

Time Management & The Eisenhower Box

On a farm there is always more to do than time to do it. Time management skills and systems are crucial for prioritizing daily, weekly, and monthly tasks, delegation decisions, annual planning, economic viability, meeting market demands, and accomplishing a healthy personal life.

Put simply, effective time management is a fundamental and crucial component of farm and personal success.

A first step to effective time management is to categorize the tasks to be done based on how urgent and how important they truly are.

1. Time management is a work in process.
2. It is critical for creating the lives we want.

Urgent Actions: Things that you feel you need to react to now or very soon.

Important Actions: Things that contribute to your long-term mission, values, and goals.

Some things are urgent and important, such as a broken fence and cows out. Imagine you have to stop planting to deal with the cows. Then it rains, and the planting goes unfinished. When we are pulled away to react to urgent emergencies, like a line of dominos, other areas of our work or personal lives fall.

Other things may feel urgent but might not be important—such as the phone ringing—and distract us from tasks that are important.

The Eisenhower Box is a useful tool to for taking action and organizing your time. The format breaks tasks into 1 of 4 categories based on urgency and importance. Separating these is simple enough to do once. Doing it continually can be challenging. The box provides a framework to do it consistently. Consistency is key to success.

The Eisenhower Box

	URGENT	NOT URGENT
IMPORTANT	1. DO Do it now.	2. DECIDE Schedule a time to do it.
NOT IMPORTANT	3. DELEGATE Who can do it for you?	4. DELETE Eliminate it.

There are many ways to use the Eisenhower box. It can be used for planning on a daily, weekly, monthly, or annual basis, or record keeping and analysis. A few ways to consider are:

- **Make your work plans and to-do-lists in it.** Doing so will hold you to prioritizing tasks effectively. It will also develop prioritization habits and analysis skills. Keep blank copies where you do your daily planning: at your desk, on your clipboard, etc. A template is provided in this document.
- **Record and analyze.** As you go through the busy season, capture farm activities in the category that you want them to happen in the future. For example, if you find yourself writing a CSA newsletter at midnight the night before distribution in the heat of harvest, you might note in the Important and Not Urgent box that next year you will create CSA newsletters in January, and only finalize them with a bit of current news during the busy season. After recording activities for a period of time, you will be able to create an annual work plan. It can be close to impossible to make system changes on a farm during the busy season. It's important to capture what needs improvement so you can attend to it later when you have time. Without recording, things are often forgotten and the same inefficient process is repeated again, year after year.
- **Analyze the Delete box.** Items that fall into the not important & not urgent box may just be old habits to be gotten rid of, however they might be serving a personal need that is not readily apparent. Is there a reason you do these things? Do they provide down time? Connection, or some other personal need? You may be better served recognizing the personal need and finding a more effective way to meet it.

	URGENT	NOT URGENT
IMPORTANT	<p>1. DO Do it now & Plan to move it. These are tasks that must be done right away or there could be a negative consequence. Prioritize actions that are in this category. However, plan ahead to keep Box 1 as empty as possible. Doing so will minimize emergencies that disrupt your life and work.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> On a daily basis, be sure you identify what should be in this box and that it gets done. Look at what is falling into this box and ask if advance planning could move any of these to Box 2 or 3 or even better 4. <p>Task: We have to stop planting, go fix the fence, and round up the cows. NOW! New Strategy: Calendar-schedule fence maintenance during less busy times to move the task to Box 2 and minimize the likelihood of fencing being a Box 1 emergency in the future.</p>	<p>2. DECIDE Schedule a time to do it. For maximum efficiency, it is best if the majority of your time is spent on important tasks before they become urgent. Consider what is presently happening in other boxes. Plan ahead to move them to box 2.</p> <p>1. Calendar schedule important tasks at non-urgent times.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Long term business strategizing - Fence maintenance - Order supplies - Hire staff - Meet with buyers - Write articles - Respond to emails and phone calls at a planned time <p>2. Designate and protect time for your personal needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exercising - Time with family and friends
NOT IMPORTANT	<p>3. DELEGATE Who can do it for you? This box challenges us to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Address the feeling of urgency, and Helps us delegate tasks to others. <p>1. Some things create the feeling of urgency, but actually aren't urgent and aren't important. Sometimes they need to be moved to a different box or delegated.</p> <p>Task: The phone ringing <u>feels</u> urgent but most of the calls are not important. Should I answer it or use other strategies such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Schedule important calls in box 2. - Have voice mail manage incoming calls. - Set up a special ring for family, buyers, and other important calls to reach me. <p>2. DELEGATE: Is it important that YOU do this task? Is there a better use of your time? Who can do it for you?</p> <p>Task: I am the fastest corn picker, but I can't pick all 300 cartons. My time is best spent inspecting the field, and managing the corn harvest crew than trying to pick a lot myself.</p> <p>Task: If I rebuild this carburetor it will take me 3 hours. Bill will do it for \$50. I need it NOW, can't schedule it for winter, and right now lost productivity is worth more than \$50.</p>	<p>4. DELETE Eliminate it. The Eisenhower box is particularly useful because it pushes us to question whether an action is necessary. The fastest way to get it done may be to eliminate the action entirely. There may be tasks or behaviors that:</p> <p>1. Could be eliminated with a different system.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Task: Scraping and repainting the worktables in the packing shed. Eliminate: Replace them with stainless steel. - Task: Hand writing labels. Eliminate: Link the invoice to a label printer. <p>2. Are mindless habits or done to avoid other tasks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Doing grammar checks on unfinished writing. Then deleting the text in the content-edit. - Checking Social Media—if it's important, move it to 2 - Looking at photos to avoid writing the newsletter. - Overeating to have an excuse to take a break. <p>Keep in mind you may be doing these things to serve a personal need. Ask <i>why do I do these things?</i> Are they a waste of time or do they meet a personal need such as introspection time, connection or other? Ideally, we'll recognize the need and plan a more effective way to meet it. Ex: Am I grammar checking to get distance from the work? Would I be better served going for a short walk to clear my head?</p>

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