



WINTER 2025

Phone (507) 288-5567

Reflecting on 2024 and Looking Ahead

A message from firm President Jason Wagner



As we welcome 2025, I want to take a moment to reflect on the incredible year we've had at Wagner Oehler and share a vision for where we're headed in the year ahead.

In 2024, we were privileged to assist with over **900 estate planning matters** and more than **150 estate administrations**, reflecting the trust so many individuals and families placed in us during life's most crucial legal moments. Of the new matters opened in 2024, more than **600 matters were farm-related**, including over **300 farm matters focused on succession planning and estate planning**. Helping farmers plan for the future of their operations and secure their legacies continues to be one of the most meaningful aspects of our work.

Commercial and farm real estate matters also played a significant role in 2024. We handled more than **200 farm real estate matters**, many of which were family land transfers, contracts for deeds, and private party sales – all important aspects of planning for generational transfers of farmland. These cases support the backbone of our community by preserving the land and businesses that define it.

None of this would have been possible without the strength of our team. At Wagner Oehler, we've built a collaborative environment where every client benefits from the collective expertise of over 20 professionals (all employees of the law firm embedded in our Southeastern Minnesota community), including nine experienced attorneys. Although it may not always be evident, virtually every matter is supported by a team of professionals at the firm. Together, we provided guidance across our practice areas:

- **Estate Planning:** Designing tailored wills, trusts, and strategies to secure your legacy with a particular focus on working with farmers, business owners, and professionals.
- **Farm Succession and Business Planning:** Helping families efficiently transition ownership while minimizing disruption and preserving wealth, as well as guiding entrepreneurs in forming new businesses, negotiating contracts, and acquiring or selling businesses.
- **Real Estate Law:** Managing transactions and ensuring smooth transitions for landowners and commercial property owners.
- **Probate and Trust Administration:** Guiding families through the complexities of estate settlement, including preparing and filing gift and estate tax returns while navigating critical estate tax deductions and elections.

As we reflect on 2024, we are reminded of our commitment to our tagline: *"Guiding you through life's most crucial legal decisions."* This guiding principle has shaped our work over the past year and will continue to steer us as we move forward.

Looking ahead to 2025, we remain dedicated to our vision of being the premier estate planning and administration firm in the region. We are especially focused on expanding our support for farmers, small business owners, and medical professionals, as our team is attuned to addressing the unique challenges they face.

We will remain committed to our team-based approach in providing legal services. This approach ensures we can offer the best solutions to our clients' unique legal needs, and that we are always ready to serve them. Every member of our firm shares these values and actively fosters this culture. We do not silo our attorneys or practices, nor do we tolerate lone wolves. We are all here to work together for you.

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On behalf of everyone at Wagner Oehler, I want to thank you—our clients, colleagues, and community—for your trust and partnership. You inspire us daily, and we're excited to continue working alongside you in 2025 to protect what matters most.

Wishing you a happy, healthy, and prosperous New Year,

Jason Wagner
President, Wagner Oehler, Ltd.

Farm Facts: According to the USDA 2022 census, released in February 2024, there are currently **65,531 farms** in Minnesota occupying **25.4 million acres** of farmland. - **85% of farms** are operated by **families/individuals** with another 14% operated by partnerships or corporations.

Farm Succession Planning Never Stops

Farming is more than a job—it's a way of life, a family tradition, and often, your greatest legacy. But securing that legacy for future generations requires more than hard work in the fields; it demands careful and ongoing succession planning. At Wagner Oehler, we believe that farm succession planning is not a one-time event; it can't be if you are to be successful. It's a continuous process, as essential as preparing the soil each spring, adapting to new markets, or safeguarding crops against unpredictable weather.

If you've already established a plan, that's a great start—but ask yourself, *when was the last time I reviewed it? If you've never started, consider this: the decisions you make today could mean the difference between your farm flourishing in the hands of your heirs or being sold to the highest bidder – an all too common and too real consequence of poor farm succession planning.*

Why Farm Succession Planning is Continual

Farming is cyclical in nature, and so is the planning that keeps a family farm thriving. Over time, everything changes—your family, your finances, tax laws, and even your goals. What worked for your operation ten years ago may no longer make sense today. Perhaps a child who once planned to take over the farm has chosen another path, or maybe you've acquired new land that wasn't accounted for in your original plan. It should not come as a surprise that what worked for your estate plan ten years ago may also no longer make sense today.

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**FARM SUCCESSION
PLANNING NEVER STOPS**

Take control of your farm's future!

WAGNER OEHLER, LTD.
Legal & Title Services

In Minnesota, farmers face unique challenges that demand an adaptable approach to estate planning:

- **Rising Land Values:** Farmland values are at historic highs, creating both opportunities and risks for families passing down agricultural assets.
- **Non-Farming Heirs:** Balancing the needs of farming and non-farming heirs is a delicate process, and without proper planning, it can lead to costly disputes.
- **Tax and Debt Pressures:** Without the right strategies in place, taxes and debts can jeopardize the farm's future, forcing heirs to sell land to cover obligations. The combination of taxes and debts to a farming heir, if not intentionally managed, can result in your farming heir actually being worse off in the event of your death.

At Wagner Oehler, we specialize in helping farmers navigate these challenges with tailored estate plans designed to evolve alongside your family and your business.

Common Farm Succession Challenges

If you're not convinced of the need for an updated plan, consider these common scenarios:

- **Sibling Rivalries:** One child has invested years of labor on the farm, while another has pursued a different career. Is your farming heir approaching 40 or 50 with virtually no assets in their name? How do you create a plan that feels fair while preserving the business?
- **Tax Implications:** An outdated plan could leave your heirs with unexpected tax burdens, potentially forcing the sale of farmland or equipment. Have you actually run the numbers to see what the impact would be to your farming heir upon your death? A recent review of an outdated estate plan revealed that, between paying off non-farming heirs and covering debt obligations, the farming heir's operating costs would have *tripled* upon the passing of mom and dad.
- **Generational Changes:** As younger generations take on larger roles, their vision for the farm may differ from yours. How do you reconcile those differences and set them up for success? Are you prepared to allow the next generation to make some of their own mistakes? We believe this is a necessary part of grooming your farm successor.

These situations don't resolve themselves. They require thoughtful planning, clear communication, and professional guidance.

Why Work with Wagner Oehler?

We know that farmers need more than a standard estate plan, and they should not work with just any lawyer. You need a team that understands the complexities of agricultural businesses, land ownership, and family dynamics. At Wagner Oehler, we've helped Minnesota farm families protect their legacies for decades, offering personalized strategies that go beyond generic legal solutions.

We take a proactive approach to planning, helping you:

- Evaluate and update your current plan to reflect new laws, goals, or family changes.
- Explore tools like family trusts, business entities, and buy-sell agreements to preserve the farm's financial health.
- Create strategies that balance the needs of farming and non-farming heirs, reducing the risk of disputes.

Take Control of Your Farm's Future

The time to act is now. Whether you're starting your first succession plan or revisiting one from years ago, don't wait until it's too late. Life is unpredictable, but your farm's future doesn't have to be.

Let Wagner Oehler be your partner in securing your legacy. [Contact](#) us today to schedule a consultation. Together, we'll build a plan that evolves with your family and ensures your farm remains a source of pride and prosperity for generations to come.

The farm is your legacy. Protect it with a plan that works as hard as you do. Farming matters.

Office Hours and Locations

Rochester: [1801 Greenview Drive SW, Ste. 102](#)

Monday – Thursday 8:30 – 4:30

Friday 8:30 – 3:30

Winona: [65 Johnson Street](#)

Monday – Thursday 8:30 – 4:00

Friday 8:30 – 3:30

Lake City: [120 W Center Street](#)

Monday – Thursday 8:30 – 4:30

Friday 8:30 – 3:30

St. Charles: [819 Whitewater Ave](#)

Tuesday 12:30 – 4:30

Thursday 9:00 – 12:00

By appointment

To schedule an appointment in any of our offices, please call (507) 288-5567.



Wagner Oehler, Ltd.
(507) 288-5567
www.wagnerlegalmn.com

Events Schedule

3 Misconceptions of Estate Planning that Leave a Mess!

Rescheduled: Tuesday, January 21, 2025 at 11:00 AM
125 Live! 125 Elton Hills Drive, Rochester, Minnesota

Keeping the Farm in the Family

Wednesday, February 26, 2025 at 2:30 PM
Dodge Center Community Center, 35 East Main Street,
Dodge Center, Minnesota

Keeping the Farm in the Family with Farm Bureau

Saturday, March 8, 2025 at 10:00 AM
VFW Post 1802, 390 MN-60, Zumbro Falls, Minnesota

Keeping the Farm in the Family

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 at
Winona History Center, Briarcombe Room, 160 Johnson
Street, Winona, Minnesota

Visit <https://www.wagnerlegalmn.com/events/> for our current list of seminars.

If you have questions, contact Marketing Lead, Janice Domke, at janice.domke@wagnerlegalmn.com.

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