



# FACT SHEET

## PRO-FARM Leadership and Management

Fact Sheet 671

### Time Management: Making the Most of a Limited Resource

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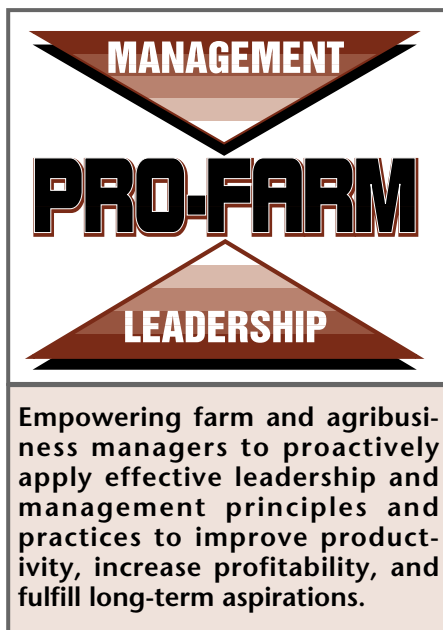
When we talk about economic resources, three types of resources usually come to mind: land, labor, and capital. But a fourth resource—time—may be more important than all the others. A common saying among farmers is, “I already know how to farm better than I am farming right now. I just don’t have the time.” Obviously, farmers understand the economic value of time. To make the best use of our limited time, we should manage it just as effectively as we manage our land, labor, or capital.

Time management experts have developed a model called a time management matrix. This model helps us prioritize our activities and use our time more effectively. Through the model we can evaluate our activities in terms of importance and urgency.

Everything we do is either important or not important. Important activities are those that contribute to our mission, objectives, and goals. Our activities can also be characterized as urgent or not urgent. Urgent activities are things that demand immediate attention—they put pressure on us for a response RIGHT NOW!

Important activities may be either urgent or not urgent. Urgent activities may be either important or not important. Figure 1 shows a time management matrix illustrating these concepts. Each of our activities can be distinguished as one of four types, represented by the four quadrants of the time management matrix.

Type A activities are both important and urgent. These include deadline-driven tasks and important daily chores. For example,



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	<b>Urgent</b>	<b>Not Urgent</b>
<b>Important</b>	<b>A—Important/Urgent</b> deadline-driven tasks important daily chores demanding problems crisis management delayed field operations daily care of livestock last-minute financing last-minute repairs paying past-due bills	<b>B—Important/Not Urgent</b> preparation and planning crisis prevention deadline-avoiding activities timely field operations winter repair work work with consultants marketing labor management skill improvement
<b>Not Important</b>	<b>C— Not Important/Urgent</b> interruptions minor pressing tasks some phone calls some meetings some mail some salespeople some repairs and clean-up	<b>D—Not Important/Not Urgent</b> busy work time wasters junk mail some phone calls

**Figure 1.** Time management matrix

the important activity of harvesting is often pressed to urgency by looming bad weather. On a dairy farm, milking and feeding the cows is important to maintaining productivity. It is also urgent because we cannot postpone milking and feeding even a few hours. Type A tasks include demanding problems and managing crises such as last-minute repairs, past-due bills, and last-minute financing.

Type B activities are important but not urgent. These activities are characterized as preparation, planning, crisis prevention, and deadline-avoiding tasks. Examples are timely field operations, financial management, winter repair work, work with consultants, effective marketing, labor management, and skill improvement.

Type C activities are not important but urgently press upon us and interrupt our more important activities. These include

responding to a salesperson, phone calls, meetings, and mail that do not increase our productivity and effectiveness. Some odd jobs around the farm—such as minor repairs and cleanup—may appear urgent, but may be only marginally important.

Type D activities are neither important nor urgent. Busywork, time wasters, junk mail, and some phone calls are the type of activities that fall in this quadrant.

Categorizing our activities in these quadrants reminds us what is important and helps us avoid unimportant endeavors. It also helps us prioritize important activities. Five practical observations can be made about these concepts:

1. Type A and B activities may be equally important. Some type B activities may even be more important than type A activities, they just may not be urgent.

2. Type A activities (important and urgent) almost always come first.

3. Spending most of our time on type A activities causes stress and burnout. It leads to crisis management and “putting out fires.”

4. Focusing on type B activities (important and not urgent) can reduce the number of type A activities in the long run.

5. The way to make time to focus on type B activities is to avoid all unimportant activities (type C and D).

### Time Management Practices

The concepts illustrated by the time management matrix can be practically applied using to-do lists. A to-do list is a simple method of keeping track of tasks that need to be done, but it is more than simply scribbling a list on a scrap of paper. It is a concerted effort to prioritize and complete tasks in an organized way, day in and day out.

To-do lists should be kept in a small notebook that fits in your pocket and can be carried at all times. The PRO-FARM program has printed to-do list pads that are the size of a normal checkbook (Figure 2).

### Making a To-Do List

Review your objectives, strategic, and tactical plans. Review yesterday’s list for unfinished tasks. Look forward to upcoming events and deadlines. Brainstorm everything that comes to mind that needs to be done today and record it on the Activity or Task column. Rank each item according to importance and urgency in first column:

- A—important/urgent
- B—important/not urgent
- C—not important/urgent
- D—not Important/not urgent

**Prioritizing the to-do list.** Prioritize the events for the day in numerical order

**MANAGEMENT**  
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**LEADERSHIP**

## TO-DO List

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Time Quadrant (A, B, C, D)  
↓  
Priority (1, 2, 3, . . . )      Done ✓

Activity or Task

Time Quadrant	Priority	Activity or Task	Done

**Figure 2.** Sample to-do list for prioritizing tasks

in the second column. Type A tasks nearly always come first, then type B activities. Type C tasks should be avoided because they are not important, but they sometimes must be done because of their urgency. Type D activities should be avoided nearly all the time and should be crossed off the list.

**Act on priorities.** Complete the tasks as you have prioritized them. Try to stay with one task until it is done. Each day, try to work down the priority list to accomplish at least some type B activities—doing this will avoid crisis management in the future. Do not procrastinate, stay disciplined, and avoid type C and type D activities. Work smarter, not harder.

Throughout the day, check off activities as they are completed. Put an arrow beside activities to be moved to another day. Make notes on the back of your list of thoughts, ideas, and conversations with people that you want to remember. Record the names of people you delegate tasks to, and list tasks and activities on future to-do lists. Keep your list with you ALL THE TIME! Keep old to-do lists in chronological order for reference (recipe file boxes work well).

**Time management planners.** Many leaders and managers in all types of businesses, including farms, use time man-

agement planners. These planners are daily, weekly, or monthly schedules that help the manager allocate time to the most important priorities. The following is a list of publishers of time management planners that may be useful for farmers. This list is not an endorsement for these particular companies, but merely a convenience for individuals looking for information on commercial planners. The exercises in Worksheet 1 may be useful as you begin to use to-do lists.

Day-Timers Inc.  
One Day-Timer Plaza  
Allentown, Pennsylvania 18195-1551

Franklin Planners  
Franklin Quest Company  
P.O. Box 31406  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84131-0406

Seven Habits Organizer  
Covey Leadership Center  
P.O. Box 19008  
Provo, Utah 84605-9925

## Worksheet 1

### Time Management Exercises

#### Exercise 1

Use a to-do list every day as described in the PRO-FARM workshop materials.

#### Exercise 2

Over the coming week, keep a historical record of what you do with your time on the back of your to-do lists. List your tasks and activities and estimate the amount of time for each item. Determine whether they are A, B, C, or D activities. Summarize and review the week as a whole and observe the C and D type activities (not important) that could be eliminated so that you can spend more time on important/not-urgent activities (type B).

#### Exercise 3

At the beginning of the week, review your mission statement, objectives, and strategic and tactical plans. Compile and prioritize a to-do list for the coming week based on this review. As the week progresses, add additional activities and tasks to the to-do list that you overlooked in the original list. Focus on important/not urgent activities (type B) whenever possible.