

'Map of my Kingdom' sparks discussion

Play addresses farmland transfer issues

By JESSE MAJOR

jmajor@messengernews.net

LYTTON — Farmers and their families lined the pews of the The Friendship Center in Lytton Sunday to watch "Map of My Kingdom," a play illustrating issues that arise during farmland ownership transitions.

In the play, commissioned by the Practical Farms of Iowa, Angela Martin, portrayed by Elizabeth Thompson, told the audience how her grandmother's decision to sell the farm without consulting the family affected her and how similar situations affected other families.

Darsi Haddleson of Lytton said during a discussion following the performance she could relate to this story since her husband, Tim Haddleson, was in a similar situation.

"One of our serious conversations was about Tim's dad who sold the family farm without consulting the children," she said.

His father sold it to a neighbor for retirement, she said.

"At the time, his son Tim, that's all he knew was farming," she said. "Tim had such a passion for farming that he was going to farm, whether it was his mom's and dad's land or not."

The family now rents the land they farm, though Haddleson said her husband



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ABOVE: Actor Elizabeth Thompson portrays Angela Martin in the play "Map of my Kingdom," during a performance in Lytton on Sunday. In the play, Angela Martin tells the audience of how her grandmother's decision to sell the family farm without consulting the family affected the family.

AT RIGHT: Kurt Vanhulzen, a member of Practical Farmers of Iowa, leads a discussion following a performance of "Map of my Kingdom."



would have preferred to own it.

"For everyone I know that sits here, that's the greatest thing: farming," she said.

Teresa Opheim, the execu-

tive director of PFI, said this is an issue more and more families will face in the coming years, since 35 percent of farmland is owned by people over 75 years old.

"There's a huge land transitioning happening," she said. "(Communication) is the most important thing a farm owner can do."

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By presenting the play, PFI's goal is to get people to talk about the goals they have for their farmland, then to decide what financial and legal strategies can help them reach the goal.

"Everybody's goals seem to be different," she said. "For some, leaving it to all the kids is the best solution. For others, it means the farm will disappear."

Kurt Vanhulzen led the discussion following the performance.

"The biggest thing that we want to put out there on the table is to start talking about this idea," said Vanhulzen, who is a board member of PFI. "This is an issue that is going to take some communication."

Like Haddleson, Vanhulzen knows from experience what it's like to have a farmland transfer made without input from the family. His grandparents sold their farm to a neighbor.

"That transition didn't go as well as it should have," he said. "It was sold outside the family and we had a family member that wanted to buy it and farm it."

When families don't agree on how a farm should be sold, Vanhulzen said there can be some hurt feelings.

"Some families can get back together and some families can't," he said.

As a hospice social worker, Vanhulzen's wife, Teresa Vanhulzen, has seen land transfers tear families apart.

"I've known families that were incredibly close," she said. "Then when death came, that land issue tore families apart."

That happens because farmers don't talk, she said.

"We just don't talk about it," she said. "And pretty soon, decisions are made."

Though some farmers don't talk about how the land will be sold, Vanhulzen said she appreciated the way her father made the decision.

"He brought us all together and explained what was going to happen," she said. "He knew how land can cause problems in family. His goal was to keep us tied as a family."

During the discussion, Carolyn Ashbaugh, of Sac City, explained that the



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ACTOR ELIZABETH Thompson portrays Angela Martin in the play "Map of my Kingdom," during a performance in Lytton on Sunday. In the play, Angela Martin tells the audience of how her grandmother's decision to sell the family farm without consulting the family affected the family.

transfer her father had drawn up went well.

"My father made the decision long before he died," she said. "In fact, he transferred most of it to myself, my sister and brother long before my parents died. Things worked out pretty well."

She farmed with him in the 70s, she said. "By 1977, he already had the papers drawn up. He started pretty early in the transition process."