

Grower Files

Steve Dugan (left), Dugan Farms owner, and Bret Weil, *Mulberry Grove, Ill.*



Varied ground gets productive boost

When Bret Weil started as farm manager for Dugan Farms in Mulberry Grove, Ill., with owner Steve Dugan 10 years ago, the operation looked a lot different. "At first we just did a couple hundred acres and used a bit of everybody's products. As we started to grow, we needed more knowledge," says Weil.

That's where Alan Lurkins, crop specialist at South Central FS Inc., came into play. "Alan came out, sat down and went over the program with us. We were able to pull from his years of experience. As we grew, he stayed right with us. FS is great to work with," Weil says.

Lurkins knows the area well and likes the dependability of FS Seed for his customers. "Obviously with input costs going up, they can't afford any surprises out there. FS Seed has been very dependable. Nothing is risk-free, but we're trying to look for seed products that are lower risk. We want our customers to have confidence in the investments they've made," he says.

For the past seven years, Dugan Farms has been 100% FS. "We buy all our herbicides, insecticides, seed and fertilizer from them. Before we were buying seed corn from one guy and soybean seed from another and fertilizer from someone else. Now, we have 100% of their products, so we have their undivided attention," says Weil.

Today, Dugan Farms raises 3,200 acres of corn and soybeans on a 50-50 rotation. The farm's yield goal is 150 bushels per acre for corn and 45 bushels per acre for soybeans. "In this part of the country, we have to think of soil type and rainfall. What hybrid will adapt to that soil, and stand not to have rain for three weeks? We need 1 inch of rain per week. If our corn takes three weeks of no rain, we can easily lose 30 bushels per acre," Weil says.

Both the FS Seed Corn and FS HiSOY products really perform well when conditions are ideal, too. "Five years ago we had a great amount of rainfall. On 1,600 acres of corn we averaged 188 bushels per acre. Our average for beans was 54 bushels per acre that year," Weil says. "We need a seed that when under stress will get you a decent yield, but when conditions are perfect will also go ahead and yield on that high end."

Sponsored by FS Seeds

Farm Management

40 www.PrairieFarmer.com ♦ October 2008

Does your attorney have any backup?



Estate-Plan Edge

By CURT FERGUSON

WHAT do you do when your estate planning attorney walks away from the practice and sends you an "It's been nice knowing you" letter? Or worse, what if that person dies suddenly leaving no associate or partner behind? The question — a real one I got from a real person — raises several important issues.

The question itself illuminates a fact that many people wishfully ignore: Estate planning is an ongoing process rather than a one-time event. Many people approach estate planning like a wisdom-tooth extraction: Let's get it over with! But that won't work.

Every time you acquire new property, trade trucks or tractors, open a new investment account, or buy additional life insurance, you are making an estate-planning decision. The decisions you make will either support or undermine your estate-planning goals.

In each instance, at least a brief discussion with your estate attorney will be appropriate. Sometimes in-depth counsel and advice are needed. Later (you hope) there will be steps taken to carry out the plan and professional help will be required again. Your family should be talking to the same attorney from year to year, not jumping from one attorney to another.

The best attorneys focus on the ongoing client relationship rather than a specific transaction. When you work with your professionals as partners in this lifelong planning project, they will feel more accountable and responsive to you. Whenever you contact them, it's like working with a friend.

A modest retainer fee keeps the attorney available for questions as they come up, without the penalty of a bill every time you call. Having your attorney on retainer means the attorney has a duty to let you know when laws change or other elements of your plan might need updating. Like the old adage "A stitch in time saves nine," this sort of relationship usually costs less in the long run. It also provides more peace of mind along the way.

Someone once put it this way: Some attorneys do planning to you, others plan for you, but the best one will plan with you. If you have such a relationship with your attorney, you are on the right track.

Even good attorneys retire or die

Never mind the jokes about what happens to attorneys in the end. It's true most will retire, and all will die. As you talk to any attorney who might become your family's planning adviser, ask them questions like these:

- ✓ What happens to me when something happens to you?
- ✓ Do you have your own personal

Key Points

- Estate planning should be a lifelong process.
- Has your estate planning attorney done his or her own planning?
- Having your attorney on retainer saves money in the long run.

and professional plans in order?

✓ How are you going to assure that your clients' needs are met when you retire or die?

Many farm families work with a rural attorney who is practicing solo. A law practice has traditionally been very much about the lawyer, the brilliant guru who dispenses knowledge on command — the command being the hourly fee. When the guru dies, so does the law practice. That sudden loss of the trusted adviser will be a disruptive event for a family. Even in a multi-attorney firm, often only one does estate planning. Therefore, these same questions must be asked.

An attorney who cares about clients will not ignore this issue. The client-oriented attorney must have a plan for the succession of the practice. It should involve a smooth transition over a reasonable period of time, anticipating emergency matters, as well as the mundane and routine. The underlying business structure should support the client relationships through even death or retirement. Ask your attorney how his or her business will survive, how your needs will be met when he or she quits, and how much warning you'll receive.

It seems rather fundamental. Estate planning is a long-range proposition built on a long-term relationship where both parties take the commitment seriously. An attorney who wants to plan your estate but hasn't planned his or her own probably doesn't deserve your business.

Ferguson is an attorney from Salem who helps families accomplish estate-planning goals.

Rubes



"It'll never last. Other than sharing 98.5 percent of the same DNA, they have absolutely nothing in common."