

FARM TOUR GUIDE

Ideas on what to listen for, or perhaps inquire about as a guest on someone else's farm. To learn the most, try to discern the growth and development plan for the business. What makes this farm work and why do the operators have confidence that it works. Listen, observe, listen.

Basics

- What is the natural resource base of the *whole farm* and how is it being used? (Climate, landscape, soils, water access, timber, etc.)
- What are the “profit centers”, or enterprises of the farm? Are they a good fit with each other and the available resources?
- Why were these enterprises chosen over others? Why were the particular livestock breeds and forage species chosen over other options?

Management

- What is the family and/or management structure—is it multi-generation, family partners, etc? How are responsibilities divided?
- Are there clear goals for this operation—short, intermediate, long-term?
- How does this operation make decisions to reach goals?
- How does the farm collect and evaluate management information?
- Do all of the parties involved share the same plan for the operation? Can they clearly articulate the plan? How does communication take place?
- Is there a succession plan? Will heirs be worked into the business? How?
- What “outside services” are used by the farm – attorneys, accountants, hired employees, family labor, dealers, consultants.
- Where does the operation source information? How?
- Do the operators like the way they are managing the farm and do they enjoy doing it? What would *they* change about their management to improve the operation or meet one of their goals?

- How is time distributed among farm tasks and seasons?

Responsiveness

- What changes were made to develop the current farming system – pasture renovation, equipment changes, soil amendments, etc.?
- What livestock responses have been observed -- better reproduction, better gains, better animal health, etc.? How are these responses measured?
- What forage responses have been observed – quantity, quality, changes in diversity, etc.? How are these responses measured?
- What would this farm look like six months from now? How does the production cycle function year round? For example, how does summer grazing or haying impact winter feeding?

Financials

- How dependent is the operation on “off farm” income?
- How has cost-share, government programs, or tax management influenced operational decisions.
- Does the operation know it's cost of production per unit?
- How is capital currently apportioned in the business – relative investment among land, buildings, equipment, livestock, and labor.
- How does the farm work with creditors?

Marketing

- Is there a defined marketing strategy?
- How flexible is the farm to market swings?
- How big of a priority is marketing?