

### Overview and Objectives

A vision statement is a clear and detailed description of the business at a specific future date (commonly three to five years in the future). A well-defined and accepted business vision assures owners, managers, employees, and stakeholders understand the direction of the business, providing a ‘north star’ or ‘destination’ around which to align decision-making and priorities.

After completing this guide, participants should:

- Develop a shared understanding of the desired direction of the business.
- Define success in terms of enterprises, management, leadership and ownership for a specific future state.
- Commit to decision making and planning aligned with the business vision.

The process of creating a vision statement helps decision-makers identify and reconcile differences of opinion about the direction of the business. If the parties can’t reconcile opinions about the future, there will likely be confusion, ongoing conflict and communication challenges. In such cases, the parties may consider splitting the business or options for party/parties to exit.

A clear and agreed-on picture of the ‘destination’ is a powerful tool for making strategic decisions and even in the day-to-day to assure resources (financial and people) are moving the business towards a common end point.

### Defining Vision (and what it’s not)

There is often confusion about terms relating to business vision. Below are brief definitions to help clarify and show how these elements of the business plan fit together.

<b>Vision:</b>	A clear and detailed description of the business at a specific future date (the ‘north star’ or ‘destination’).
<b>Strategy:</b>	A set of tactics or approaches the business will employ to achieve its vision.
<b>Goals:</b>	Targets or milestones along the way to gauge progress towards achieving vision (shorter timeframe than vision).
<b>Action Plans:</b>	Step-by-step plans and assignments to complete specific tasks in pursuit of goals and strategies (includes timeframes for each step).

### Elements of a Vision Statement

The vision statement should be **clear and simple**, making it practical to reference in decision-making and priority setting. It should also be **realistic and aspirational** (but not too aspirational), with enough ‘stretch’ for a 70% chance of achieving success. Elements include:

- **Timeframe:** Identify a date or year when the business will achieve or reach its vision (commonly five and 10 years in the future for annual and permanent crop businesses respectively).
- **Enterprises and Sizes:** Define future enterprises (commodities, products, or services) and their size (acres, pounds, revenues, etc.) at the end of the defined time period.
- **Leadership and Management:** Identify major areas of responsibility, decision-making authority and formal positions key players will hold at the end of the defined time period.
- **Ownership:** Define ownership of the business, including ownership percentages in operating, land holding and other business entities at the end of the defined time period.
- **The Big Idea:** Identify a major theme from all elements of the business vision to help everyone focus on what’s most important. This should be energizing and inspirational.

**Example:**

XYZ Farms is a family-owned and managed cattle and hay operation. Success as of 20XX will be achieved by:

Vision Elements	20X0 (today)	20X5 (future)
Enterprises	<b>Cattle</b> – 400 head <b>Hay</b> – 800 acres (160 irrigated)	<b>Cattle</b> – 400 head <b>Hay</b> – 1,000 acres (320 acres irrigated) <b>Custom Hay</b> (small bales) – 200 acres
Leadership and Management	<b>Rob</b> – Board Chair and Cattle Operation Management (mentoring Jake) <b>Jan</b> – Bookkeeping <b>Jane</b> – Hay Operation Management <b>Jake</b> – Learning Cattle	<b>Rob</b> – Board Chair (not required day-to-day) <b>Jan</b> – Bookkeeping (mentoring Jake) <b>Jane</b> – Hay and Custom Hay Operation Management <b>Jake</b> – Cattle Operation Management and Learning Bookkeeping
Ownership	<b>Operating entity</b> - Rob + Jan <b>Real Estate Entity</b> – Rob + Jan	<b>Operating entity</b> – Jane + Jake (under contract to purchase using wages) <b>Real Estate Entity</b> – Rob + Jan
The ‘big idea’	Establish a custom hay operation and transition responsibilities to Jane and Jake.	

### Group Discussion Guide

Including all people vested in the business in this discussion is important to ensure transparency, understand all perspectives and maintain relationships.

**Prepare Participants**

- Schedule a dedicated time (1-2 hours depending on the group size) for a focused discussion.
- Recommended listening to the [Family Business Vision episode](#) of the Northwest FCS Strategic Planning audio series.
- Provide this Business Vision Guide to all participants.

**Define Roles**

- Identify a facilitator to keep the group focused and moving through the discussion.
- Designate one person to take ‘official’ notes, documenting the discussion.
- Review the meeting ground rules and verify agreement or possible changes.

**Instructions**

- Agree on a timeframe for your business vision. If you’re not sure, start with five years.
- Using the worksheet below, take 10 minutes for each individual or couple to define their vision for the future.
- Take turns sharing each individual vision with the group to identify your collective vision for the future.
- The designated note taker should write down all vision elements in a shared document to compare and identify differences.

### Business Vision Building Blocks

**Vision Date:** 20XX (when this vision will be achieved)

Vision Elements	20XX (Today)	20XX (Future)
Enterprises and sizes		
Leadership and management		

Ownership		
The 'big idea' (key theme)		

Use the space provided below to capture discussion notes as you compare and contrast your Vision Building Blocks with others.

Assessment Question	Discussion Notes
Where do our vision building blocks align?	
Where do our vision building blocks differ?	
How can we reconcile the differences to create a single, common vision?	
What metrics could you use to measure success?	

**Recommended Next Steps:**

- Listen to the [Transition Timeline episode](#) of the Northwest FCS Strategic Planning audio series.
- Schedule a dedicated time (1-2 hours depending on the group size) for a focused discussion on Business Transition Planning.
- Read the [Transition Timeline Guide](#).

**Please share your feedback!** [Click Here](#) to complete a short two-minute evaluation of this business resource.