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Improved Agriculture

Business and Society

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Introduction

There is a saying in the farming and ranching world that “in order to become a million-dollar farmer or rancher, you start by having two million.” Few in the industry will boast about its profitability, and even fewer will ever believe that in today’s world that there is money to be made in the trade. (BBC, 2020) They rely on market prices, the weather, and luck to pay off last years bills. This report is going to investigate what happens when these paradigms and common practices are challenged, shifting the reliance on profitability from the buyer back into the seller’s hands and open up resource opportunities to keep continuous education available at the front line of our local food systems. I do reference into much of my own experiences throughout this research, from my education with RFP (Ranching for Profit) and their education partners, the South Dakota Grassland Coalition (SDGC, 2020), as well as working in the industry as a livestock producer for the last 12 years.

Background

Most businesses are trying to find new developments and ways to utilize new techniques, improve their bottom line, and increase long term profitability. Agricultural in many ways has been relatively the same practice since its origins, with most modern improvements coming from equipment and technology developments or a chemically driven basis. While most agricultural colleges cover the general knowledge that is needed, it is still too broad of a subject to make innovative reaches without outside feedback over the long term and regular follow up. While help is often sought out, there are far too many instances in agriculture where improving as a business, goes against the teachings of several generations of work and knowledge, or, there is so much effort put into keeping the business alive that the art of running a business and investing in needed knowledge is put aside for day to day labor, or simply seen as “to expensive”. This leave a large gap in a country’s education and the gross domestic product (GDP) since many countries rely on agriculture as one of their main exports. While other more technological business models are highly funded and pushed educationally, agriculture and the

benefits it can potentially provide to the community are left to their own means. (McGuinness, et al., 2014, pp. 89, 92)

Ranching for Profit School (RFP) started when Stan Parson and Alan Savory (Savory, 2017) saw a gap in the agricultural education sector and a lack of holistic management being practiced within the business back in 1979. By combining animal husbandry, grass management, as well as business practices in an easily understood educational model that was ahead of their times. They soon ran out of resources to keep up with their demand, later developing the Ranch Management Consultants (RMC) and the educational teaching of Stan and Alan that is known today across the United States, Canada, South Africa, and in Australia. (RCS, 2020) (RMC, 2020)

Currently in Ireland, agricultural education resources are centered around government incentives, livestock genetics, organic farming, and soil protection. (Department of Agriculture, 2020) (Comission, 2020) (UCD, 2020) Many of the independent organized trainings done are only a day or two in length and are focused on certain aspects within agricultural, leaving out much of the business tactics, paradigm shifts, and the impact of family orientation that may be needed for ag business success. Seminars like BioFarm, (AgriLand, 2019) are definitely taking steps in the right direction to include diversity of speakers from all over the world, but from my findings there is no supportive accountability within the Irish community as of yet.

What RFP has with its support programs and Executive Link membership, provides a place where members get together monthly and discuss business problems, management techniques, as well as availability to continuing educational resources, all given in a structured manner, similar to what a large firm would do for monthly meetings. This provides a place for growth mindsets and new developments to come about that many in the agriculture sector do not currently have, as well as the unintended support group that forms when people gather to achieve a common goal.

Positive Impacts of RFP:

Attendees are encouraged to acknowledge the personal mindset shifts that happen as a result of this education. Much of it is centered around bringing positivity and quality business

construct into an operation (family and succession planning included) where it didn't exist before. The land, since it is being more carefully managed to include all aspects of nature, is more productive because of the buildup of soil matter and encouraged microbial diversity. (Buckley & Carney, 2013) This opens opportunities for improved habitats, and from that, other business developments or partnerships with nature conservative groups, climate activists' groups, and high carbon emitting business partnerships. Since this type of management also entails less time-consuming work and equipment needs, you have more social economic spending happening within the communities as a result. This in the end, results to a high GDP of the country since there is more diversity in production, more new entrants with access into the business, and more long-term sustainability within the business area. (Vitiello & Wolf-Powers, 2014)

Product/ Service profile

RFP is an educational resource dedicated to improving the lives of those in the agricultural sector by challenging conventional thinking, bringing to light new ideas for the producer to implement, with the addition of how to make the transitions into using new practices, and most of all changing the global impact and ideas of what business agriculture is. The original platform has been around for 35 years with most of the effort being performed in the United States, Canada, Mexico, Australia and Africa. (RMC, 2020) The work is focused on using a holistic method to approach business agriculture to incorporate all aspects that impact and effect it from the ground up. By addressing soil health, animal health, wildlife impacts, and climate health the business owner can better predict when it is best to economically make sales, investments, and see new opportunities in business they may not realize they have available to them. (Rhodes, 2012) A lot of Parson and Savory's previous work has been centered around making impacts in the agricultural business to improve and rebuild soil health and reduce land degradation while incorporating animal husbandry and behaviors for healthy livestock and wildlife. This resource would provide small farm business owners the opportunity to upscale their farm into a more serious working business that has the potential to be profitable and sustainable for the farmer. Large farm businesses would have the knowledge to better leverage

their production while living a healthier lifestyle. Community integration and sharing knowledge is a large part of the schooling, and those that are willing would have the opportunity to partner with ag-touring companies and raise awareness of the benefits of regenerative agriculture to the general public.

Environmental Analysis of RFP (SWOT)

Strengths: Fulfills an unknown or unnoticed global need (Hoenninger, et al., 2019) and creates a positive community within the members. Improves and impacts the global effects of top soil erosion, water use efficiency, and climate change. (Jeff Schahczenski, 2009) Furthers alternative education across a wide variety of businesses (Banking, Economics, Biology, Animal Science, Climatology, Etc.). Improved GDP through more productive and profitable businesses.

Weaknesses: It is sometimes seen as controversial information since much of the science is new and still developing. Requires individuals to seek personal development and put aside traditional mindsets to change their behaviors, (Chip Heath, 2010) which will not be accepted by everyone. Is not a “one size fits all” method, even though the theory is the same, every individual is facing a different barrier to success. Requires one to challenge their own theories and motivations of business. Only works if the methodology is applied (from personal experience I have seen individuals take in the education but still refuse to take the actions needed).

Opportunities: Fast growth potential because of the rising interest in regenerative and permaculture practices. (AgriLand, 2019) Caters to a diverse range of business, although agriculture based it is also a good training in ‘thinking outside of the box’ and challenging conventional thinking. Centered in long term and short-term sustainability with techniques and methods used for succession planning, drought planning, and energy reductions in emergencies. Could be used as an investment by larger companies to “offset” their carbon outputs.

Threats: Big businesses (Ag Equipment, Chemical) because of the reduced used and need, weeds and pests are no longer seen as a threat to production but an indication that there is an ecological imbalance. The local population may not have funds and time available to attend. Government restriction and regulation of management practices such as limitations on herd

capacity and general production or outputs. (Davis, 2018) Can bring conflict between neighbors in the industry.

- **Potential customer analysis**

Many of the customers will be agricultural members and families in the industry, but I could easily see it branch out into Agri Tourism, Economics, Banking and Finance, Climatology, Biology, Wildlife federations and Nature preserves, Airline companies, the Food Production Industry, and other major carbon contributing businesses.

Positive Societal Impacts

Because Ireland is known as a farming country, improving the profits and quality of life of those in this sector would have the potential to bring new entrants into the business, improving the country's exports and GDP. Societal Impacts would firstly begin with struggling families now having the knowledge to have one or both parents at home, making just as much income and improving their quality of life. This could overall decrease the childcare costs within this part of the community, increase local spending and the quality of life. By raising awareness of the positive impact land management can have on climate change and carbon reduction, you could bring the theory to the attention of some of the largest companies in the world and raise further awareness across the globe to create agricultural business schemes to get more people interested in agriculture, as well as supporting agricultural colleges with a place for experimentation and practice. (Jeff Schahczenski, 2009) Tourism, being another large impactor of the economy, could be incorporated by adding to the agri-tourism sector and hosting wilderness tours such as wildlife or native plant tours, as well as multi-agricultural farm tours. Many hosts in the agri-tourism industry focus on one specific type of farming practice. With the Education from RFP, one could incorporate multi-diverse farming practices into the tourism mix. For example, rather than just a pig farm tour, you could have a farm with pigs, cattle, and poultry all in the same field to show case that animal diversity is feasible and attainable, as well as beneficial to the soil, wildlife, and climate. Farm hosts could also open their land to campers and

hikers looking to find a personally safer and legal alternative to wild camping in Ireland away from the more popular areas. With just a few additions to the sector, you can drastically change the economy and overall society of the country. This could follow on to impact the inner-city communities by having funds available and placing emphasis to develop landscapes such as land that is deteriorating or eroding on plots for community gardens and other permaculture practices, giving communities a place to gather and produce their own food sources, support local wildlife, and give them a sense that they can do their part to reduce their carbon foot print.

Conclusion

In today's environment it is easy to see the impacts agriculture can have on the public sector. With the push to provide food locally due to restrictions from Covid-19 and agriculture on the list of essential workers, it seems contradictory that governments have let misinformation, corruption, and trade profits take the front seat in this industry. (Fitzgerald, 2019) Giving producers the tools to adapt into this new, climate conscious environment could be the economic push that is needed to get the local Irish economy back on its feet. With so many global uncertainties on our door step, many being made redundant who've now had the time to sit back and envision what they want their future to hold, it may be an ideal time to reintroduce profitable agriculture as Ireland's sustainable force.

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