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ONLINE COURSE TO HELP RURAL FAMILIES OPERATE BUSINESSES

A holistic approach on how to operate a rural family business will be offered to participants in a 26-week online course offered by the University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service (CES) beginning Feb. 1.

“Enterprising Rural Families” will be an ongoing class, and participants can register at the first of each month. Information is available at www.erurfamilies.org.

How do rural families in business stay in business? Is it just luck that makes a family venture successful?

“Operating a family business is not like operating any other business,” according to Gail Gordon, CES business development and family economics specialist. “Ranching and farming businesses have more family involvement in their daily operation than most other enterprises. As a result, many family businesses have intergenerational conflicts, financial problems and a

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disconnection in relationships, all of which can be traced back to serious problems with communication,” she notes

“Often the mother of the family is the person who bears the brunt of the stress caused by these issues because she is expected to continue nurturing the family members, juggling the household budget and holding the family together,” Gordon explains.

“Economic goals oftentimes can be left behind as the family struggles to handle the complexities and unresolved issues of intergenerational misunderstandings and controversies. The course offers several coping strategies for successfully managing the family dynamics within the enterprise.”

Family businesses can be satisfying, she reports. “Family members share the rewards of being in business with loved ones, but they also share the not-so-rewarding times. The course is designed from the perspective of the individuals in the family unit rather than from an industry standpoint in which the family business exists for the purpose of making a profit,” Gordon explains.

The course will also provide families with the tools needed to deal with immediate challenges and to build long-term resilience. It is designed to help them create the skills necessary to think proactively, analyze critically, manage profitable enterprises, recognize potential and act on opportunities with confidence. Enrollees will have the chance to exchange ideas and experiences with other rural business operators from across the nation.

Organized as part of a CES strategic effort to enhance Wyoming communities and households through outreach resources, the course was written by CES specialists and educators Gail Gordon, John Hewlett, Bill Taylor, and Randy Weigel in cooperation with Lorne Owen of

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the Canadian Farm Business Management Council and John Reeve of Lifeline in Central Queensland, Australia.

The course structure will include seven modules. Students will focus on their current situation, think about their future and investigate realistic options, and consider changes necessary to move forward. After investigating various resources available to family businesses, the participants will complete self-driven projects designed to lead to improved family business operations.

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