Conflict is a daily reality for everyone. Some conflicts are relatively minor and easy to handle. However, others of greater magnitude require a strategy for successful resolution or else they will create constant tension and lasting enmity in the family or business. Knowing how to manage and resolve these conflicts is important for the overall success of the farm business.

Conflict is not necessarily bad. Properly managed, moderate doses of conflict can be beneficial. Conflict is the root of change and allows people to learn and grow. It stimulates curiosity and imagination, and relieves monotony and boredom. After conflict, closer unity may be established.

However, conflict can be harmful to the family and business, and divert time, energy, and money away from family and business goals. Prolonged conflict can be injurious to your physical and mental health.

Various methods you can use to manage conflicts are outlined below. A step-by-step procedure is also discussed for resolving family/business disputes.

**Conflict management styles**

A framework for learning various conflict management styles is presented below. No one style is superior. The most effective style depends on the situation. You should master all of the styles and know when to use each one.

In the figure below, two basic variables are plotted against one another. One variable is assertiveness, or the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy his or her own concerns. The other is cooperativeness, or the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy the other person’s concerns. These two dimensions define five distinct styles for coping with conflict: competition, collaboration, avoidance, accommodation, and compromise.

**Competition**

Competition reflects a desire to meet one’s own needs and concerns at the expense of others (win/lose situation). The most assertive and least cooperative people use the competitive style (see figure). To achieve the desired outcome, the competitor uses whatever power is available and acceptable, e.g.,

Source: Guy Hutt and Robert Milligan, Managing Conflict on the Farm

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**Behaviors that are Focused on Others**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Uncooperative (Unreasonable)</th>
<th>Cooperative (Reasonable)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competing (Fighting)</td>
<td>Collaborating (Mutual Problem Solving)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising (Negotiating)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Avoiding (Withdrawing)</td>
<td>Accommodating (Self Sacrificing)</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assertive (Confrontive)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unassertive (Avoidant)</td>
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**Source:** Guy Hutt and Robert Milligan, Managing Conflict on the Farm
Managing conflicts

The family may need assistance in resolving conflicts. So you may need to assume a leadership role in managing and resolving these conflicts. Below are six steps or techniques you can use for managing a family/business dispute.

- **Initiate dialogue** - Call the family together and establish the fact that you will be open, honest, and attentive to everyone’s needs in what is likely to be a sensitive situation. Discuss only present problems and discuss them one at a time. Remember, everyone has a right to talk. It is important to understand every person’s position.

- **Involve all parties** - Next, involve all parties in the communication process. Involvement begins by asking questions and encouraging others to answer. Listen as people respond to your questions.

- **Assimilate information** - The third phase is to assimilate all this information. Everyone must consider all of the facts and feelings. Clarify every position expressed and its cause.

- **Reinforce agreements** - The next step is to reinforce agreements. Reinforcing agreements is a powerful psychological tool. This process builds trust and understanding and makes negotiating easier. Always reinforce agreements before you negotiate disagreements.

- **Negotiate disagreements** - This begins by reviewing and ranking the disagreements. When issues are ranked, seek adjustments from each adversary, with the most insignificant or easiest problem first. Remind them that you cannot negotiate disagreements until the facts and feelings are understood by everyone.

- **Solidify agreements** - The last step is to solidify agreements and confirm solutions to the problem. Begin by reviewing the changes agreed to, and ask if compromises are still acceptable. Review proposed actions carefully. Commitment to the adjustment can be confirmed through formal or informal contracts, a checklist, a handshake, or even a hug.

Source: Based on Managing Conflict on the Farm by Gay Hutt and Robert Milligan.