

# Identify Values— What’s Important to You?



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Your values are critical to the business planning process. They will guide you through business management choices and personal decisions as you dream a future vision, set goals, consider strategic alternatives, and develop monitoring checkpoints.

## Values: What Are They and How Are They Important to the Planning Process?

Values are the standards, beliefs or qualities that you consider worth upholding or pursuing. They are not goals, but instead can be thought of as something that reflects your view on life or a judgment about what you find important.

Your values will directly shape your business strategy and whole farm management choices. The excerpt from the Cedar Summit Farm business plan that follows demonstrates how the Minars’ values have affected management choices and how these values continue to influence their operating decisions.



### ■ Planning Task One

- ✓ Discuss values: What are they and how do they affect business planning and management decisions?
- ✓ Identify your own values.
- ✓ Identify common values among your planning team.
- ✓ Prepare the Values section of your Business Plan.

See pages 24–25 for a complete set of blank worksheets for Task One.

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To print a complete set of blank worksheets, go to <http://purl.umn.edu/115840>

*“Because our health is directly tied to the health of the environment, we strive to produce healthy dairy and meat products by utilizing sustainable methods in their production. . . . We put all of our land in permanent pasture grasses to let the cows harvest their own feed and to stop erosion. This can also improve animal health as well as the water and mineral cycles. . . . Our community values the esthetic beauty of seeing farm animals on the land.”*

Similarly, the values identified by Greg Reynolds of Riverbend Farm had a big impact on his choice of production system. Greg believes that agriculture should be both labor and knowledge intensive, thus *“involving more people in production agriculture to create a healthy rural economy.”* These values or beliefs have led him toward the establishment of a labor-intensive organic vegetable business.

Value identification becomes critically important if you are planning collectively with other business stakeholders such as family, formal partners and community members. Awareness of the different values held by each planning team member will make goal setting and conflict resolution easier down the road. A clear understanding of core values can help expose the personal biases that you have and make it easier to come to more objective business decisions.

You may ultimately decide to share your values with future stakeholders as they join your business or hold on to them privately to serve as internal yardsticks throughout the business planning process.

## Identify Your Own Values

Take time now to explore your own values. Begin by asking yourself and members of your planning team what being “successful” means or recall a critical turning point in your life when you were faced with a serious tradeoff. What values guided you?

Which of the following statements ring true for you?

**To me, being “successful” in farming means:**

- Paying down our expenses.
- Putting money away for the future.
- Farming full time.
- Taking pride in the products we produce.
- Creating a place for the next generation to farm.
- Taking time to rest, vacation.
- Being able to save for down times.
- Having a surplus to share with others in need.
- Working together as a family.

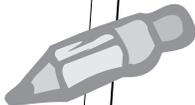
- Helping neighbors who are farming.
- Creating a beautiful landscape and environment.
- Working outdoors with livestock.
- Generating \_\_\_\_ % of my income from the farm.

Or, try to identify specific personal, economic, environmental and community values. Ask yourself:

- What type of life do I want to lead? (personal)
- What do I consider financially important? (economic)
- What role does the environment play in my life? (environmental)
- How do I define community and why is it important? (community)

Goat-cheese producer Mary Doerr of Dancing Winds Farm, for example, thoroughly explored her values in the context of personal, economic, environmental and community sustainability. She included a full values description in her business plan.

Use **Worksheet 1.1: My Values** to think about and define your values. You may decide to write a comprehensive



**Figure 3.**  
**Example from Dancing Winds Farm—Worksheet 1.1: My Values**

**Worksheet 1.1 My Values**

Think about your values and list them in the space below. Consider what it means for you to be “successful” in farming, or try distinguishing between personal, economic, environmental, and community values. If you are having trouble putting values onto paper, try drafting a brief essay. Begin by recalling a critical turning point in your life when you were faced with a serious tradeoff: What values guided you?

**Personal Values:**

*I value good health – physical, emotional and spiritual – and work to keep those in good balance. One’s health is truly a very precious commodity. I live with allergies and asthma, and it may sound obvious, but if I can’t breathe nothing else matters. It’s important for me to get good nourishment (mind, body and soul), exercise regularly, and get enough rest. I value my relationships with people: family, loved ones, friends and community. I believe that it is important to be authentic, honest, and understanding with others and to try to help make a positive difference in this world. I want to continue to grow and learn, respect life, value its diversity and work for justice, equality, environmental protection, and a safe, affordable food system. I value travel – it is always good to explore and see how others live. It is an education unto itself. I value the philosophy of letting others live as they will. It is a basic human right, I believe, to be free to live and love as you choose ... without fear of persecution or discrimination.”*

**Economic Values:**

*I value living modestly. I try to practice wise management of my financial resources and carry no debt-load beyond my mortgage at this time. I want to make an honest living. I enjoy producing and promoting quality goat products and providing friendly hospitality to my guests.*

**Environmental Values:**

*I believe in leaving my environment better than how I found it. I strive to be a good steward of the land, trying to help maintain and enhance soil, water, and air quality through sustainable farming practices. I plant trees every year on the farm. My philosophy is to take the long view when making business decisions that will impact the farm’s environment – trying to imagine that impact seven generations into the future ... We need to pay attention to our actions and care about all forms of life on this planet, even the forms we cannot readily see.*

**Community Values:**

*It’s important for me to try to be part of the solution, not part of the problem. I want to make a positive difference in my community and be a good role model for other young women who may have an interest in sustainable farming. I will support the local economy as much as I can, realizing that this effort, in itself, helps sustain the community.*

description of your values and their potential effect on management decisions as Mary Doerr did, or simply list your values as was done by Dave and Florence Minar on their Common Values Worksheet (Figure 4).

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## Identify Common Values

Next, it's a good idea to share your values with other planning team members. Identify those values that you, as a team, hold in common and to become aware of the different values held by each planning team member. This will make goal setting and conflict resolution easier down the road. Ideally, by gaining an understanding of what motivates each member of your planning team, you will be able to develop goals that everyone can commit to and support.

Dave and Florence Minar had family members identify values individually. Each family member was then asked to rank their values in order of personal importance and to share their top five values. When the family came together,

*"we found that nearly everyone had identified and prioritized the same core values,"* Dave recalls. From these core values, Dave and Florence were able to develop a values statement for inclusion in their final business plan. This statement is reproduced as Dave Minar's answer to question two in Worksheet 1.2.



*By gaining an understanding of what motivates each member of your planning team, you will be able to develop goals that everyone can commit to and support.*



Complete **Worksheet 1.2: Common Values** to identify the values shared by your planning team members.

## Worksheet 1.2 Common Values

Use the space below to identify common or shared values among your planning team members. You may want to begin by simply listing the values identified by each team member and then determine what values you share as a team. If you are uncomfortable sharing personal values, focus on the environmental, finance and community values that you share.

### Values Identified by Individual Planning Team Members:

- Human health
- Animal health
- Christianity
- Financial stability
- Open communication
- Healthy soil and water
- Beautiful landscape
- Community relationships

### Values That We Share as a Planning Team:

*We value health, Christian values, trust, and open communication. Because our health is directly tied to the health of the environment, we strive to produce healthy dairy and meat products by utilizing sustainable methods in their production. We value preserving our forests and grasslands for future generations to enjoy. It is important to be a contributing member of the community both socially and economically. Our community values the esthetic beauty of seeing farm animals on the land.*

**Figure 4.**  
**Example from Cedar Summit Farm—**  
**Worksheet 1.2: Common Values**

## Preparing the Values Section of Your Business Plan

Values are very personal statements about you, your family and other planning team members. If this plan is for internal use, then it may be important to include a good description of your values, like that of Dancing Winds Farm owner Mary Doerr, (Figure 3) in your final written plan. If your plan is primarily for external use, however, then you probably want to include a succinct values statement, like that written by Dave and Florence Minar, (Figure 4) in your business plan.

The most important thing to remember is to write about what you feel is important. You can always trim or revise your values statement to use in a written plan once you've settled on a whole farm business strategy and outline.

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