

Farm-Family Connection Activity

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As you read the following farm family scenarios:

1. Identify the issues each family is facing related to the impacts of economic stress on the family, the marriage, the children, and parenting.
2. Offer suggestions for improvement. What do you think they could do differently to improve and strengthen their family, marital, and parent-child relationships?

Scenario 1

Bob and Mary raise wheat and livestock. They have three children, ages 14, 11 and three. To improve their cash flow, both work off the farm — Mary as a waitress, Bob as a truck driver. It's early in the morning. Mary has set breakfast for her husband, Bob. The kitchen table is cluttered with the tools of their struggle to survive as family farmers: computer, newspaper, telephone, adding machine and a stack of papers from the bank. It's planting season. Bob has to leave the table to find the salt shaker. As he returns, he gives his wife a hard look. They trade more hard looks after he broadcasts salt all over his food. He snaps about a child's new toy, which is part of the kitchen clutter. He doesn't ask how much it costs, but he's wondering. Mary reminds him again that he's going to miss their daughter's concert at school. Mary is also worried about paying bills. Their son needs new running shoes and she has had to cancel dental appointments for the children.

Scenario 2

Tom and Donna have a family orchard. They have two sons, ages 13 and 18. The last few years have been tough. Donna works off the farm at a bank, and Tom is doing more of the work himself to save on labor costs. He also expects their sons to do more orchard work than in the past which they resent. Everyone in the family works long and hard hours. There is more arguing and ongoing conflict in the family, especially between Tom and their sons. They haven't taken a family vacation in several years. Donna does most of the household work and also keeps the orchard books. She is exhausted at the end of the day. They are worried about the future for their sons and how they are going to be able to send them to college.

Scenario 3

Jim and Irene have a large wheat farm and are in their early 60's. Irene is looking forward to retirement and going South for the winter like many of their friends. Now they are wondering if they will be able to afford to retire. They have three grown children who aren't interested in farming. Jim and Irene can't agree on what to do and get into many fights and arguments about the issue. Their children want them to sell out. Jim isn't ready to quit farming and says it would be difficult to find a buyer in these kinds of tough economic times anyway. Irene is having health problems and is often stressed-out and depressed by the whole situation. They do not get to see their children and grandchildren very often. One lives in Idaho, one in Seattle, and another in Iowa.