Farm Transitions
Reviewer Conference Call
7/09/13

Present on call:

Brian Schoenborn
Sharma Foley
Ann Lemke
Robert Maggiani
Rich Myers
Karen Stettler
Audrey Arner
Hannah Lewis
Cathy Svejkovsky
Craig Chase
Jane Jewett

Introductions. Brief preliminary remarks by Jane Jewett; technical reviewers reviewed separated documents while utility reviewers read both, so we’ll try to cover all of the review form questions and let reviewers talk to each other.

**Usefulness:**

Ann – Non-farming landowner perspective could have been brought out more. How to hold land in a landowner family, especially with multiple heirs?

Brian – How to do this? The document is missing basic information about trusts, other tools used to keep farms in the family and sustainable.

Carmen Fernholz had asked a question about Limited Liability Partnerships; that was the vehicle used for his farm transfer.

Audrey – Addresses question of stewardship very well, but needs more about the mechanisms and options for doing it; feels piecemeal. Also, she doesn’t understand the flow chart. What’s the code, what is meant by the triangles, rectangles, and ovals? It’s not sequential; doesn’t know what’s prioritized.

Jane – clarification that this chart was not intended to be sequential, but rather a picture where people could find something meaningful to them. Probably easier to follow when electronic version is complete.

Question about when legal counsel would be recommended?

Karen – Decision-tree type of format was discussed on an earlier call.

Brian – His office uses this type of tool. It is fairly prescriptive. He likes the sequential process laid out; also likes the menu of options. It’s not a completely exhaustive list but is broader than what’s available currently.

Content/Credibility

Craig Chase – The 10 strategies are good coverage of topics that come up. It hits the mark as an introduction; could have a wider range of references. Confused on some parts; not sure on some terminology and calculations. “Economic returns” needs more specific description of what’s included in that.

* Specialty crop $/acre may be low
* Management $/acre? Questions this figure; need more information than what’s in the footnote.
* $300/acre/year loss of income, not sure how that’s calculated. Need to have more solid documentation of this.
* Tables appear to be in partial budget format. If that’s the case, all of the necessary information for a partial budget should be there. How to do that in the table? What about cases where there were cumulative effects?
* Note by Jane: advisory committee members strongly endorsed including non-monetary benefits of practices, so we do need to have a way to show that.

Ann – She intended to go back to the tables, circle the items that apply to her, go back to the final column and insert the items she’s likely to use.

Audrey – Also liked the tables with the qualitative column; useful to have the stewardship focus as a tool for communication with people not familiar with stewardship concepts.

Craig – All the information isn’t there for partial budgeting. You need to have all the plusses and minuses available to make the decision.

Karen – Should there be something way at the end? A way to look at and compare two options – would that make sense?

Ann – That could be useful. Do it at the end rather than in the text.

Karen – Is there enough information available from sources to do a partial budget?

Craig – You need to show all the cost savings, gains. 4 components.

More comments from Craig Chase:

* Don’t use verbiage like “Of course ….” This can be seen as condescending.
* Rotate references; offer more choices. Info was generally current but not broad enough.
* Always recommending lowering rent or doing stepped rent starts to look biased toward beginning farmers.
* Note by Jane here: the grant that is funding this is the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Grant, so we do need a way to promote land availability for beginning farmers.

Ann – Understands that it is riskier to grow specialty crops, but the rewards may be greater, even far greater. Talk about ways to have the landowner take on more of the risk, but also more of the potential benefit.

Brian – Always talking about lower rent is going to be a turn-off for landowners.

Craig – Flexible lease; lower the base but potential for greater gain thru profit-sharing.

Ann – risky, but potential gains.

Craig – Make this more broad geographically. For instance, in Indiana tomatoes are a low-risk crop – they have an RMA agreement for insurance just like any commodity crop.

**Organization:**

Audrey: There are some format shifts. The sequence is okay. Some grammatical shifts; make sure this is consistent through the document.

Ann – A little choppy.

Craig – likes the use of text boxes. Ann agrees. Use these for things that are explored in more depth, not for things required for general understanding of the material.

**Audience:**

Craig – Geared toward the landowner and the beginning farmer. Any thought to making this useable for educators?

Karen – It’s a struggle to narrow this down to something useable by educators; could pull out some pieces and make them useable at a later time.

Audrey – Likes that this was created for stewardship decisions by the landowners who will be making the decisions. Only exceptional individuals familiar and comfortable with economics are going to dive deep into the calculations.

Ann – Round numbers and make them more obviously a ballpark figure. It’s useful to have the rough, ballpark figure as a starting point.

Craig – Suggest sharing this with Extension educators; hold focus groups; get it tested in use.

**Things to Change:**

Brian – Add Decision Tree

* Include menu of farm succession options.

Craig – Don’t assume anything: show your work.

* Pilot materials to one or two groups before releasing final version.

Audrey – Rooted in Holistic Management: language issues, ways of communicating. A full range of options on how to structure trusts would be too much for this document. More info and background on some things.

Ann – Descendants and options for landowners: more from the landowner’s point of view.

* More about potential benefits
* More about the $60 Management charge; what goes into this? Setting up a process, travel, extra 1 hr/acre?