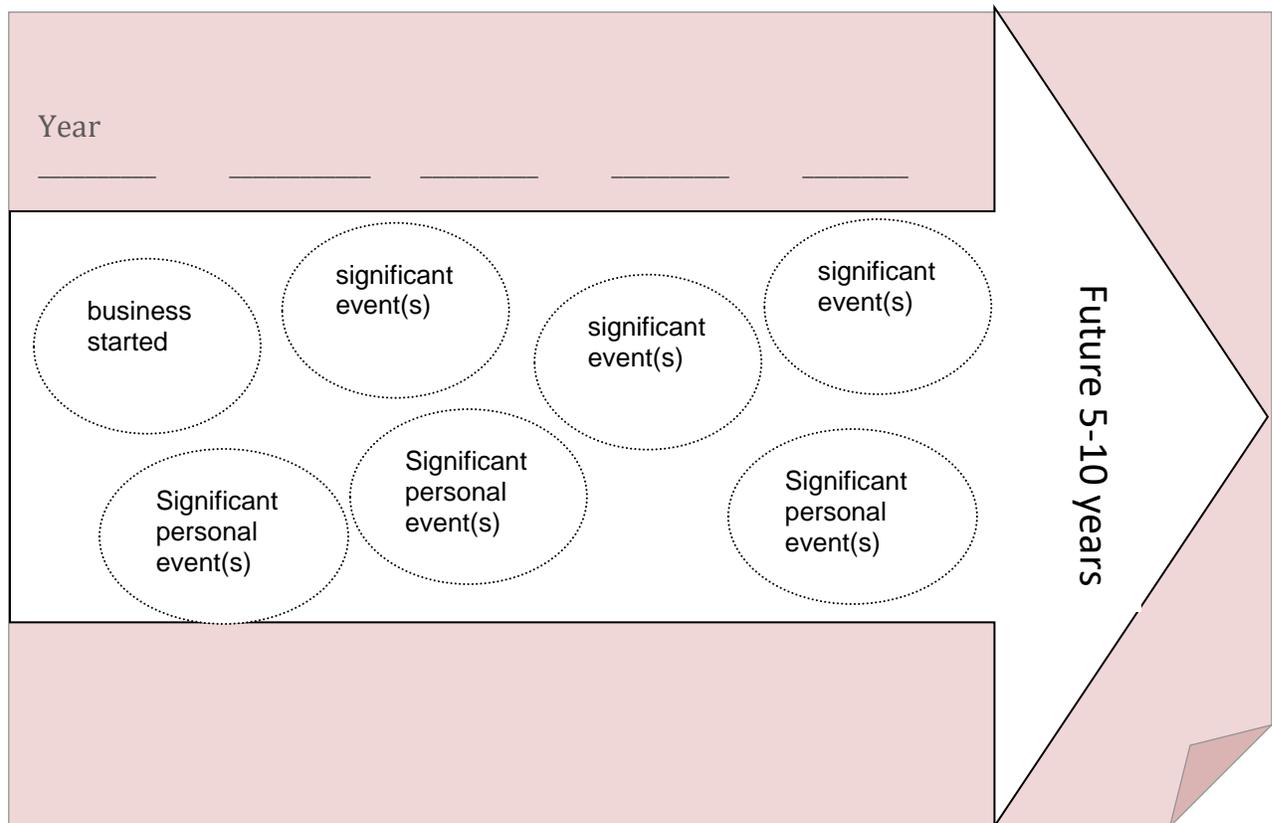


## Looking Back

We are going to start the planning for the next phase of your business by going backwards. For many farm and business owners the day-to-day challenges of running the business can interfere with the greater vision that you had for the business when you started. It is easy, and common, to focus on all the dreams, hopes and ideas that have not been realized and forget all that we have achieved. For that reason, we want to begin with an exercise that will help you to see how far you have come and what you have accomplished along the way.



### Exercise 1. My Timeline(s)

#### Instructions:

1. You might want to begin this exercise with a little reminiscing. Jot down significant events related to your business AND significant events related to your personal life.
2. When you have a good list of these events identified, begin plotting them on the timeline. Suggestion: Use 2 different colored markers so that you make a visual distinction between business events and personal events. You might also choose to post pictures on the timeline instead of just writing notes.  
Example: significant personal events might include: completed school, 1<sup>st</sup> child born, on-farm internship, purchased 1<sup>st</sup> home, loss of a parent, health crisis, or a relocation to a new state.

Developed by Mary Peabody, UVM Extension for the Women's Agricultural Network (WAgN).

Business events might include: started business, 1<sup>st</sup> Farmers' Market season, spring flood that destroyed half the crop, hired first employee, purchased farm land, etc.

3. When you have the timeline complete up to the current time begin projecting some future events. These might take the form of mini-goals that you have been thinking about or some events that you know are coming up. For example, you might have "launch a website for my business" as an upcoming event along with the date that you hope to have that done. For your personal timeline you might have something related to your youngest child heading off to college. Try to anticipate some events, both personal and business, for the next 5-10 years.
4. When you have the timeline complete, find someone and tell them your "story" in your own words. If, in the telling, you realize that you have omitted an important event go ahead and pencil it in – this is an exercise in capturing your history so make whatever adjustments you have to make to have a complete picture.

### Exercise 2. Questions about the timeline

1. When you look at your business timeline what are some observations that jump out at you?

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2. Can you identify places where the competing demands of your business and your life may have impacted either your business or your life? Were these impacts positive, negative or a combination?

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3. What are some strategies that you might try to lessen the tension between the future demands of your business and your life?

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### Women, Business and Balance...

Many women business owners find themselves burning out often to the point of physical or emotional distress. Frequently the cause of this distress is not the demands of the business or the demands of family but rather from trying to juggle both without having a clear sense of which should take priority and when.

Consequently, it is important to understand how, and when, your business intersects with your life.

The point of this exercise is to help you become more aware of when the demands of your business are likely to be the most intense. By comparing these points with the life events that you can anticipate, we hope that you will be able to make some adjustments and avoid having the demands of both business and life pile up at the same time.

Of course, there will always be unanticipated events that defy your best planning but by avoiding as many direct conflicts as possible it is likely that you will have the energy you need to cope with the unanticipated crises.

### Coach/Facilitator Notes:

This is a good exercise to incorporate into a group learning experience. You might want to wait a week or 2 until the group has a bit of comfort with one another as this does require an element of trust to be really successful.

You can make it very impactful by posting a giant “timeline” on the wall and asking participants to copy their individual events and business events onto the large shared timeline. This allows the group to see, in a visual way, group’s shared history complete with overlapping events and other events spanning decades.

The take-home message of this exercise is to help individuals see that a) they have generally accomplished a lot more than they give themselves credit for and b) life and business events sometimes get in one another’s way.