### IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

**Center for Agricultural Law & Taxation** 

# Choosing Your Farm's Legal Structure

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## Why do businesses form entities?

- Limiting personal liability
- Tax Planning
- Developing a workable management structure
- Attracting investors
- Transition planning
- Estate planning



## **PREMISES LIABILITY**

## Owners and Occupiers of Land

- Duty to exercise reasonable care in the maintenance of their premises for the protection of lawful visitors.
  - Koenig v. Koenig, 766 N.W.2d 635 (Iowa 2009)

## Owners and Occupiers of Land

- A land possessor owes a duty of reasonable care to entrants on the land with regard to:
  - Conduct by the land possessor that creates risks to entrants on the land AND
  - Artificial conditions on the land that pose risks to entrants on the land

### What is Reasonable Care?

Among the factors to be considered in evaluating whether a landowner or occupier has exercised **reasonable care** for the protection of lawful visitors will be:

- the foreseeability or possibility of harm;
- the purpose for which the entrant entered the premises;
- the *time, manner, and circumstances* under which the entrant entered the premises;
- the use to which the premises are put or are expected to be put;

#### Standard of Care

- the reasonableness of the inspection, repair, or warning;
- the opportunity and ease of repair or correction or giving of the warning; and
- the burden on the land occupier and/or community in terms of inconvenience or cost in providing adequate protection

### What if it's obvious?

- Possessors of land must take reasonable precautions for known or obvious dangers when the possessor "should anticipate the harm despite such knowledge or obviousness."
- Negligence may exist even though a defect is, in fact, open and obvious where the circumstances are such that there is reason to believe the risk of harm involved would not be anticipated or appreciated by the lawful visitor.





- Plaintiff went to a nature trail to walk over her lunch break. She noticed an orange construction fence laid across the sidewalk, "looking like it was in disuse."
- The walker did not believe the trail was closed.
- She caught the toe of her shoe in the webbing and fell forward, suffering an avulsed hamstring.

- The walker sued the construction company for negligence, alleging that her injuries were do to:
  - The condition of the fence and
  - The company's failure to warn
- The company defended itself by arguing that:
  - The hazard was open and obvious
  - It was other walkers who tore the fence down, thus exposing the walker to the danger, and
  - She assumed the risk by walking in a construction area.

- The trial court granted the construction company's motion for a directed verdict after trial.
  - The lowa Court of Appeals reversed and sent the case to trial.

- It was for the jury to decide whether the construction company reasonably monitored and maintained the condition of the fence.
- Company had a duty of reasonable care to discover dangerous conditions on the land and to eliminate them.
- Even though fence was open and obvious and company said she simply didn't pick her feet up high enough, a reasonable jury could have determined that the fence bore a "deceptively innocent" appearance.



# Baumler v. Hemesath (Iowa Supreme Court 1995)

- Defendants operated a dairy farm in Winneshiek County, Iowa.
- They employed their son-in-law, the plaintiff, as a farmhand.
- The plaintiff twice injured his back while working on the farm, first when he fell off a motorcycle while rounding up cows, and again when he slipped in a tractor tire rut while helping remove manure from a holding pit.

# Baumler v. Hemesath (Iowa Supreme Court 1995)

- The plaintiff sued the farmers for both accidents, alleging negligence.
- The jury awarded the plaintiff damages of \$163,290, including past medical expenses of \$7790 and future medical expenses of \$5000.
  - Farmers appealed on grounds that tire tracks were open and obvious.

# Baumler v. Hemesath (Iowa Supreme Court 1995)

- The farmers were aware of the ruts before the accident. Their son had advised them of the danger of the ruts and asked him to fill them with gravel.
- Court said that farmers could have anticipated the dangerousness of the condition and the safety risk it posed for their employees.
- Court found that a reasonable jury could find that the farmers acted negligently toward the plaintiff by failing to warn him.





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## What about trespassers?

- Common law rule: A possessor of land owes no duty to a trespasser other than:
  - Not to injure him willfully or wantonly, and
  - to use reasonable care after his
     presence becomes known to avoid injuring him (applies to "foreseeable" trespassers)
    - Ex: Duty to warn of known dangerous conditions

## What About child trespassers?

- Child trespassers Too young to understand risks
- When property owner should know children are likely to trespass, must take reasonable care to protect them
  - Attractive nuisance
    - Trampolines
    - Swimming Pools
    - Scaffolding
    - Holes

## Vicarious Liability

- Employers are generally liable for the negligence of their employees while the employees are in the scope of their employment.
  - Does not generally apply to independent contractors unless the employer negligently found and engaged the independent contractor.

## LIMITATIONS ON LIABILITY

### Statutes of Limitations

- The statute of limitation for a personal injury action in lowa is generally two years.
  - lowa Code § 614.1.2
- Begins when defendant knew or reasonably should have known of the harm.

### Iowa Recreational Use Statute

- Realizing the potential liability would prevent landowners from opening their property to recreational uses, lowa Legislature passed lowa Recreational Use Statute. Revised in 2013.
- Encourages private owners of land to make land and water areas available to the public for recreational purposes and for urban deer control by limiting an owner's liability toward persons entering onto the owner's property for such purposes.
  - Does not apply if you charge a fee.



**A Look at Common Business Structures** 

## **SOLE PROPRIETORSHIP**

## Sole Proprietorship

- The default entity for a single-owner business.
  - Owner owns all assets
  - Owner has personal liability for all debts and contracts of the business
  - Income tax is reported on individual 1040, using a Schedule C (or Schedule F for farming)
  - Owner can represent himself in court (although that's usually ill advised) (pro se)

## **Example: Liability**

- Jim, a farmer, starts a new business on the side.
  - Jim incurs a large amount of debt to get his business started.
  - He also fails to acquire business insurance.
  - Jim loses a lawsuit in which the plaintiff wins \$1
    million judgment against him because of damages
    stemming from the negligence of one of his
    employees.
    - Because this is a sole proprietorship, the plaintiff can seek to collect the judgment by forcing a sale of his farmland.

## **Example: Taxation**

- Sue grows vegetables on her farmland and sells them to local restaurants.
  - As a sole proprietor, she must pay income tax and self-employment tax on her net income.
  - She is entitled to the new 20 percent QBI deduction to reduce her tax liability.
  - Because she is single, Sue is taxed under the individual tax rates:

#### 2018 Income Tax Brackets

Rate	Individuals	Married Filing Jointly
10%	Up to \$9,525	Up to \$19,050
12%	\$9,526 to \$38,700	\$19,051 to \$77,400
22%	38,701 to \$82,500	\$77,401 to \$165,000
24%	\$82,501 to \$157,500	\$165,001 to \$315,000

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Taxation

## **GENERAL PARTNERSHIPS**

## **General Partnership**

- A default entity when two or more people come together to conduct a business for profit.
- Partnerships can arise through conduct. If two people do business together and hold themselves out as partners, the law will treat them as a partnership.
  - Oral agreements to form a partnership are valid.

## General Partnership

- Iowa has adopted the Uniform Partnership Code,
   Iowa Code chapter 486A. It has default provisions:
  - A partnership is an entity distinct from it's partners.
  - All partners have equal management authority and an equal obligation to contribute time, energy, and skill without compensation
    - Can file a statement of authority, limiting which partners may engage in which transactions

- All partners share equally in profits and losses.
- All partners have unlimited personal liability to the creditors of the partnership.
  - This liability is only for debts incurred since the partner joined the partnership
- A partnership is dissolved at the death of a partner or sale of a partnership share.

- Partnership files a Form 1065 to report partnership income, along with K-1's which allocate profits and losses among partners.
  - All income flows through the partnership and is taxed individually to each partner.
  - Partners pay self-employment tax on their earnings and are eligible for the new 20 percent deduction.

- Partners can enter into a written partnership agreement. Most of the default provisions can be altered by such an agreement:
  - Capital contributions
  - Management
  - Sharing of profits and losses
  - Rights and obligations
  - Terms of property ownership
  - Termination and dissolution
  - Buy/sell agreements

- Some provisions cannot be waived:
  - Right of each partner to have access to books and records
  - Each partner has a fiduciary duty to the partnership:
    - Duty of loyalty
    - Duty of care

#### Example – Liability

- Ben and Brad are brother who farm together.
   They share their equipment and cash rent most of their ground.
  - A passenger is severely injured when Brad's grain truck (hauling the brothers' corn) strikes a car.
  - Ben's personal (non-partnership) assets, such as the Exxon stock left to him by his grandfather, are at risk if a judgment is entered against the partnership.

#### Example - Tax

- Ben pays income and self-employment tax on net earnings passed through by the partnership.
- Ben is entitled to the new 20 QBI deduction.
- Ben is married. The combined income for him and his wife would be taxed under the MFJ rates:

2018 Income Tax Brackets

Rate	Individuals	Married Filing Jointly
10%	Up to \$9,525	Up to \$19,050
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24%	\$82,501 to \$157,500	\$165,001 to \$315,000

#### LIMITED PARTNERSHIP

### Limited Partnership

- Iowa has adopted the Uniform Limited Partnership Act, Iowa Code chapter 488.
  - Must have one or more general partners and one or more limited partners.
    - General partners have the same obligations and liabilities as those of partners in a general partnership.
    - Limited partners contribute money or property to the partnership and are liable to the partnership only up to the amount of their contribution.

### Limited Partnership

- Limited partners do not participate in the management of the partnership
- Limited partnership is also a pass-through entity for taxation purposes.
- Family limited partnership were once a very commonly used estate planning tool.
  - Older generation that wants to retire and get out of management can still contribute assets to business, but is only liable up to the amount of the contribution (doesn't put other assets at risk)

#### Example

- Grandpa owns 800 acres of farmland and rents it to Granddaughter.
- Granddaughter can't afford to farm on her own so Grandpa agrees to enter into a limited partnership agreement where he contributes the machinery and cost of inputs in exchange for a share of the profits.
- Grandpa provides no management or oversight.
  - If Granddaughter hits someone with the grain truck, Grandpa will be liable only up to value of the machinery and the inputs.
  - His farmland is not at risk.

#### Example

- Gus "retires" from farming and creates a limited partnership with his son, Junior.
- Junior is the general partner and Gus is the limited partner
- Every day, Gus gives Junior a "to do" list.
- Gus maintains sole control of the partnership bank accounts.
- Would Gus be considered a limited partner for liability purposes?
  - Courts are going to look at reality of situation, not just paperwork.

#### Family Limited Partnership

- Another reason to have a limited partnership is to reduce value of assets for estate valuation purposes.
  - Sale restrictions mean assets have lower value (marketability discount)
  - Minority owner's assets will be discounted using a minority interest discount.
    - These two together can mean assets valued at 40% less than market value.
      - Basic exclusion is now 11.4 million per person

### Limited Partnership

 Parties wishing to establish a limited partnership must file a certificate with the lowa Secretary of State.

### **CORPORATION**

#### Corporation

- A legal entity with rights and liabilities separate from shareholders (the owners).
- Shareholders are only liable for the debts of the corporation to the extent of their investment in the corporation.
- Shareholders elect a board of directors, which appoints officers to manage the corporation.
- Corporation is formed by filing articles of incorporation with the Secretary of State

#### Corporation

- A corporation is managed in accordance with its bylaws.
- A corporation has a potentially unlimited duration.
- It does not dissolve upon the death of a shareholder, director, or officer.
  - Buy-Sell agreements often govern dispensation of shares at death.
- Corporations must observe strict formalities or shareholders will lose liability protection
  - Meetings
  - Records

#### Corporation

- Ordinary corporation is double taxed.
  - Corporation is taxed on profits
  - Shareholders are also taxed on the income they receive through dividends
- Corporations electing Subchapter S status are pass-through entities for taxation purposes (like a partnership)
  - Can only have 100 shareholders
  - Often used to reduce Self-Employment tax

#### **S** Corporations

- Shareholders eligible for 199A deduction
- No double taxation
- No self-employment tax for W-2 wages

# Corporate Tax Rate – Now a Flat Rate

- Permanently lowers the maximum corporate tax rate from 35% to 21%, beginning in 2018.
- Small corporations may consider conversion to S Corporation in light of new law.
- Many see a rate increase.
  - Old Rates:

Taxable Income	Tax rate (percent)
Not over \$50,000	15
Over \$50,000 but not over \$75,000	25
Over \$75,000 but not over \$10,000,000	34
Over \$10,000,000	35

**LLCS** 

### **Limited Liability Companies**

- Emerged in 1977
- Hybrid business entity considered to have the attributes of a partnership for federal income tax purposes and the limited liability protections of a corporation.
- Far and away the most popular entity.
- Operational advantages of a partnership by allowing the owners (members) to participate in the management of the business.
- Members and managers are protected from liability in the same manner shareholders, officers, and directors of a corporation are protected.

#### **LLC Options**

- Single Member
- Multi-Member
- Professional LLC (Iowa Code § 1102)
- Family Farm Limited Liability Company (lowa Code § 9H.9)
- Authorized Limited Liability Company (Iowa Code § 9H.4)

#### LLC Advantages

- Personal liability and asset protection for members and managers (in same manner as corporations).
  - Only liable up to the amount of investment (in the absence of veil piercing).
- Similar flexibility of a partnership or sole proprietorship.
  - Fewer formalities than a corporation.
- Choice of taxation structure
  - Taxed like a partnership or a C corporation or an S corporation
  - Single member taxed like a sole proprietorship (disregarded entity)

## **LLC Danger**

- Must keep finances separate and treat it as separate entity or you will have veil piercing.
  - Personal liability.

#### **Statutory Law**

- Iowa has adopted the Revised Uniform Limited Liability Company Act, Iowa Code ch. 489
  - Current version enacted in 2008, went into effect January 1, 2009.
  - LLCs began in Iowa in 1992.
  - Every state allows the LLC.

#### **Formation**

One or more organizers may act to form an LLC by signing and delivering to the Secretary of State a Certificate of Organization.

Iowa Code § 489.201



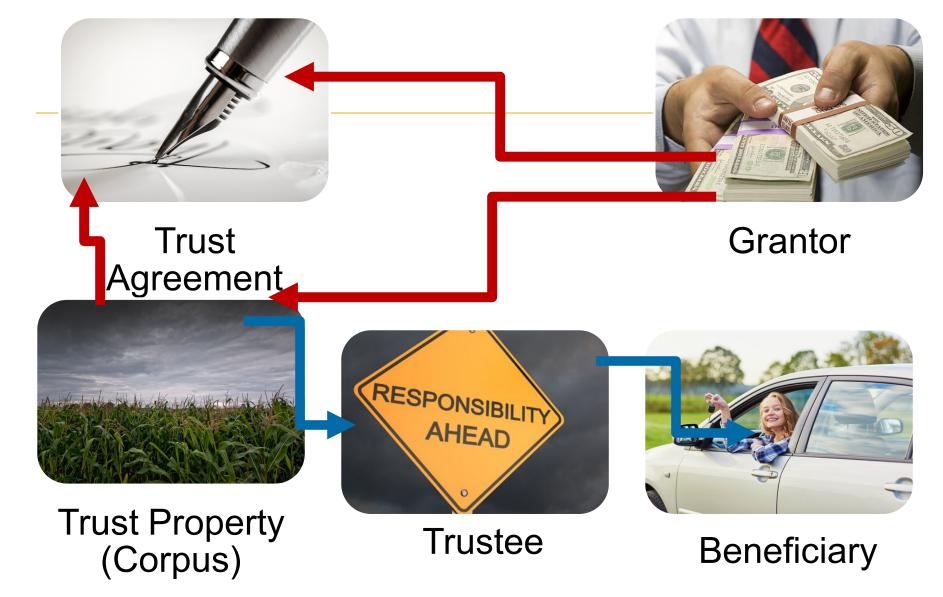
### **Limited Liability Company**

- LLCs are managed according to an operating agreement.
- An LLC is an LLC even if no formal operating agreement is adopted. Best practice says create a written operating agreement. LLCs are creatures of contract.
- An LLC can be a member-managed LLC or a manager-managed LLC.

#### **Iowa Secretary of State**

https://sos.iowa.gov/search/business/search.a
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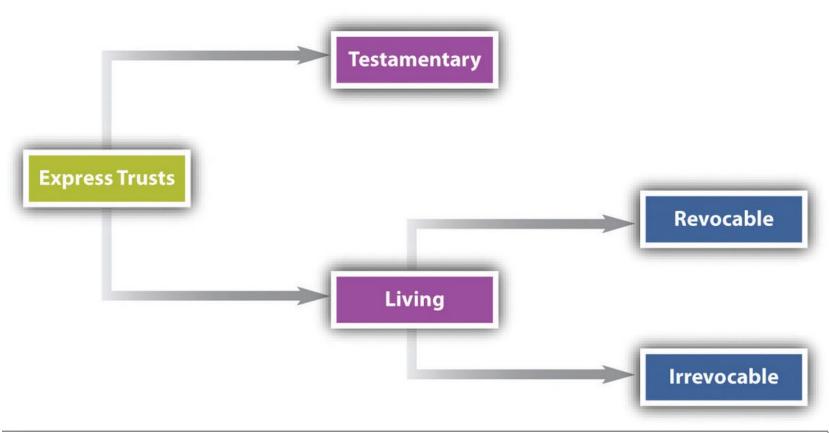
## **TRUSTS**



#### Use Of The Trust

- In General
  - Every trust has:
    - A trustee
    - Corpus (body)
    - Beneficiaries of income or principal

#### Types of Trusts



## Types of Trusts

- Intervivos (Living trust): established during life.
  - Revocable can be changed.
  - Irrevocable cannot be changed.
- Testamentary: established at time of death.
  - Pour-over trusts are established by a will.
  - Charitable Remainder Trust
  - Life Insurance Trust

#### Revocable Living Trust

- Grantor creates the trust by executing a trust agreement.
- Grantor funds the trust by transferring property to the trust during the grantor's lifetime
- Biggest error is failing to fund the trust

# GENE SMITH REVOCABLE LIVING TRUST

This trust is entered into this \_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_, by and between Gene Smith, as Grantor, and Gene Smith, as Trustee. Trustees agree to accept and manage such property in accordance with the terms outlined in this Trust.

#### ARTICLE I TRUST NAME

This revocable living trust shall be known as the Gene Smith Revocable Living Trust ("Trust").

#### ARTICLE II FAMILY INFORMATION

#### **QUIT CLAIM DEED**

For the consideration of \$1 and other valuable consideration, Gene Smith does hereby convey to Gene Smith, trustee of the Gene Smith Revocable Living Trust, the following real property:

## Revocable Living Trust

- Called a will substitute, but still need a "pourover will"
- Federal Estate and Gift Tax Implications
  - Trust subject to tax unless grantor divested of the power to "alter, amend, revoke, or terminate the trust"

## Revocable Living Trust

- Advantages
  - Probate avoidance if all or substantially all of the assets are transferred to the trust during life
  - Avoidance of ancillary probate where real property is owned in another state
  - May simplify estate settlement after death
  - Privacy
  - Provides seamless property management during old age, incompetency or disability
  - Property transferred at death retains step-up

## **Primary Use**

- Non-business property.
- Title all property in revocable living trust.
- Include a pour-over will.
- Property transfers easily at death.

## Irrevocable Living Trust

- Grantor gives up all control and power over the trust or trust property during his or her lifetime
- Transfer to trust is a completed gift
- Basis of Property will be basis in the hands of the grantor
- Five-year look-back period for Medicaid.

## **Primary Uses**

- Credit shelter
- Estate tax planning
- Attempt to shield assets from Medicaid Recovery.
  - Can leave grantor impoverished.
  - Can backfire and still allow property to be recovered.
  - Ethical questions regarding Medicaid trusts.
  - Avoid trusts arising from seminars.

## Long-Term Care

- Americans presently have a 1/3 chance of spending at least 3 months in a nursing home or similar facility during their lifetime.
- Unless they are very wealthy or very poor, longterm care insurance is important to investigate.
- Long-term care insurance allows the insured to self-pay care and avoid the necessity for Medicaid.
- LTC insurance also allows insured to preserve assets for the next generation.

### Charitable Trusts

- For those with large estates, charitable trusts are great options to reduce estate tax and provide for a lasting legacy of good will.
- The technical makeup of charitable trusts is beyond the scope of this class.

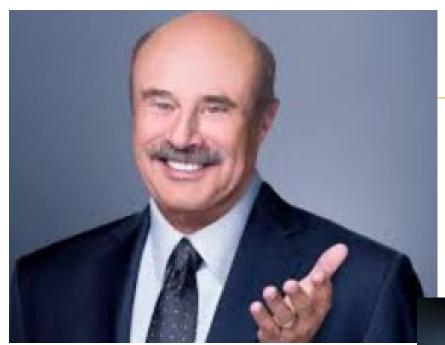
## **Testamentary Trusts**

- Trusts triggered at death by terms set forth in will.
- Primary uses:
  - Protect assets for minors (until they become old enough to handle property responsibly)
  - Protect assets for vulnerable beneficiaries
    - Special needs relatives
    - Alcoholics/drug addicts
    - Spendthrifts (protects from their creditors)
    - Etc.

## Spousal Issues and Revocable Living Trusts

- Spouse in lowa is entitled to same 1/3 elective share from a revocable living trust as from a will.
- In other words, you can't disinherit your spouse without a valid prenuptial agreement.
- Iowa law also provides that a spouse will be written out of a trust (like a will) if a divorce occurs. This is not true of all states.

## WHAT ABOUT TRANSITION PLANNING?





## Proper Planning Can Promote Family Harmony







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#### News

Guidance is Trickling in, but Nothing Big Yet

lowa Court Upholds Intentional Interference with a **Bequest Judgment** 

Provisions to Watch During Farm Bill Debate

More

#### **Check Out Our July Newsletter**



July was a busy month! This month we review where we're at with tax reform guidance, including a review of notices issued this month, look at the

status of the farm bill debate, review new lowa laws, and much more!

Edit Feature

#### Upcoming Events

Aug 1, 2018 The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 -Employer Provisions

Aug 2, 2018 Webinar: Form 4797

Aug 8, 2018 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act - Small Business Provisions

More

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#### "Fix" to Grain Glitch is Now Law - Examples Included

March 22, 2018 Kristine A. Tidgren

President Trump signed the <u>Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018</u>, H.R. 1625, on March 23, 2018. At the end of the 2,232-page legislation, Congress included a section written to <u>"fix" the "grain glitch."</u> This is, of course, the provision in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act that provided significantly higher tax deductions (in most cases) to patrons who sold commodities to cooperatives rather than to non-cooperatives. You can read more detail about the original provision <u>here</u>.

The 17-page "fix," while attempting to level the playing field, adds even more complexity to an already convoluted section of the new tax law, IRC § 199A. The fix retroactively takes effect, beginning January 1, 2018. This wipes from existence the provision giving cooperative patrons a 20-percent deduction based upon gross sales.

Non-Coon Sales



#### Looking at Vehicle Depreciation and Expensing under the New Tax Law

February 25, 2018 Kristine A. Tidgren

The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) made significant changes impacting the depreciation and expensing of vehicles used in a trade or business. [1] In this post, we review the current law.

#### 2017 Limits for "Passenger Automobiles"

IRC §280F(a) imposes dollar limitations on the depreciation and IRC § 179 expensing deductions that can be taken for passenger automobiles. This limitation is often referred to as the "luxury automobile depreciation limitation," even though it applies to vehicles not commonly considered "luxury automobiles." Passenger automobiles, by definition, weigh 6,000 pounds gross vehicle weight or less. Cars, trucks and vans falling within these weight limits are subject to the 280F limitation. SUVs are treated as trucks for the purpose of applying the limitation. The 280F limitation is indexed for inflation, and IRS has traditionally applied a different inflation adjustment for cars than for those vehicles on a truck chassis, including light-duty trucks and vans. Consequently, two tables have emerged for the IRC §280F(a) limitation. IRS Rev. Proc. 2017-29 set the 2017 limits as follows.

#### Limits for light-duty trucks and vans placed in service in 2017 for which bonus does not apply:

	1st Tax Year	\$3,560
•	2nd Tax Year	\$ 5,700
•	3rd Tax Year	\$ 3,450
	Each Succeeding Year	\$ 2,075

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#### Dicamba Drift: What are the Legal Remedies?

As the reports of damages stemming from dicamba drift increase, questions swirl. Just what is the problem? Who's responsible? What can be done to prevent future damage? While there are no clear answers to many of these questions, it may be useful to review the general legal principles that apply to herbicide drift and discuss how they apply to the current problem. Continue reading here.



Plaintiff Wins \$70,100 after **Neighbor's Trail Encroached upon** Her Land

The Iowa Court of Appeals

Edit View

September 2017

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Tax Court Rules that Farm Couple's Rent from Its S **Corporation Not** Subject to SE Tax

On September 27, the U.S. Tax Court ruled that a Texas farm couple was not liable to pay self-

employment tax on rents they received from the S corporation through which they conducted a poultry growing operation. The decision in Martin v. Commissioner, 149 T.C. 12 (Sept. 27, 2017), adopted the analysis of McNamara v. Commissioner, 236 F.3d 410 (8th Cir. 2000), and comes 14 years after the IRS announced its non-acquiescence with that key 8th Circuit case.

The taxpayers, who were husband and wife, acted as contract poultry growers for Sanderson Farms, Inc. Although they originally signed their broiler production agreement with Sanderson Farms as individuals, they later formed an S corporation and assigned their responsibilities under the agreement to that entity. The S corporation, CL Farms, Inc., employed the wife to provide bookkeeping services and the husband to provide labor and management services. Nothing in the agreement required the taxpayers to personally perform the duties of grower, and the company hired additional employees.

The taxpayers then entered into a five-year agreement under which CL Farms would rent from the taxpayers their farm, including 176,000 square feet of poultry houses and equipment, in exchange for \$1.3 million. This was fair market rent and was consistent with amounts paid by other Sanderson Farm growers for the use of similar premises.



#### It's Time to Register for Tax School!

We had a great time at the September Seminars. Thanks to all who participated, either in person or online! We've now turned our attention to preparing for the 44th Annual Federal Income Tax Schools. We have a great slate of locations and speakers, and we're looking forward to seeing you around the state! Reserve your spot today.

November 2-3, 2017 - Maguoketa, Iowa - Centerstone Inn and Suites

November 6-7, 2017 - Le Mars, Iowa - Le Mars Convention Center

November 8-9, 2017 – Atlantic, Iowa - Cass County Community Center

November 9-10, 2017 - Mason City,

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