

## Business Planning

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Do you currently wake up in the middle of the night with all sorts of thoughts about your business running around in your head and you're scared that in the morning they'll be gone? Do you get the feeling that you and your senior staff are lacking purpose and direction? Are you doing what you're doing because that's what you've always done? Is your financial outcome under pressure?

If you answered yes to any of the above, or any question similar, then a Business Planning exercise is a good place to start.

Currently, the new APAL Future Orchards project is selecting a group of Focus Orchards to work with over the next 2 years of the project. It is intended that these orchards will demonstrate to themselves and to their fellow growers, "best practice" techniques that will ensure their businesses are profitable and meet their own specific needs into the future.

As with most businesses, the Focus Orchards will have a team that will be charged with that responsibility. That team will include the orchard businesses current stakeholders, and will now also include the local Front Line Advisor (FLA) and one of the AgFirst consultants. As with any team, it is critical that the team is all working for the same purpose and needs of that business. To ensure that each team member understands the needs and objectives we will be starting by undertaking a "Business Planning" exercise.

Business Planning is a relatively new concept for most orchardists. In the good old days, the goals and objectives of the "Ma and Pa", or "Father and Son" family orchard were never written down; they were all kept in the heads of that close working team. With the business being small and plenty of good communication happening, that worked just fine and may still do so for some smaller orchard businesses. Now however, many orcharding businesses are often larger and more complex, with many more people involved and lots of thinking and planning required. The environment they operate in is forever changing and more than ever, it is important to have a very clear direction of the plan going forward. A sports team calls it their "game plan", in business we call it a "business plan".

Business Planning is a structured process that puts down on paper where you are, where you want to be and how you're going to get there. The discipline of taking the time to document your plan will have long term benefits. Many studies have shown that businesses with a plan, are more likely to succeed than those without.

AgFirst have researched and been involved with Business Planning for orcharding clients over a number of years and will be leading the process with the Focus Orchards. We have developed a Business Planning template specifically designed for fruitgrowers. The MindMap that produced the template is

shown on page 2 of this handout. We think the sections are all relevant to a fruitgrowing business. We will be using this template with the Focus Orchards over the coming months and invite all Australian orchardists to use the template for the benefit of their own business.

Business Plans should take 1-2 days to complete, be succinct (not too wordy). Ideally involve your key stakeholders in the process e.g. partners, senior staff, consultant, etc. Take time out from the orchard and turn the phone off. You will be surprised at the direction it takes you and the long term benefits that will result.

Please refer to the AgFirst, Orchard Business Planning template word document and the associated Power Point presentation that takes you through a real life example.

