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Management in Families – Decision Making
Michigan State University Extension Service
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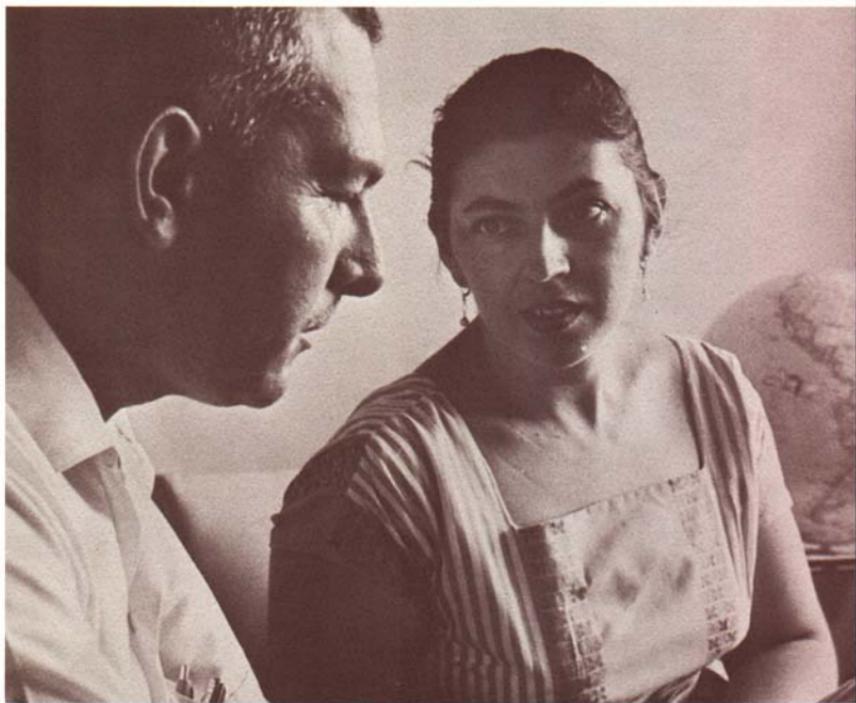
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management in families / **DECISION
MAKING**



Decision Making

DECISION-MAKING BEGINS when you become aware of a situation that needs to be changed. At first glance it may look as though nothing can be done . . .

EVERY DECISION HAS CONSEQUENCES. The present situation itself may be a result of another important decision you've already made . . .

EXPLORING THE SITUATION ENOUGH can help you to see what the problem really is, what alternative solutions or adjustments are possible, what resources you can use, and whether you can really do something about it. This takes patience and thought!

DECISION-MAKING DOESN'T STOP until you've planned and organized activities to carry out the choice. You're more likely to do this if the choice is meant to strengthen an important value in your family . . .

Deciding—making choices—is the heart of your job as a home manager. Decision-making is THE key factor in "making things happen" in a family instead of "letting things happen." One good way to improve your skill as manager is to study how decisions are made. Then use your understanding to reach the goals you've set for your family.

What's involved in decision-making? The process includes:

- Recognizing a problem where "something" should be done.
- Looking for alternative solutions.
- Thinking through alternatives to see what the consequences of each might be.
- Making the choice.
- Accepting responsibility for your choice and all its possible consequences, and carrying it out.

Let's look at how one family used decision-making skill to solve a big problem common to many families—perhaps your own.

GETTING DAD BACK INTO THE FAMILY*

By Myrtle Felkner—*Iowa Farm Homemaker*

A lot of farmers I know would enjoy spending some leisure time with their families, but can't do much about it. This situation gets worse as farming becomes more and more high-powered.

My husband Paul and I are typical of the young- to middle-aged farmers who've had to expand or go under. We chose to expand—but at what a price! Now Paul often works a 16-hour day. No longer can he find time for evening checker games and reading with our three children, ages 4 to 13. The youngest can't even remember when Daddy shared these pastimes.

Question: How to keep our youngsters in touch with their wonderful father, and also give that man some relaxation? Since farm work goes on practically every waking moment, only one solution seemed possible: We'd have to use some of the work time as fun time, but without seriously slowing down important jobs. I was bound that we were going to include Dad. So . . .

When we bring baled straw from field to barns for bedding, we turn that routine chore into a moonlight strawride. There is something special about a quiet, golden night that's free from television and telephone. We take the long way home, singing our favorite songs. If there's snow, Paul may let the kids tie their sleds behind the wagon for a fast trip up and down the farm runway. The runway is smooth, and I am on the back of the wagon to keep an eye on the sledders.

Neighbors tell us they can hear these goings-on! While the girls help Dad unload the straw, small Bill and I hustle in to make sandwiches and cocoa.

Someone has to walk the fences once a week and check the cattle in the timber. Usually this is a job for shortly after dawn, and sometimes we all take part. The "walkers" (Paul and daughter Barbara)

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OVER TIME, MANY SMALLER DECISIONS or series of decisions help solve the central problem. All of these put together will determine the success of the original big decision . . .

CARRYING OUT decisions in a family can be very satisfying (and even fun!) if everybody takes part. —Even though they don't always realize the importance of their actions . . .

meet the "cooks" (us sleepyheads) at a favorite spot for a breakfast cookout. I've hauled the food and the younger children down to the timber in the pickup. We scramble eggs and roast little sausages over a hickory fire and toast bread on a stick. This is the kind of life we love; how lucky that we're farmers.

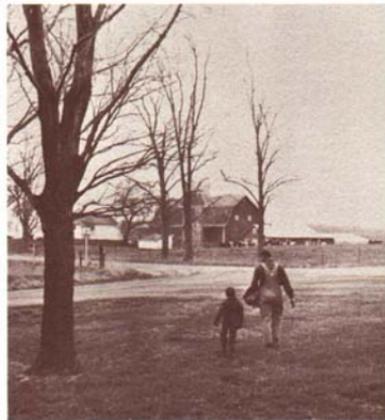
Or we may choose Sunday evening to walk the fences, and build a big fire that will last several sociable hours. This has become our favorite way to entertain. Town and country friends alike tell their tallest tales around our campfire.

Immediately after we eat, our girls may take all the children on a "flashlight hike." The game is to turn off the flashlight when they're out a ways, and feel their way back through the dark. No danger of their getting lost; they can see our fire, and we can hear them steal around in the bushes chanting "I hope I don't meet the ghost tonight." After that spooky business, joining their relaxed grownups brings a wonderful sense of safety and contentment.

"Who wants to take the tour?" sends our young fry dashing for the pickup. "The tour" is just the checkup on crops that every farmer makes. We may do this on a Sunday afternoon, or any day when we need to check for grasshoppers and weeds, or on a day that's too wet for field work.

We stop to watch a convoy of skunks meander single file across the South Meadow. We collect toads in a feed sack to turn loose in the garden (they're good bug-eaters). We pull weeds in the bean field, hash over the whys and how-comes of the fertilizer program.

Sometimes Paul has something special to show us: baby cotton-tails under a brush pile, or a buck deer that grazes with the cattle. These things delight the children, who leap from the back of the pickup at every stop to go bounding around and to explore.



"A lot of farmers I know would enjoy spending some leisure time with their families . . ."



"Sometimes Paul has something special to show us."

WHO MAKES THE DECISIONS? *It is hard to say sometimes, because there are many ways family members can share*

...

THERE ARE LIMITS TO *decisions. There may be circumstances you can't control. Your alternatives or resources may be limited or there may be other goals more important to you and the family. And so your decision may be more of a compromise than a choice between alternatives . . .*

THE MOST SATISFYING *decisions a family works out are likely to be the ones tied most closely to their strongly held values or beliefs . . .*

While "on tour," we don't feel hurried; Paul and I talk over farming problems. Although I am only his sounding board, I believe that my listening—and asking an occasional pointed question—helps my husband make decisions.

During planting or harvest Paul often wants his noon meal in the field, and everyone who's home joins Dad for dinner. It's not a leisurely meal—he wants to get to work. But sometimes I'll spread an old blanket under a tree, so Paul and the pre-schooler can rest together while I plow or mow a round or two. This never lasts long, though; the Boss feels that I have certain shortcomings as a field hand!

Hauling sand and rock from the creek is a job we all share. (We use the stuff to make concrete for foundations and feedlot floors.) The older children tend their fishing lines as much as they shovel. The youngest catches tadpoles. When the sand is loaded, Paul and I are content to sit awhile by the creek with our coffee jug and watch the kids.

Cattle-feeding on winter days may include a tractor-driving lesson as well as a lark for our 13-year-old Barbara. Paul, who has won many a tractor rodeo, is a teacher with infinite patience; he coaches Barbara carefully on safety.

Some jobs aren't fun, no matter how you dress them up. Others are too dangerous or demanding for the family to be underfoot. But we have found that there are jobs to be shared—work that can be fun for the whole family without wasting Dad's time.

One qualification: We don't overdo "togetherness." Our daughters avidly engage in 4-H projects, and have many other outside interests. Barbara loves music—her piano and choral group. Joan writes stories and poems. She's politics-minded, too—campaigns vigorously in election years and keeps up a spirited correspondence with our Congressman. In another year little Bill will start school and widen his interests.

We want all that for our children. Paul and I also like to branch out—we dance, bowl, or rent a plane for him to fly, when time permits. Still, we hope that our all-family fun will help build warm memories for our children. And deep affections—for each other, and for both their busy parents.



"We hope that our all-family fun will help build warm memories for our children. And deep affections for each other and for both their busy parents."

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

1. The problem this family faced of Dad having no time to spend with his children concerns many families today. At least this is indicated by homemakers who recently answered a home management class questionnaire. Typical comments were: "My husband should do more with the family; my husband should not work so hard; my husband should have more time for pleasure . . ." At the same time these women said that the activities in homemaking enjoyed most were . . . "doing anything together . . . because it makes everyone so close and yet each individual has a special feeling of belonging and being loved . . ." These ideas show that this is one situation calling for real decision-making. Can you think of possible alternative solutions that might suit other families? (To be realistic, each alternative must have a *possible* outcome and resources available to carry it out!)
2. From this story, how do you think decision-making is generally done in this family? By the mother; by the father; both together? Are there evidences of the children sharing? Are some types of decisions best made by one person, some best made by more than one? Can you think of examples?
3. In this story, the choice to enlarge on the farming operations can be called a *central* choice in home management. This means that it is so important that it has far-reaching effects on the future and actually causes other choices to be made. The choice to include the children in on some of Dad's work, and all the following choices of activities were brought about by this central choice. Can you think of other central choices and related choices that affect a family?

4. Can you think of a situation in which a family or person may decide "not to decide" right now? What could cause this? (Some possibilities are: the person doesn't have enough information; is uncertain of the outcome if he makes a decision; he has too many alternatives or there isn't "one best one"; he doesn't feel free to make the decision; he cannot carry out the decision.)
5. In deciding what to do, are there times when it is not necessary to consider decision-making as we've discussed it?
6. What seems to you to be the most important part of decision-making?

By GEORGIANNE BAKER
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Home Management

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