



*Example Essay. Note that the margins in this example are not correct.*

Centered Title

### The Family Farm as a Learning Organization

A learning organization is one that is able to adapt to changes in its environment and act accordingly to remain solvent, hopefully competitive and, ideally, profitable. Environmental changes might include innovations in technology, evolutions in the marketplace and changes in leadership, among other transformational events. Learning organizations are characterized as having certain traits. These traits were distilled to their essence by Peter Senge in his five disciplines of a learning organization. Family farms, if they are to be successful, must observe these disciplines as much as any other business would; these disciplines are systems thinking, personal mastery, shared vision, team learning, and mental models.

Thesis Statement

Main supporting points

Topic Sentence 1<sup>st</sup>  
Supporting Point

Transition Sentence

Topic Sentence 2<sup>nd</sup>  
Supporting Point

Transitional Sentence

Topic Sentence 3<sup>rd</sup>  
Supporting Point

Life on a family farm is all about systems thinking, from the raising and selling of livestock to the choice and rotation of crops. For instance, not all calves from the spring will necessarily be sold; some heifers may be kept to grow the herd. If cattle are to be fed, some of the hay and corn crop probably will be used to feed them. Some of the corn will be cut for silage. All of this must be planned to work together for balance and profitability.

Successful farming absolutely requires that practitioners be committed to lifelong learning and personal mastery of their trade. A farmer must know both short term and long term markets if he is to optimize profitability. Markets change yearly, monthly and daily and are complicated, tied as they are to global economies and environmental conditions. The farmer also must keep abreast of changes in herbicides, pesticides and environmental law, better hybrids and more efficient machines for planting and harvesting. These things represent just the tip of the iceberg in regard to what he has to learn on his own time and of his own volition.

Lack of shared vision has destroyed more than a few family farms. A family farming organization must be committed to the same vision of the future and what constitutes success because “the road map” to the future can change at

Transitional Sentence

any time. If the team is committed to working in the service of a shared vision, the business has a great chance of remaining solvent.

Topic Sentence 4<sup>th</sup>  
Supporting Point

Team learning on a working family farm is a foregone conclusion. It goes hand-in-hand with shared vision. All mature members are expected to know the basics of the business and what it takes to be successful; and while there may be division of labor, the same people who generally run tractors might be called to duty delivering a calf.

Transitional Sentence

This means that all members have an appreciation for the importance of all the jobs in the smooth operation of the business and can bring their knowledge and creativity to improving efficiency in all areas.

Topic Sentence 5<sup>th</sup>  
Supporting Point

The farmer who doesn't have mental models, or strongly held ideas about the world and how it works, that he impresses upon his "team" is a rare creature. Indeed, a failure to pass on some mental models is highly likely to lead to the aforementioned "lack of shared vision." Chief among the mental models essential to successful family farming is the belief that the farm, owning it and working it, are important. However, some mental models in the world of agriculture, as in all industries, must be turned over and aired out once in a while.

Transition Sentence

For example, the effects of the drought of the Great Depression were enormously complicated by over tillage; current practices born of experience and experimentation with different ways of thinking and doing have greatly reduced tillage and, thus, erosion, and increased production.

Summary/Review of Supporting Points

People who have never farmed often think of family farming in terms of a lifestyle choice, but farmers know that it is business. In order for a family farm to survive as a business, the farmer must see her farm as a system with many parts that have to work together. She must be committed to lifelong learning and personal mastery of her trade. She must impress upon her family/team members a shared vision, the importance of team learning and establish mental models that

Restatement of Thesis Statement

are flexible enough to change with new information. A family farm is the very definition of a learning organization.