

This Resource has been generated by Women in Farming Enterprises and is designed to offer the fundamental basics of what to think about within a farm office. It is a work in progress and we welcome any thoughts or considerations we have missed, or extra ideas you think of along the way. The information is broken into main sections for consideration. All sections contain some **General Ideas** (dot points) and some have a table which contains what WIFE Varley Consider are **Critical Points** to cross check or work toward within your farm office, many of these were generated during a farm office tour.

## BACKGROUND —

- If re-designing your farm office ranks behind buying a new piece of farm machinery, consider moving it up on your spending calendar.
- A farm office that is well designed not only provides physical comfort and improves morale but makes your entire operation run more efficiently.
- A farm is a very active place, but all that action is derived from thought. The farm office is where all thinking is centralized and the place from which the operation can run.
- An organised, structured and professional office can reduce stress, improve productivity and improve paper flow through the office.
- Gives credibility to your business, to you and can improve self-respect and pride.
- A business like office has a positive effect on employees, bankers and other business professionals you need to deal with and at times may need to impress.
- The revolution into farm productivity and efficiency needs to extend into the farms office.

## CONSIDER YOUR DESIGN – GENERAL IDEAS

- L shape layouts of two large tables at right angles to each other allow space for computing equipment along with ample desk space to spread out papers and books. U shapes also work well to function like a cockpit. Stay clear of inexpensive small computer desks, as there will not be enough room.
- A defined Space – most likely in your home – the farm office will benefit from a boundary, the best is a door but a divider, bookcase or other physical separation will help.
- Meeting areas – if your farm business requires meetings with staff, consultants etc. – if possible create this space – or for most of us accept that our kitchen tables will become this place.
- Comfortable modern seating that supports back and legs and conserves energy.
- Heating/Cooling/Adequate power points.
- Adequate lighting should be considered to reduce eye strain and improves general atmosphere. The printer and fax machine should be within easy reach of your desk – mostly wireless functioned now which can help free up space if you are willing to get up each time you need to access it.
- Charging/docking station – with today's gadgets etc. having a dedicated spot for charging equipment can help keep equipment on track.
- Whiteboards/Cork Boards are useful for team planning and visual cues for progress.



## TECHNOLOGY & FARM OFFICE INFRASTRUCTURE - GENERAL IDEAS

- Aim for investments that offer an immediate return on the investment. Also consider full cost of ownership including ongoing costs i.e. toners/software updates/training etc.
- Wireless equipment can create more space.
- Consider dual screens for your desktop – proven to increase efficiency in the workplace when updating equipment a redundant screen can be easily hooked up.
- Consider your preferred learning style – if you like to read create a space to do it. If you like to listen or are a visual learner– ensure you have the technology to support this.
- Consider two computers if two people frequenting office. Ipads offer a good option to allow internet research off the main desk top for accounts etc.

## TECHNOLOGY & FARM OFFICE INFRASTRUCTURE – CRITICAL POINTS

		PROGRESS
Up to date operating system on main computer	Greater ease of use and file sharing, or else be familiar with how to download conversion programs.	
Adequate Computer processing speed and memory	Improves efficiency	
Backup Systems in place	USB Sticks, Discs, Powered external hard drives, cloud based, off site backups, email backups, click free wireless hard drive – backs up automatically. Don't forget smart phones/lpads need backing up.	
Power Surge Protection & Back up Battery system	Backup units are a must in regional areas especially where power outs are common.	
Wi-Fi in the home	Wi-Fi in the home means office jobs like researching on the internet can be done comfortably and often within the family. Need to make sure your router – is strong enough to service your home.	
Adequate internet speed and data allowance	Compare Satellite to Broadband 3G network.	
Photocopier, scanner – multifunction centre preferred – utilising Wi-Fi	Wifi'd MFC's allow for more than one computer to print, create more desk space as can be located further away. Have cable backup handy if modem fails.	
Cordless Phone Technology	Uniden Ingenious can travel 10km with two way capability. Handy for reaching workshops etc.	
Farming/Business Software	Software programs enhance efficiency and usability of information entered. Agrimaster/Phoenix for farm books, PAM, Back Paddock etc. for farm records. Email management programs i.e. Outlook. Microsoft office/ Mac equivalent for document production. Communication programs i.e. Skype, Face time, Apps for smart devices when off farm i.e. banking. Drop Box for transferring large files.	
Stationary	Labeller, Stapler, Tape, Paperclips, Bull Dog Clips, Lever arch file labels, Paper, Highlighters, Pens, Punch, Clear slips, Binder, laminator, filing trays, Magazine Files, Pin up boards, post it notes. White boards, reminded – not to skimp on appropriate equipment to do the job well.	
Archive Boxes	Helpful and neat for storing business records.	



## PAPER FLOW - GENERAL IDEAS

- It is important to establish a specific paper flow path in your office. A good paper flow will reduce the buildup of clutter and put an end to the paper piles problem.
- Generally Paper starts on one corner of the desk the “incoming corner” flows across the “clear work space area” and towards “the outgoing corner” of the opposite desk. The incoming corner is where the mail and other papers begin their journey through your office. Concentrate on cleaning this area down to the desktop each time you work in your office.
- The Clear Workspace Area is the next stop in the paper flow. This is where the mail is opened, read, notes and action taken etc. Once a piece of paper reaches the clear workspace area some action must be taken. It may be thrown away, filed in the current activity file, such as bills to be paid, filed in nearby reference files (or scanned and saved) or put in the outgoing mail tray.
- Try to avoid the tendency to create a pile of paper to be filed at a later date. Creating another pile of papers to be filed about doubles the number of times you have to handle each piece of paper flowing through the office.
- At the clear work space decide on a destination and file it immediately.
- Concentrate on improving your paper flow and you will see a dramatic reduction in office clutter.

## PAPER FLOW – CRITICAL

		Progress
Mail Sorting and Opening	Not in the kitchen/in ute etc. – straight into inbox before opening. Prevents misplaced invoices etc.	
In Box	Sort into To Do -(try and action immediately), To Pay (once paid file immediately into your system) To File (ok to leave in tray), To Read (ok to leave in tray) Consider using custom made stamps to help record this process – i.e. READ, KEEP, FILE, PAID	
Invoice Filing	Two systems discussed – Filing Cabinet system – either in Quarters or Alphabetically Or use a Lever Arch file/quarter (a little more manoeuvrable – i.e. can have close at hand at desk) File in relevant month – action and pay or file in an “unpaid section” if need be. Filing within each section can be done alphabetically or date order. Just so long as you can quickly find an invoice you need.	
Document Filing	Scan important Documents and file electronically and physically. Allocate time each year to clean out files if unused.	
Cross Checking for Errors	Popular technique is to have business partner check invoice coding and payments each month either before or after payment (via monthly report).	



## FARM RECORDS – GENERAL IDEAS

- Daily diary – keep notes in a diary – use the A4 sized ones. That way you have a dated record of conversations, quotes given, messages taken etc. etc.
- Planning Notebook – helps to collate thoughts, plans and track progress.
- Unit Costs – it is helpful to keep a record of major farm inputs – this can be easily done using the description column in your accounting program. A quick search of well coded accounts can accurately give historical prices quickly.
- Unit Returns – ensure you are somehow recording the return for all farm outputs – again detailed accounts and code lists can make this easier and create a useful record of historical information.
- Key financial info– such as interest and principal repayment schedules – to help forecast expenditure accurately.

## FARM RECORDS – CRITICAL POINTS

		Progress
Accounting Programs	Agrimaster, Phoenix, Myob. Ensure up to date and do training if necessary	
Paddock & Livestock Management Programs	Get information from paddock either manually or electronically and record data. These programs allow for the easy reference of previous history, stock numbers and trends in production. Not critical but useful. File the hard copy original well if not using programs such as these.	
Production Records	Livestock yields & grain yields – are you keeping annual records of production and income associated with that production.	
Farm Maps	Have printed and available for use regularly. Large aerial maps not only look nice but are a very useful tool for guiding new staff around your property. Use Google earth if you need updated maps or landgate.	
Soil & Tissue Test Results	Mostly electronic now – file once received on emails. Or hard copies into your filing cabinet.	
Grain Contracts	Important to save if received electronically, print and file in your marketing file for the year.	
Carters Delivery Forms (CDF's)	These are the dockets the truck driver brings home each load. Have a dedicated place for these and cross check across loads on loadnet during harvest to ensure accuracy.	



## FARM RECORDS - CRITICAL POINTS – CONTINUED

		Progress
Load Nomination Requests	Print and staple to the Grain contract, file back in marketing file. Cross check with grain invoice when received and mark as PAID once payment correctly received.	
Livestock records	Livestock numbers should be recorded and updated when necessary. It is helpful for planning and budgeting to have accurate stock numbers. Lambing dates & numbers, wool yields & quality, \$/head achieved. Need to have filed your National Vendor Declaration book – when you sell or purchase stock you need this paperwork, Wool Book – when you sell your woolclip you need this record. Shearers Tally Book – needed for documenting shearing numbers and wool quality. Consider a Wool & Sheep Record File to keep records of wool production and quality. Alternatively use an electronic record i.e. program.	
Machinery Records	Stored either in the farm office or workshop – machinery manuals and service records need to be kept somewhere safe.	
Staff Records	Records of past time sheets need to be kept in case of claims or issues, Collate TFN Dec Carbons with the annual payment summary and file per tax year. Consider files for superannuation records. Archive old documents yearly. Have an “active” file on hand for staff currently employed – transfer to filing cabinet when not likely to be needed.	
Annual Farm Reports/Benchmark Reports/Budgets	Have a dedicated section for these reports as they hold great info. Often current seasons are active files so have them handy to your work space. Archive older documents together in filing cabinet.	
Fertiliser Product Books and information		
Taxation Documents	Business and Personal Tax Return Documents should be filed. Not usually an active file. If needing to forward this information on (i.e. centrelink etc.) – consider asking for an electronic version from your accountant.	
Plant and Equipment Records	Date and cost of purchase, depreciation, insurance, registration, fuel consumption, hours use, major repairs and services. The asset register on Agrimaster can house this stuff.	



## COMMUNICATION IN THE FARM OFFICE – GENERAL IDEA

- Good communication and planning improves efficiency and outcomes in business.
- It can take a while to implement improvements – be patient and take regular small steps toward your ideal for a better outcome

## COMMUNICATION IN THE FARM OFFICE- CRITICAL POINTS

COMMUNICATION		Progress
Planners/Job Lists	Have somewhere to plan the week ahead and discuss goals to be achieved and what can be done to maximise efficiency. Consider a family one nearby to enable both needs to be met if applicable.	
Regular Farm Planning Discussions	Helpful for understanding thoughts and priorities for the week ahead	
Phone Lists	Local and emergency. Ensure children know the emergency numbers (when capable) and how to contact neighbours if needed.	
Desk Diary per business member	A place for specific messages to be put, critical papers to be read or signed.	
Mobile & Internet Technology	<p>Smart phones, Ipads etc., setting up emails using IMAP not POP3 accounts means if you read or reply using a device it is automatically registered and when you access your desktop it shows you have opened it already. Ensure you have a data allowance if using the internet on your mobile. Enable your smart phone to connect to your home Wi-Fi when you are at home to save on your phones data allowance.</p> <p>Useful apps can monitor internet usage – search your app store and keep track of your monthly usage – adjust plans if necessary. Ensure good signal – consider car kits to boost on farm and signal repeaters to improve signal in the home if needed.</p>	
Two Ways	40 Channel and/or Private channels. 40 Channels are important in emergencies. Private Channels are helpful if you have to do sheep work with your husband...	
Farm & Local Maps	Have some photocopied maps easily available to distribute for planning, to show staff or visitors, or to orientate new staff to the farm and region.	
Pin Up Boards	Helpful for staff communication/documents that need to be given etc.	
White Boards	Using whiteboard/planners can help get thoughts and worries out of heads and onto paper for everyone to see and help with.	



## IMPORTANT PAPERS - GENERAL IDEAS

- Please consider your ability to collate these documents quickly and easily in the event of a fire – consider a “safe box” – or locating some of the most important papers in an easily transportable unit – if ever needing to evacuate. Highly recommend scanning these documents and having off site backups.

## IMPORTANT PAPERS – CRITICAL POINTS

		Progress
Vehicle Papers/Licenses	Original purchase & Transfer documentation, yearly registration may be filed with invoices.	
Bank Accounts/Finance Documents/Credit Card Numbers/Loan Agreements/PIN numbers	Helpful to have a copy somewhere safe in the event of a lost purse or wallet – helps reduce stress.	
Centrelink/Medicare/Health Benefit Fund Info		
Instructions/Warrantees		
Lease Agreements		
Tax returns/Annual Farm Business Reports/Budgets & Financial Statements		
Birth Certificates/Marriage Certificates/Passports/Wills	(scan then file originals)	
Deeds/Property Titles/Trust Documents	(scan then file originals)	
Insurance Policies		
Livestock Sale and Wool books		



## GET ORGANISED - GENERAL IDEAS

- Organizing your office can be done inexpensively and relatively quickly. Second hand desks, filing cabinets and tables can go a long way to improving efficiency on a budget. There are more and more cheaper alternatives also available via larger stores i.e. Ikea and Office works also.
- Consider your roles – often there are multiple. Consider managing each one separately – i.e. Farm Business/Family/Community Roles/Personal.
- Sharing the Workspace? Communicate systems and procedures to address both sets of needs.
- Developing paper flow and making a habit of following through the process with each piece of paper will stop new clutter from accumulating.
- To catch up start organizing the freshest piles of paper first. Take an extra 10 minutes each office session and soon you will be getting on top of the back log.

## TIPS - GENERAL IDEAS

- Never put all your papers into one basket try a four tray system (although some of us haven't found trays helpful – however it could be worth a try)
  - To Do
  - To Pay
  - To File
  - To Read
- You could try taking the To Read tray somewhere in the home such as kitchen table, bedside or wherever reading is carried out.
- Make a filing habit each week i.e. 15 – 20 minutes of dedicated time
- Backups are critical – ensure you have an offsite backup along with a separate hard drive backup in the office.
- Dust buster or wipes available for quick dust when needed.

## INVOICE FILING - GENERAL IDEAS

- Popular method is the use of 4 lever arch files per year – each holding the three months per quarter.
- Within each month create divisions that work for your business to effectively file invoices, income receipts, loan documents, credit card statements and wage summaries – this should be tailored to suit your preferred style of filing.
- At the end of the year shift the four files nearby your work station and the previous four files further away as they become less and less necessary. Once no longer referred to – files can be stored (archive boxes are good for this) for appropriate period into boxes etc. Files can be reclaimed; however the investment of \$4 per file is possibly not worth the effort.





## DOCUMENT FILING – GENERAL IDEAS

- However you choose to store your documents (I.e. scan and save manila folders or filing cabinets) can be separated into active files – i.e. those containing documents currently in use, or Reference files i.e. information perhaps needed at a later date.
- Active files remain located close to the clear work space without having to leave your chair, Reference Files should be ideally nearby but don't have to be next to clear work space.
- One suggestion for filing cabinet organization was –
  - Top Drawer – Import Docs Insurance Docs/Lease Docs/Deeds/Trusts/Financial Docs/Loan Docs/tax returns/Vehicle Licenses/Tax Returns/Staff Docs/Quotes
  - Second Drawer Farm Records – Pd Operation Docs/Soil/Tissue Hx/Yield Hx/Annual/Reports/Wool Records. Machine Docs/User Manuals/Historical grain marketing /Carter Delivery Forms.
  - Third Drawer – Reference Docs i.e. articles/Misc. Info
  - Fourth Drawer – Personal – Centrelink/Medicare/Private Health/Schooling/Birth Cert/Marriage Cert/Passports/Wills (Scan first before filing!)
- Newspapers, Magazines and Newsletters go to a separate “to be read” pile. Articles of interest you would like to keep should be either scanned and saved (electronic filing) or torn out and filed in your reference file cabinet. The Rest of the paper/magazine could be discarded to reduce on clutter.

## FINAL THOUGHTS –

- Look out for farm office melt down workshops run by Partners in Grain – great workshop and resource.
- Three big issues impacting on our group in the office were
  - Lack of time to do a good job (i.e. keep on top of the filing).
  - Finding Motivation needed to make big inroads i.e. study re vamp/clean up etc. ?? Buddy up with a neighbor and blitz each other's offices!
- Finding/choosing good organizational systems to manage information well – i.e. paddock software/apps to record and manage data.

