The Soft Issues: Communication and Conflict in Succession Planning
Presenter: Sharon A. DeVaney, Purdue University

Background:
I conducted interviews with 40 farm families in five states to learn about their retirement and estate plans. Many families had difficulty communicating with the older generation about farm transfer.

Strategy: I developed a web site, Who Will Get Grandpa’s Farm: Communicating about Farm Transfer. The web site gives examples of three strategies for communication when speaking to a parent, son, spouse, and a brother who is not farming. The strategies are: Direct Control, Indirect Control, and No Control.

The web site includes six scenarios filmed on a farm near Delphi, Indiana.
1st scenario, the farmer urges his father to think about slowing down.
2nd scenario, the farmer talks to his son about dividing up the work.
3rd scenario, the farmer talks to his wife about moving to town.
4th scenario, the farmer talks to his non-farming brother about transferring the farm.
5th scenario, the farmer urges his father to see a doctor.
6th scenario, the mother and son have a talk.

In each scenario, family members express feelings of Paternalism and Autonomy. The farmer wants to help but he also wants to allow his father and the others to make independent decisions. The web site shows examples of behavior that incorporates Politeness theory.

The web site contains exercises to help users understand and practice the communication strategies of Direct Control, Indirect Control, and No Control.

The web site includes a Presentation Guide that can be used by anyone giving a presentation.

The web site is available at http://www.extension.purdue.edu/farmtransfer

Other helpful sites on the topics of retirement and estate planning are:

Planning for a Secure Retirement http://www.extension.purdue.edu/retirement
A Retirement Estimator for Farm Families http://www.extension.purdue.edu/farmretirement

Getting Ready for Estate Planning http://www.extension.purdue.edu/estateplanning
Getting Motivated for Estate Planning http://www.extension.purdue.edu/getmotivated

Retirement and Estate Planning for Farm Families http://www.extension.purdue.edu/farmriskmgt
And all of the Learning Lessons on eXtension http://www.extension.org