ranch or business specifically contribute, in a positive way, to maintaining or improving natural resources and your local community? *What do you do to let others know about your positive contributions? (Do you tell anyone?)*

5. What issues do you see as being especially important 5 years from now? 20 years from now? Further into the future? Do not limit your thinking to local, state, or regional issues. Also consider national or international issues.

6. How do you see your farm/ranch or business positioning itself to be a positive contributor to the issues identified in #5?

7. Are your answers to #1 and #6 similar/compatible? If not, what needs to change in order to make them compatible?

Example Stewardship Commitments

These examples can be modified for your environmental policy statement (EPS). The first section includes general statements--which are not required in your EPS. The other three sections are examples of required statements. Your commitment statements should be personalized but also apply to your operation for many years. Be sure to involve family, employees, suppliers, consultants, and others. You are free to edit or update your policy statement at any time, but it is recommended that it be reviewed annually to ensure it still reflects your vision for your farm/ranch or business.



General Commitments:

We are committed to...

- “Being a profitable and responsible swine operation that provides jobs and contributes in positive ways to our local community.”
- “Being recognized as a leader in environmental management by others in our industry.”
- “Providing the best possible housing and care for our sows and piglets.”
- “Safeguarding the health and safety of those who live or work on our ranch.”

Regulatory Compliance:

We are committed to...

- “Remaining informed and in compliance with all pertinent environmental regulations.”
- “Meeting or exceeding environmental regulations which apply to our dairy.”
- “Complying with all pertinent environmental regulations and adhering to the standards set forth in the XYZ Organic Beef certification program.”

Environmental Stewardship:

We are committed to...

- “Preventing discharge of potentially harmful materials into the soil, water, air, or other resources.”
- “Efficient management of nutrients, including those that enter, leave, and are recycled within our farm.”
- “Reducing the amount of inputs needed to produce our eggs (including, but not limited to energy, feed, nutrients, and pesticides).”
- “Recycling and reusing within the system as much as possible.”
- “Properly managing manure as a valuable source of plant nutrients, desirable soil amendment, and a means for recycling and sequestering carbon in the soil.”
- Minimizing soil erosion through the best available management practices.”

Continual Improvement:

We are committed to...

- “Regular reviews of environmental performance and identifying solutions for improvement.”
- “Developing or maintaining records that provide useful data for tracking environmental performance and profitability.”
- “Seeking opportunities to increase my environmental knowledge and awareness.”

Environmental Policy Statement for: Jones Family Farms

Description

Jones Family Farms is a diversified operation with poultry, cattle and alfalfa hay production. The farm employs its husband and wife owners on a full-time basis and two employees on a part-time basis.

Environmental Issues

Jones Family Farm is located near a small housing development along a busy highway; therefore our relationship with our neighbors and community is an important aspect of our operations. We will strive to maintain a neat and professional appearance on our farmstead. Poultry litter applications will be made to our hay ground with consideration to potential impacts on neighbors.

Compliance

We are committed to compliance with all pertinent environmental laws and regulations.

Environmental Stewardship

Our profitability depends upon maintaining efficient long-term productivity. We also seek to: 1) To manage riparian areas in such a way that provides wildlife habitat and protects water quality and 2) To improve soil quality by minimizing erosion and building organic matter through calculated use of our poultry litter resources.

Continuous Improvement

We are committed to continually improving conservation practices and environmental management that will benefit our farm's value for future generations.

Signed _____

Date: _____

Signed _____

Date: _____

Our farm aims to produce the best possible product in an environmentally responsible manner. We manage animal health to ensure the birds' well being, and a high level of production and quality. We manage and apply manure to cropland so as to achieve optimum production while preventing pollution. We are committed to complying with all pertinent environmental regulations and to continually improving the environmental performance of our operations. By regularly reviewing our actions and our goals we sustain our farm's profitability while continually improving environmental stewardship.

Pigs Ear Farms is a family-owned pork farm that raises wean-to-finish pigs for premium quality, lean meat products. This father and son operation annually raises about 15,000 animals, relying on animal-friendly and environmentally-friendly production practices. Pigs Ear Farms will focus on addressing nutrient management and odor issues. These priorities are based on current regulations and our desire to maintain the quality of life in our community. The farm is permitted under Nebraska's DEQ waste control regulations and is inspected annually for compliance. We will work to remain informed and in compliance with applicable environmental regulations. We are committed to preventing discharge of potentially harmful materials into the environment, minimizing our impact on neighbors, and to participating in community activities. By annually reviewing our performance, we strive to improve our environmental impact, increase profitability, and improve on our community acceptance.

Drink Milk Farm is a family-owned-and-operated dairy and crop farm with 250 dairy cattle and 450 acres in south central Wisconsin. We believe that earth exists not only for those who currently live on it but also for our descendants. We recognize our farming activities are deeply related to the environment. We acknowledge our responsibility as stewards of the land and strive to contribute to the quality of life in our neighborhood and community through our business. We will encourage environmental awareness among our family members, employees, and business partners. We are committed to compliance with all relevant environmental rules and regulations. We will research, implement, and promote pollution prevention and waste minimization practices. We will monitor our business and environmental practices for opportunities to continually improve our environmental impact.

Beautiful Bossy Ranch is a certified organic producer of high-quality beef, marketed directly to our customers. We began this venture in 1993 with a desire to improve our quality of life, environmental impact, and profitability. We strive to be recognized as a leader in environmental management by other producers and our local community. We are committed to complying with all pertinent environmental laws and regulations and to the certified organic standards set forth by the USDA. We are committing to protecting our natural resources by reusing and recycling materials whenever possible. We are constantly looking for ways to improve our business and environmental practices and will strive to educate ourselves as better ways to raise and process our product are discovered.

Chicken Little Farms considers being a good neighbor a high priority and actively participates in local civic and church activities. We produce broilers in an environmentally-responsible manner by using the best available practices, materials, equipment, and technologies. Specifically, we are committed to compliance with applicable environmental laws and regulations, proactive management of bird and crop health, efficient management of nutrients within the cropping system, enhancing and protecting wildlife habitats, and periodic reviews of our operation to identify improvement opportunities.

Environmental Policy Statement:

(Farm or Ranch name:) _____

Description

Environmental Issues

Compliance

Pollution Prevention

Continual Improvement

Signature(s): _____ Date: _____

Follow Up: Using Your Environmental Policy Statement

Suggestions:

- Post on your website or blog
- Include it in your newsletter for neighbors or customers
- Handouts to visitors or tour groups
- Handout when you give a presentation
- Print it, frame, it and hang it on the office wall
- Use it in training new employees and provide to consultants and suppliers
- Create a video with pictures of your farm/ranch and the EPS as the script
- [Direct marketers] Pack a copy with each purchase

Certificate of Completion (Optional):

If you would like to receive a certificate of completion, please submit your EPS using [this online form](http://bit.ly/eiE7L) (<http://bit.ly/eiE7L>). Your certificate can be submitted for continuing education programs or framed and displayed as part of your own professional development efforts.

A North Carolina hog producer made laminated wallet cards (including Spanish translation) for each of his employees. He remarked that they never forgot their policy statement cards and he frequently saw them reading and discussing over the card. "They really appreciated the fact that we took time to explain and go over all of this with them."

About This Project:

Building Environmental Leaders in Animal Agriculture (BELAA) is a collaborative effort of the [National Young Farmers Educational Association](#) (NYFEA), University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Montana State University. It was funded by the USDA National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) under award #2009-49400-05871. This project would not be possible without the [Livestock and Poultry Environmental Learning Center](#) and the National eXtension Initiative (<http://www.extension.org>), National Association of County Ag Agents (NACAA), National Association of Agriculture Education (NAAE), Farm Credit Services of America, American Registry of Professional Animal Scientists (ARPAS), and Montana FFA Association.



More Information:

Visit the following sites to learn about and interact with others interested in environmental stewardship and agriculture (and other issues important to the future of agriculture):

Facebook <http://www.facebook.com/envagleaders>

Twitter <http://twitter.com/envagleaders>

National Young Farmers Educational Association (NYFEA) website <http://nyfea.org>

Livestock & Poultry Environmental Learning Center <http://www.extension.org/animal+manure+mangement>

YouTube <http://www.youtube.com/user/lpelc>

Also consult your local extension office, soil & water conservation districts, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, zoning and planning commission, agricultural organizations, and others .

<http://www.extension.org/pages/33198/developing-an-environmental-policy-statement-for-a-farm-or-ranch-belaa-eps>