

Article

Exploring the Impact of Emotional Intelligence on Family Farm Member Conflict Experiences

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Abstract: Family farm sustainability traditionally focuses on economic and environmental issues. However, sustaining family farms also relies on understanding how to sustain the relationships contained therein. Emotional intelligence (EI) is an important means through which family farm members can sustain relationships, especially when handling conflict between members. This paper focused on how four EI dimensions (awareness of own emotion, management of own emotion, awareness of others' emotions, management of others' emotions) could prevent four types of conflict within family farms (task, relational, process, and status). Family farm participants ($N = 204$) were recruited through social media posts and emails to specialty agricultural groups and agencies, and students at a university. Hierarchical regression results showed that awareness of own emotions, management of own emotions, and management of others' emotions negatively predicted task, relational, process, and status conflict. Awareness of others' emotions did not predict any conflict types. Theoretically, this article points to the importance of considering all four EI dimensions, since they impact conflict types differently. For the family farm members, being aware of their own emotions and being able to manage emotional responses in themselves and others can help prevent conflict from occurring, thereby sustaining both family and business relationships for the future.

Keywords: emotional intelligence; intragroup conflict; family farms; United States agriculture



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1. Introduction

According to the most recent census of agriculture, 96% of farms in the United States are family-owned and -operated [1]. These family farms are primarily small family farms that gross under USD 250,000 a year [1]. In addition, family farms are recognized as a key sustainability factor for rural communities [2]. Family farm members have extensive knowledge of local production, can adapt to continually changing conditions, and share this information with younger generations [2,3]. While economic and environmental sustainability takes precedence in most family farm studies [3,4], sustaining the family itself is also crucial to maintaining the family farm [2].

Family farms represent a unique context wherein business and family merge [2], with many members questioning “when does one deal with someone as a family member and when as a coworker or business partner?” [5] (p. 449). While family farms are very tight-knit, rarely incorporating new members [6], sustaining relationships within family farms can be difficult. Family farm culture is associated with key personality characteristics that often do not include working with other people: independence, self-reliance, competitiveness, keeping problems private, and avoiding talking about issues with anyone [7–9]. Though these cultural values are what likely makes family farms successful across multiple generations [8], these same values can lead to conflict between members and damaged relationships.

Conflict occurs in daily farm interaction as members negotiate whether and how to approach issues with family farm members, which in turn affects how the business is able to thrive [4]. For example, many younger family farm members suppress conflict and

respond with “dad says we’re doing this and I say ok”, [10] (p. 30). Though younger family farm members can play a key role in farm sustainability, involving more members in family farm decision-making can also lead to reduced profits for family farms [3], likely due to mismanaged conflict. For family farm members, finding ways to prevent conflict can be a way to sustain their family farm.

One possible tool for family farm members is emotional intelligence (EI). EI represents an individual’s ability to manage and be aware of their own and others’ emotions [11], and plays an important role in organizational sustainability [12–17]. Research has shown EI can help individuals build and maintain positive relationships [13,18] and balance work and family responsibilities [16]. In addition, EI contributes to feelings of optimism, [12], happiness, and a sense of flourishing [14], and can improve job performance [15]. EI plays a crucial role in organizational sustainability by helping employees build and maintain positive wellbeing and feel connected to other people [14]. For family farms, managing these relationships is even more important as family members function in two spaces, business and family, and the loss of one often means the loss of both [19]. In addition, family farm members experience high levels of emotions as the farm is tied not only to socioeconomic livelihood, but also to a deep concern for the land, animals, and family members who started the farm generations ago [20].

Therefore, this project focused on how EI skills can help prevent different types of conflict within family farms. EI, with its focus on an individuals’ ability to assess and manage their emotions, may play a crucial role in preventing conflicts within family farms [21], thereby helping sustain family farms for the future. Utilizing intragroup conflict theory, which focuses on how four different types of conflict (task, relational, process, and status) impact performance and satisfaction differently [22,23], this study demonstrates the importance of EI for preventing conflict among family farm members. The above section provided a brief overview of the family farm context and situation for this study. Section 2 provides a review of research on intragroup conflict types and EI, with specific emphasis on the links with family farms, and also presents the guiding hypotheses. In Section 3, the survey methodology for the project is outlined. Section 4 includes the hierarchical regression results, noting that most EI dimensions negatively predict intragroup conflict types. Finally, Section 5 focuses on connecting the results to earlier theoretical and family farm research and offering limitations and future research directions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Intragroup Conflict Types

Task, relational, process, and status conflict all impact family farm members in their day to day work on the farm. *Task conflict* refers to conflict based on the assigned task that groups are working on [22]. Groups with task conflict see increased effort, group problem-solving, communication [24], and commitment to the task [25]. Though original work and meta-analyses point to the benefits of task conflict, more recent research points to problems with task conflict, including losses of teamwork quality, effectiveness, performance [26–29], and group satisfaction [29,30]. Instead, task conflict may be better captured as emotional task and cognitive task conflict [31]. On a family farm, task conflicts could include disagreeing about what task to accomplish during the day or what tasks are most important to complete.

Relational conflict exists when group members are incompatible with each other, leading to tension, personal disagreements, and annoyance with group members. Relational conflict is difficult to separate from other conflict types based on the emotionality contained in all messages [23], and since it can be a consequence of poorly handled task or process conflict [32]. The research primarily defines relational conflict as negative, given it limits cognitive processes, decreases the ability to share and assess new information, and reduces cooperation, communication, and commitment within the group [24,33]. In addition, relational conflict is taxing for group members, as emotional resources are drained [27,28].

For family farm members, relational conflicts may include personal attacks or frustrations with other family farm members, such as “Dad feels sorry for him”, [9] (p. 1).

Whereas task conflict focuses on problem-solving and decision-making regarding the group task, *process conflict* refers to logistical issues, including managing and coordinating with people [23]. For example, Waters [10] notes that many family farm members experience conflict over the use of technology in farming, reflecting process conflict as members struggle to identify how best to run the farm. Process conflict within groups and organizations tends to have a negative impact on outcomes [25,29,33] as it increases claim and blame behaviors [24], and negatively impacts performance, as trust and communication are damaged [33]. Furthermore, process conflict can elicit emotions related to personal value and worth as groups discuss the allocation of resources. This leads to arguments becoming personal, which in turn decreases satisfaction within the group, and distracts the group from the task at hand [24,32]. However, groups with a problem-solving approach to conflict are able to utilize process conflict to positively impact performance [34].

Group and organizational scholars have emphasized the importance of status within an organization [35]. *Status conflict* refers to “disputes over people’s relative status positions in their group’s social hierarchy”, [36] (p. 323), and how much of a say and influence members have within the group. Whereas task and process conflict focus on issues related to the group task at hand, status conflict focuses on the social hierarchy of the group and how much status members have and/or desire [37]. Status conflicts can emerge from irrelevant arguments as members compete for more influence in the group [38]. As a result, status conflict tends to be long-lasting, affects the entire structure of the group, and can lead to more competitive behaviors in groups given the benefits of higher status [36]. Furthermore, status conflicts are often a distraction to the group, as members shift attention to individuals rather than the assigned task at hand [38]. Status conflicts likely play a role in family farms, especially for women [39] and in-laws [40], who are often excluded from conversations. Furthermore, Rosmann [9] includes two common family farm member statements that reflect status conflict: “I’m a better farmer than he is”, or “He doesn’t work as hard as I do”, (p. 1).

2.2. Emotional Intelligence and Conflict

Conflict episodes elicit strong emotions, primarily negative ones such as anger, frustration, hatred, and jealousy. Jehn [23] points to the importance of emotion when defining conflict: “individuals’ subjective interpretation of reality and reactions to current situations”, (p. 532). The connection between conflict and emotions also plays out in organizations. Any conflict episode is bound to impact organizational behavior, relationships, and productivity, but the emotional aspect of these conflict episodes is rarely considered [41]. Conflict experiences elicit strong emotions, many of which stick with people after the conflict has been resolved, which affects future interactions [41]. As a result, emotion elicits and guides our actions and behaviors in organizations and relationships [42].

During conflict discussions, participants are required to assess and manage their emotions, referred to as EI. Compared to general intelligence, EI is a subset of social intelligence that focuses on the capability to manage and understand other people [11]. Salovey and Mayer [11] define EI as “the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions”, (p. 189). Though most research adopts a business or psychological view of EI, EI is also a communication competency [43], as an individual utilizes EI based on the verbal and nonverbal interaction occurring between individuals, and their assessment of the social context [44].

Salovey and Mayer [11] break EI into three mental processes: appraisal and expression of emotion, regulation of emotion, and utilization of emotion. Numerous scholars have built on Salovey and Mayer’s work to refine our understanding of EI. One stream differentiates between *ability EI* and *trait EI* [45,46]. Ability EI focuses on the theoretical and cognitive understanding of emotions and emotional functioning [12,45], while trait EI focuses on

the personality characteristics and behaviors in emotionally laden situations, and often relies on self-report measures [45]. An alternative classification system places EI in three streams, with stream one similar to ability EI, stream two matching trait EI, and stream three representing mixed EI, where ability and trait EI are combined [47]. Most studies focusing on EI utilize trait-based measurement [18], which a recent meta-analysis linked to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and lower turnover intentions [48].

EI is characterized based on four dimensions: awareness of own emotion, management of own emotion, awareness of others' emotions, and management of others' emotions [16,49,50]. Though most studies focus on EI as an overall score, distinguishing between the four dimensions is growing in importance, as each dimension impacts outcomes differently [51]. Awareness of your own emotions refers to an individual's ability to be aware and conscious of their current, in-the-moment feelings [49]. Being aware of your own emotions can be helpful in leadership situations, and can dampen extreme emotional reactions to events, leading to more effective communication. Awareness of others' emotions focuses on our ability to read and interpret the emotions of others [44], and largely relies on the nonverbal interpretation of faces and body language [49]. Through awareness of others' emotions, individuals can find ways to guide responses to emotions in order to downplay situations and increase cohesiveness among members [49]. Dougherty and Krone [44] note individuals in lower power positions who are more aware of the emotions of others in higher positions.

Management of one's own emotions allows members to appropriately share their experienced emotions during conflict episodes, while managing others' emotions reflects members' ability to help other members appropriately express emotions within the confines of cultural expectations [44]. Family farm members learn these cultural expectations from other family farm members (i.e., keeping problems private, independence, passive communication) [7,52], with many norms and expectations carrying on for generations [10]. Furthermore, high levels of management of own emotions can facilitate productive conflict management and resolution, while management of others' emotions can allow others to vent and release emotion, leading to resolution [49].

For conflict occurring within groups, the ability to assess and manage emotions has a positive impact on group function and conflict experiences [18]. Individual group members with high EI tended to use collaborative resolution strategies, had fewer task and relational conflicts, and had lower conflict intensity [53]. Furthermore, group members with high EI use more collaborative conflict resolution strategies, while members with low EI levels use forcefulness and avoidance [54,55]. However, for family farm members, the social context presents unique challenges, as they are surrounded by both coworkers and family members who may be more alike than different in terms of EI skills. EI develops throughout an individual's lifetime, with their parents serving as the most important reference [17], and as a result, many children in family farm businesses have similar EI skills as their parents [56].

2.3. Research Questions and Hypotheses

For family businesses, EI is crucial, given that members are balancing both work and family relationships. Arguably, navigating dual relationships takes skill, as individuals must assess the situation and a variety of variables. However, EI helps employees assess these situations and potentially avoid more destructive conflict types later, thereby sustaining the family farm and family relationships [13]. For family farm members, higher EI skills may help them navigate conflict situations [57]. However, the cultural norms associated with family farms point to potentially lower levels of EI as members rely on passive communication rather than open communication, which can help alleviate conflict sooner [49], as well as keeping problems and emotions private [7]. Given these unique characteristics of family farm businesses, this study explores the relationship between EI and intragroup conflict among individual family farm members.

In contrast to group situations, conflict in family businesses often shifts from task to relational quickly, leading scholars to argue for low levels of task conflict [58]. Family farms

experience this as well, as members balance work and family relationships, and figure out how to keep the farm running. Some research notes that groups with strong ties, such as families, can withstand task conflicts and prevent the movement to relational conflict [59], and higher levels of EI can help individuals better select approaches for handling task demands [15]. However, task conflict over routine tasks, or tasks that rarely shift or change, often lead to negative group functionality [22]. For family farm members, daily tasks are often routine, as family members complete the same tasks every day. As a result, though task conflict can be productive in some situations, for the family farm context, EI should help members minimize task conflict. Therefore, the following hypotheses regarding EI and task conflict are posed for the family farm context:

Hypothesis 1a (H1a). *Awareness of own emotions will negatively predict family farm member task conflict.*

Hypothesis 1b (H1b). *Management of own emotions will negatively predict family farm member task conflict.*

Hypothesis 1c (H1c). *Awareness of others' emotions will negatively predict family farm member task conflict.*

Hypothesis 1d (H1d). *Management of others' emotions will negatively predict family farm member task conflict.*

Relational conflict is strongly linked with emotions, especially with the relational content contained in messages [23] and the emotional drain that relational conflict causes [28]. For family business settings, wherein conflicts tend to escalate and turn personal very quickly [58], the ability to assess and manage emotions appropriately can help prevent some of the later negative impacts of relational conflict. With regards to EI, relational conflict is reduced and managed appropriately when group members have high EI, since members are able to handle personal issues that arise [60]. With higher EI, family farm members can potentially prevent some of the extreme emotional responses common to conflict [8,15] and reduce relational conflict [60]. As a result, the following hypotheses are posed for the family farm context:

Hypothesis 2a (H2a). *Awareness of own emotions will negatively predict family farm member relational conflict.*

Hypothesis 2b (H2b). *Management of own emotions will negatively predict family farm member relational conflict.*

Hypothesis 2c (H2c). *Awareness of others' emotions will negatively predict family farm member relational conflict.*

Hypothesis 2d (H2d). *Management of others' emotions will negatively predict family farm member relational conflict.*

As family farm members experience process conflict, they face discussions regarding how to accomplish farming tasks. In a culture that values the word of the older generation who continue operating the same way they have for generations, process conflicts can elicit many emotions as younger individuals try to modernize and find new, efficient ways to farm [8,10]. Troth et al. [60] point to high EI allowing group members to avoid the negative effects of process conflict, which is beneficial for family farms. Therefore, these hypotheses are posed for the family farm context:

Hypothesis 3a (H3a). *Awareness of own emotions will negatively predict family farm member process conflict.*

Hypothesis 3b (H3b). *Management of own emotions will negatively predict family farm member process conflict.*

Hypothesis 3c (H3c). *Awareness of others' emotions will negatively predict family farm member process conflict.*

Hypothesis 3d (H3d). *Management of others' emotions will negatively predict family farm member process conflict.*

In regards to status conflict, previous research has highlighted the strong links between status and relational conflict [36,61]. Status conflicts over power and position in the group can elicit strong emotional reactions from members, and can lead to negative perceptions of other group members [36]. Additionally, status conflict has a similar impact on outcomes as relational conflict, including decreasing family farm members' satisfaction [62]. Status conflict is important in family farm businesses and can overtake other conflict types [36,62]. Older family members often dominate discussion and decision-making because of their age and experience, and get the final say even if ownership has passed to the next generation [10]. Furthermore, the competitive nature of family farmer members brings status conflict to conversations. Because of the similarity between relational and status conflict, the following hypotheses are posed for the family farm context:

Hypothesis 4a. *Awareness of own emotions will negatively predict family farm member status conflict.*

Hypothesis 4b. *Management of own emotions will negatively predict family farm member status conflict.*

Hypothesis 4c. *Awareness of others' emotions will negatively predict family farm member status conflict.*

Hypothesis 4d. *Management of others' emotions will negatively predict family farm member status conflict.*

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Participants and Procedure

The participants were individual family farm members located in the United States. The definition of family farm given by the United States Department of Agriculture was used as an inclusion criterion to identify potential participants: "any farm organized as a sole proprietorship, partnership, or family corporation. Family farms exclude farms organized as nonfamily corporations or cooperatives, as well as farms with hired managers", [1] (p. 1). Participants were also expected to be farming with other family members, including siblings, parents, or grandparents.

Data were collected through an online survey of family farm members in two ways. First, via volunteer sampling, the survey was distributed through email and Facebook to specialty agricultural groups (i.e., Farm Bureau groups, state and county agricultural agencies). Additional network and purposive sampling recruitment occurred through university and personal contacts with agricultural agency representatives who chose whether to share their information with family farmers or not ($n = 119$). Secondly, some participants were recruited through network connections at an upper Midwest university. Emails went out through a campus research listserv to students in the College of Agriculture, and to a large research pool associated with a compulsory first year course ($n = 85$). Finally, snowball sampling procedures were used as all participants were asked to identify any other possible participants at the end of the survey. Participants were also informed they

could share the study with other possible participants. Six of the eight constructs showed no significant differences between the farmer and student samples.

A total of 204 family farm members participated in this study. Age ranged from 18 to 67 years old, with an average of 25.63 ($SD = 11.33$). There were 110 males (53.90%), 93 females (45.60%), and 1 individual who chose not to report their biological sex. Participants had worked on the family farm for an average of 12.94 years ($SD = 9.76$), with a range of 6 months to 50 years. Family farms membership ranged in size from 2 to 26 members ($M = 8.34$, $SD = 3.64$). The majority of these members were parents ($n = 195$, 24.87%), followed by siblings ($n = 176$, 22.53%), spouses ($n = 140$, 17.92%), other relatives including aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews, grandparents, cousins, and in-laws ($n = 136$, 17.41%), and finally children ($n = 134$, 17.16%). The primary output for these family farms was crops ($n = 100$, 49.00%), followed by beef ($n = 44$, 21.60%), dairy ($n = 38$, 18.60%), and others ($n = 15$, 7.50%).

3.2. Measurement

3.2.1. Intragroup Conflict

All the items used in this study can be found in Table 1. Task, relational, and process conflict items from Jehn [22] were used. Participants were asked to rate a series of statements on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Three items were used to measure conflict: task conflict ($\alpha = 0.90$; e.g., My family experienced conflict of ideas), relational conflict ($\alpha = 0.87$; e.g., My family members often got angry while working in this team), and process conflict ($\alpha = 0.88$; e.g., My family members had disagreements about who should do what). Finally, the status conflict items from Bendersky and Hays [36] were used. Status conflict was measured with four items, including “My family members frequently take sides during conflict”, and was reliable ($\alpha = 0.92$).

Table 1. Survey questions used.

	Item	Alpha
Intragroup Conflict: Task (Jehn, 1997)	My family members experienced conflict of ideas. My family members frequently had disagreements about the task we were working on. My family members often had conflicting opinions about the task we were doing.	0.90
Intragroup Conflict: Relational (Jehn, 1997)	My family members experienced relationship tension that was not related to the task. My family members often got angry while working in this team. My family members experienced emotional conflict.	0.87
Intragroup Conflict: Process (Jehn, 1997)	My family members had disagreements about who should do what. My family members experienced conflicts about task responsibilities. My family members disagreed about resource allocation.	0.88
Intragroup Conflict: Status (Bendersky and Hays, 2012)	My family members frequently take sides (i.e., formed coalitions) during conflicts. My family members experienced conflicts due to members trying to assert their dominance. My family members competed for influence. My family members disagreed about the relative value of members' contributions.	0.92
EI: Awareness of Own (Jordan and Lawrence, 2009)	I can explain the emotions I feel to family members. I can discuss the emotions I feel with other family members. If I feel down, I can tell family members what will make me feel better. I can talk to other family members of the family about the emotions I experience.	0.93
EI: Awareness of Others (Jordan and Lawrence, 2009)	I respect the opinion of family members, even if I think they are wrong. When I am frustrated with fellow family members, I can overcome my frustration. When deciding on a dispute, I try to see all sides of a disagreement before I come to a conclusion. I give a fair hearing to fellow family members' ideas.	0.86
EI: Management of Others (Jordan and Lawrence, 2009)	I can read fellow family members “true” feelings, even if they try to hide them. I am able to describe accurately the way others' in the family are feeling. When I talk to a family member I can gauge their true feelings from their body language. I can tell when family members don't mean what they say.	0.90
EI: Management of Own (Jordan and Lawrence, 2009)	My enthusiasm can be contagious for members of my family. I am able to cheer family members up when they are feeling down. I can get fellow family members to share my keenness for a project. I can provide the “spark” to get my fellow family members enthusiastic.	0.80

3.2.2. Emotional Intelligence

In order to measure emotional intelligence, the Workgroup Emotional Intelligence Profile (WEIP-S) short scale was used [49]. The scale includes four subcategories of emotion management with a seven-point Likert-type scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Awareness of own emotions ($\alpha = 0.80$; e.g., I can explain the emotions I feel to family members), awareness of others' emotions ($\alpha = 0.86$; e.g., I can tell when family members don't mean what they say), management of own emotions ($\alpha = 0.80$; e.g., I give a fair hearing to fellow family members' ideas) and management of others' emotions ($\alpha = 0.90$; e.g., I am able to cheer family members up when they are feeling down) were all reliable.

3.3. Analysis

The data were loaded into SPSS 26 for data analysis. Before answering the hypotheses, tests for normality were conducted using SPSS-generated Q-Q plots of the residuals and Kolmogorov–Smirnov normality tests. The only non-normal distributions based on the Kolmogorov–Smirnov tests arose when predicting process conflict. However, the Q-Q plots showed appropriate normality for those residuals. Outlier analysis identified outliers on all four EI scales ($n = 9$), but these data points were included given the small number of outliers and the desire to accurately represent the family farm member participants. No participants were outliers in multiple EI dimensions.

In addition, tests were conducted using demographic variables to check for differences between groups and relationships between variables. Previous research has found that EI is impacted by gender, age, and experience, which are important considerations for family businesses as well [63–65]. Some differences were found for biological sex, with females having significantly higher scores in the management of own, management of other, and awareness of others' emotion. Correlation tests with the other demographic variables revealed that age positively correlated with relational conflict, and negatively correlated with management of others' and awareness of others' emotions. Years involved with the farm correlated positively with relational conflict and negatively with awareness of others' emotions. Higher numbers of relatives involved in the family farm correlated positively with management of others', awareness of others', and awareness of own emotions. The type of farm output did not play a role. Given the presence of some significant relationships, hierarchical regression was used to control for the influence of: sex, age, years involved with the farm, and the number of relatives involved in the farm.

4. Results

Hierarchical regression was used to test all the hypotheses. The control variables were included in the first block, with the independent variable in the second block. Hypothesis 1 focused on the relationship between the four EI dimensions and task conflict. The step 1 models with the control variables were not significant. The following step 2 models were significant: H1a (awareness of own emotion; $R^2 = 0.09$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.07$, $F(5, 198) = 4.06$, $p < 0.01$), H1b (management of own emotion; $R^2 = 0.06$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.04$, $F(5, 198) = 2.61$, $p < 0.05$), and H1d (management of others' emotions; $R^2 = 0.09$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.06$, $F(5, 198) = 3.66$, $p < 0.01$). Awareness of others' emotions (H1c) was not significant in step 2: $F(5, 198) = 1.17$, $p > 0.05$. Summaries of the hierarchical regression analyses can be found in Table 2.

Hypothesis 2 explored how EI dimensions could predict relational conflict in family farms, with results in Table 3. The step 1 models with the control variables were all non-significant. Awareness of one's own emotions did significantly predict relational conflict (H2a; $R^2 = 0.10$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.08$, $F(5, 198) = 4.29$, $p < 0.01$), along with management of own emotion (H2b; $R^2 = 0.06$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.04$, $F(5, 198) = 2.70$, $p < 0.05$) and management of others' emotions (H2d; $R^2 = 0.08$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.06$, $F(5, 198) = 3.65$, $p < 0.01$). However, hypothesis 2c was not supported, as awareness of others' emotions did not significantly

predict relational conflict ($R^2 = 0.04$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.01$, $F(5, 198) = 1.45$, $p > 0.05$). The second hypotheses therefore had partial support.

Table 2. Summary of task hierarchical regressions.

Variables	B	SE(B)	β	t	R	R^2	Adj. R^2
Step One					0.13	0.02	−0.004
Age	0.01	0.01	0.08	0.79			
Sex	−0.13	0.20	−0.05	−0.63			
Years Involved with Farm	0.01	0.02	0.05	0.45			
Number of Relatives Involved	−0.002	0.03	−0.006	−0.09			
Step Two					0.31	0.09	0.07
Age	0.01	0.01	0.09	0.85			
Sex	−0.06	0.20	−0.02	−0.32			
Years Involved with Farm	0.004	0.02	0.03	0.27			
Number of Relatives Involved	0.02	0.03	0.05	0.68			
Awareness of Own (H1a)	−0.32	0.08	−0.29	−4.10 ***			
Step Two					0.25	0.06	0.04
Age	0.01	0.01	0.04	0.40			
Sex	0.003	0.20	0.001	0.01			
Years Involved with Farm	0.01	0.02	0.08	0.79			
Number of Relatives Involved	−0.001	0.03	−0.002	−0.03			
Management of Own (H1b)	−0.37	0.12	−0.22	−3.11 **			
Step Two					0.17	0.03	0.004
Age	0.01	0.01	0.06	0.61			
Sex	−0.04	0.21	−0.01	−0.17			
Years Involved with Farm	0.01	0.02	0.04	0.43			
Number of Relatives Involved	0.003	0.03	0.01	0.11			
Awareness of Others' (H1c)	−0.19	0.12	−0.12	−1.61			
Step Two					0.29	0.09	0.06
Age	0.01	0.01	0.04	0.37			
Sex	0.02	0.20	0.01	0.10			
Years Involved with Farm	0.01	0.02	0.06	0.59			
Number of Relatives Involved	0.02	0.03	0.05	0.65			
Management of Others' (H1d)	−0.39	0.10	−0.28	−3.85 ***			

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Hypotheses 3a–d focused on process conflict, with no significant Step 1 models to control for demographic variables. Awareness of own emotion (H3a; $R^2 = 0.13$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.11$, $F(5, 198) = 5.98$, $p < 0.001$), management of own emotion (H3b; $R^2 = 0.13$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.11$, $F(5, 198) = 6.00$, $p < 0.001$), and management of others' emotions (H3d; $R^2 = 0.11$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.08$, $F(5, 198) = 4.66$, $p < 0.001$) all significantly predicted process conflict. Hypothesis 3c regarding awareness of others' emotions was not supported: $R^2 = 0.05$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.03$, $F(5, 198) = 2.19$, $p > 0.05$. Table 4 has the summary statistics for the hierarchical regression.

Finally, the focus of hypotheses 4a–d was on the relationship between the EI dimensions and status conflict. H4a (awareness of own emotion; $R^2 = 0.11$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.09$, $F(5, 198) = 22.69$, $p < 0.001$), H4b (management of own emotion; $R^2 = 0.15$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.13$, $F(5, 198) = 8.84$, $p < 0.001$), and H4d (management of others' emotions; $R^2 = 0.07$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.05$, $F(5, 198) = 3.11$, $p < 0.05$) were all supported. H4c (awareness of others' emotions) was not supported: $R^2 = 0.04$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.02$, $F(5, 198) = 1.64$, $p > 0.05$. Table 5 includes the hierarchical regression results.

Table 3. Summary of relational hierarchical regressions.

Variables	B	SE(B)	β	t	R	R ²	Adj. R ²
Step One					0.17	0.03	0.01
Age	0.01	0.01	0.09	0.83			
Sex	−0.11	0.19	−0.04	−0.55			
Years Involved with Farm	0.01	0.02	0.07	0.70			
Number of Relatives Involved	−0.02	0.03	−0.06	−0.79			
Step Two					0.31	0.10	0.08
Age	0.01	0.01	0.09	0.89			
Sex	−0.05	0.19	−0.02	−0.26			
Years Involved with Farm	0.01	0.01	0.05	0.54			
Number of Relatives Involved	−0.002	0.03	−0.01	−0.08			
Awareness of Own (H2a)	−0.29	0.06	−0.27	−3.89 ***			
Step Two					0.25	0.06	0.04
Age	0.01	0.01	0.05	0.49			
Sex	0.003	0.19	0.001	0.01			
Years Involved with Farm	0.01	0.01	0.10	1.00			
Number of Relatives Involved	−0.02	0.03	−0.05	−0.75			
Management of Own (H2b)	−0.31	0.12	−0.19	2.72 **			
Step Two					0.19	0.04	0.01
Age	0.01	0.01	0.07	0.70			
Sex	−0.04	0.20	−0.02	−0.22			
Years Involved with Farm	0.01	0.02	0.07	0.69			
Number of Relatives Involved	−0.02	0.03	−0.05	−0.64			
Awareness of Others' (H2c)	−0.13	0.11	−0.09	−1.16			
Step Two					0.29	0.08	0.06
Age	0.01	0.01	0.05	0.45			
Sex	0.02	0.19	0.01	0.11			
Years Involved with Farm	0.01	0.01	0.08	0.83			
Number of Relatives Involved	−0.004	0.03	−0.01	−0.14			
Management of Others' (H2d)	−0.34	0.10	−0.25	−3.47 ***			

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.**Table 4.** Summary of process hierarchical regressions.

Variables	B	SE(B)	β	t	R	R ²	Adj. R ²
Step One					0.15	0.02	0.002
Age	0.02	0.01	0.16	1.51			
Sex	0.09	0.19	0.03	0.45			
Years Involved with Farm	−0.003	0.01	−0.02	−0.22			
Number of Relatives Involved	0.02	0.03	0.04	0.57			
Step Two					0.36	0.13	0.11
Age	0.02	0.01	0.16	1.64			
Sex	0.16	0.18	0.06	0.87			
Years Involved with Farm	−0.01	0.01	−0.05	−0.47			
Number of Relatives Involved	0.04	0.03	0.11	1.52			
Awareness of Own (H3a)	−0.36	0.07	−0.34	−5.00 ***			
Step Two					0.36	0.13	0.11
Age	0.01	0.01	0.09	0.95			
Sex	0.27	0.18	0.10	1.50			
Years Involved with Farm	0.004	0.01	0.03	0.30			
Number of Relatives Involved	0.02	0.03	0.05	0.69			
Management of Own (H3b)	−0.54	0.11	−0.34	−5.01 ***			

Table 4. Cont.

Variables	B	SE(B)	β	t	R	R ²	Adj. R ²
Step Two					0.23	0.05	0.03
Age	0.02	0.01	0.13	1.25			
Sex	0.22	0.19	0.08	1.13			
Years Involved with Farm	−0.004	0.01	−0.03	−0.25			
Number of Relatives Involved	0.02	0.03	0.06	0.88			
Awareness of Others' (H3c)	−0.27	0.11	−0.19	−2.54 *			
Step Two					0.33	0.11	0.08
Age	0.01	0.01	0.11	1.08			
Sex	0.24	0.19	0.09	1.29			
Years Involved with Farm	−0.001	0.01	−0.01	−0.09			
Number of Relatives Involved	0.04	0.03	0.10	1.40			
Management of Others' (H3d)	−0.40	0.09	−0.30	−4.307 ***			

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 5. Summary of status hierarchical regressions.

Variables	B	SE(B)	β	t	R	R ²	Adj. R ²
Step One					0.13	0.02	−0.003
Age	0.02	0.01	0.15	1.46			
Sex	−0.08	0.21	−0.03	−0.39			
Years Involved with Farm	−0.01	0.02	−0.10	−0.89			
Number of Relatives Involved	−0.02	0.03	−0.06	−0.78			
Step Two					0.34	0.11	0.09
Age	0.02	0.01	0.16	1.57			
Sex	−0.01	0.20	−0.003	−0.04			
Years Involved with Farm	−0.02	0.02	−0.11	−1.15			
Number of Relatives Involved	0.002	0.03	0.004	0.06			
Awareness of Own (H4a)	−0.38	0.08	−0.32	−4.61 ***			
Step Two					0.38	0.15	0.13
Age	0.01	0.01	0.08	0.85			
Sex	0.15	0.20	0.05	0.73			
Years Involved with Farm	−0.01	0.02	−0.04	−0.36			
Number of Relatives Involved	−0.02	0.03	−0.05	−0.73			
Management of Own (H4b)	−0.66	0.12	−0.37	−5.50 ***			
Step Two					0.20	0.04	0.02
Age	0.02	0.01	0.13	1.23			
Sex	0.05	0.22	0.02	0.21			
Years Involved with Farm	−0.02	0.02	−0.09	−0.92			
Number of Relatives Involved	−0.02	0.03	−0.04	−0.52			
Awareness of Others' (H4c)	−0.26	0.12	−0.16	−2.17 *			
Step Two					0.27	0.07	0.05
Age	0.02	0.01	0.11	1.10			
Sex	0.06	0.21	0.02	0.27			
Years Involved with Farm	−0.01	0.02	−0.08	−0.80			
Number of Relatives Involved	−0.004	0.03	−0.01	−0.13			
Management of Others' (H4d)	−0.37	0.11	−0.25	−3.45 **			

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

5. Discussion

This study explored how EI (awareness of own emotion, management of own emotion, awareness of others' emotions, and management of others' emotions) predicted different types of intragroup conflict in family farms. The results showed three of the four EI dimensions significantly and negatively predicted task, relational, process, and status conflict. Previous research notes that EI skills can be helpful for conflict management [18], but this

study goes a step further to note that EI may be able to prevent conflict from occurring. This section will focus on the specific hypotheses tested and differences identified. Both theoretical and practical applications will be addressed in each section. Finally, limitations and future research directions are provided.

5.1. Awareness of Others' Emotions

Most studies exploring EI focus on an overall score and not the four dimensions. This study followed other work by exploring the impact of individual dimensions on conflict [51]. Though other studies suggest that overall EI provides many benefits to employees in organizations [12–16], this study highlights the importance of exploring what specific EI skills are important for employees, especially in family businesses. For family farm members, awareness of own, management of own, and management of others' emotions are the most important for preventing conflict.

Awareness of others' emotions did not significantly predict any conflict type. Awareness of others' emotions focuses on our ability to read and correctly identify the emotions others are experiencing [44], which can help us deal successfully with people, and can help improve performance and relationships between group members [49]. Previous research notes that awareness of others' emotions can be helpful in conflict situations, as it focuses on understanding other people and can help guide an individual's response to others [49].

However, for family farm members, awareness of others' emotions was not linked to any conflict types. One reason for this could be the individual measurement used. Awareness of others' emotions may be more useful when another person expresses a conflict versus for the individual experiencing a conflict. Conflict involves the perception of differences, meaning the other party is likely unaware of the conflict until it is expressed [66], and there may be no emotions to read from others. Furthermore, the individual's awareness of the other parties' emotions may be the last thing on their mind, as they are so heightened in their own emotions. Dougherty and Krone [44] note that awareness of others' emotions involves understanding the emotions of others and a certain amount of empathy. When conflicts are expressed, the individual may have little concern for how the other person feels; rather, they are focused on their own frustrations in the moment.

Though often beneficial, EI can also be used to manipulate others into maintaining the current structure, and can normalize specific emotional displays and not others [44]. The lack of significance of awareness of others' emotions may point to the more destructive uses of EI by family farm members, as they focus on their own needs and desires and not the feelings of others. For example, many in-laws are not given a voice in the organization due to not being blood family [40], and adult children's opinions are often overlooked by parents even after the farm has transferred to the adult child. Within a system where certain voices are consistently muted, family farm members may not be as concerned with the emotions of others, as they are focused on their own wants and needs.

5.2. EI and Task Conflict

Turning first to the task conflict hypotheses (H1a–d), awareness of own emotion, management of own emotion, and management of others' emotion all negatively predicted task conflict. The first possible reason for this is the family farm context. As mentioned earlier, family business literature tends to argue for low levels of task conflict in family business settings, due to the tendency for task conflicts to quickly become relational conflicts [58]. For family farm members, EI skills may help individuals recognize that task conflicts are not just a task, but may be laden with emotion due to the close personal relationships individuals have [58], and the intertwined nature of task and family in family farm businesses [42]. Furthermore, if task conflict does quickly become personal, the stakes are higher in family farms than in other traditional groups, given that there is the possibility of destroying both family and livelihood [19]. By utilizing EI skills to avoid task conflict, family farm members may be trying to avoid the personal feelings that can emerge during conflict with family farm members, and thus help the family farm survive.

Secondly, EI dimensions may help reduce task conflicts due to the nature of task conflicts in family farms. Jehn [22] noted that task conflicts that emerge over very routine tasks (tasks with few changes over time and limited methods for completion) were detrimental to overall group function. Where task conflict offers benefits to many work groups for creative idea generation and problem-solving, the routine nature of farm life can involve task conflict leading to resentment and frustration among family farm members when things do not change [10]. However, EI, specifically awareness of own emotion, management of own emotion, and management of others' emotions, can help family farm members reduce task conflicts and possibly improve performance. In addition, the increased EI skills among family farm members may function as an aid for conflict management, allowing individuals to make decisions about what conflicts to bring up, and what ones to avoid to maintain family and business relationships [16,42].

5.3. *EI and Relational Conflict*

Hypotheses 2a–d explore the relationship between the four EI dimensions and relational conflict. Higher levels of awareness of own emotion (H2a), management of own emotion (H2b), and management of others' emotions (H2d) all significantly predicted lower levels of relational conflict. Most studies point to relational conflict being the most detrimental conflict type due to the emotionality contained in messages [23]. However, EI skills are useful for reducing emotions for two reasons. First, both intragroup conflict and EI research emphasize the importance of staying focused on the task at hand when facing relational conflict [54,67]. If a family farm member can recognize their own emotions and manage those, and also encourage others to manage their emotions by focusing on the task at hand, relational conflict can be reduced.

Second, EI skills are important for positive relationship management [13]. Previous works noted that EI skills, specifically ones related to the effectiveness of our interaction with others and self-management, are linked with positive relationship management [13]. This study found similar results, wherein awareness of own, management of own, and management of others' emotions significantly reduced relational conflict—conflict tied closely to our personal relationships. For family farm members, awareness of their own emotions and managing their own and others' emotions is likely related to the positive relationships between family members and a desire to maintain those relationships for the sake of both family and business.

5.4. *EI and Process and Status Conflict*

Awareness of own, management of own, and management of others' emotion significantly predicted process (H3a, b, d) and status conflict (H4a, b, d). Both process and status conflict are closely tied with emotions, as they tend to occur as a result of mismanaged relational conflict [32,36] and deal with relationships between members [25,32,61]. In addition, both process and status conflicts are linked to generational issues within family farms. Whereas process conflicts deal with delegation for in-the-moment issues, status conflicts reflect issues within the larger group structure. The awareness of own emotions, and the management of own and others' emotions, can help family farm members navigate process and status conflicts, as they respect the perspectives of others and try to find ways to navigate the conflict.

Process conflict is linked to poor communication between individuals due to decreased trust and a lower desire to collaborate [26,33]. Most family farms already struggle with communication [7,19,52], but family farm members with strong EI skills may be able to prevent the decreases in trust and communication associated with process conflict. In addition, process conflict is reduced in teams with high reflexivity (the ability to reflect on goals, strategies, and approaches) since members were willing to adjust their views [26]. Older family farm members often struggle to adjust their views on doing things [10], but EI skills may be a way for family farm members to shift and be more open to ideas from others, and thereby move away from process conflicts.

Turning to status conflict, as the newest form of intragroup conflict [36], little is known about the impact of status conflict on groups. However, for family farm members, status conflict is dangerous as it often overtakes other conflict types [36,62]. However, being aware of your own emotions, and the ability to manage your own and others' emotions, can help reduce status conflicts among family farm members. Status conflict is similar to relational conflict in that it distracts people from the task at hand and suggests the prioritization of individual goals over the group goal [38]. Furthermore, status conflict often emerges from competition for resources [38], and most family farm members indicate that competition occurs when decisions are made on the farm [8,9].

So why does EI help prevent status conflict? Similar to relational conflict, shifting focus to the task at hand can help alleviate status conflict, and recognizing our own emotional reactions and those of others may allow us to divert the discussion to the task at hand [38]. However, as noted earlier, EI can also be used in destructive ways, and status conflict may be the primary area of negative use. Status conflict often involves the hierarchy of the family farm, and higher-status members (i.e., parents) often desire to maintain the current status structure, especially when it is children or younger relatives pushing for change [10]. As a result, younger family farm members may struggle with their lack of voice on the farm. However, the younger generation is often more aware of the need for sustainability in family farms, given their longer life expectancy and income-earning focus [3]. For younger family farm members (and the majority of this study's participants), learning and utilizing constructive EI skills may help them navigate status conflict situations and promote the long-term sustainability of the family farm. Higher EI skills may also help lower-status members within family farms express frustration with their lack of voice, and use that expression to consciously revisit the status quo [24].

5.5. Limitations and Future Directions

One limitation of this study is the representativeness of the sample used. Due to the snowball and volunteer sampling techniques, participants did not accurately represent the entire spread of the population. Within the United States, most farmers are 57.5 years old [68], while this study had an average age of 25.63. This may be due to the use of an online survey, given that only 75% of farms in the United States had internet access in the most recent census of agriculture [68]. Though age was included as a control variable with no influence, future works will need to test for differences among the entire family farm member population, including focusing on older family farm members, and the types of family members involved (i.e., parents, siblings, spouses).

Secondly, future work will want to explore other factors that influence the EI and conflict relationship. For example, the nature of family communication may play a huge role in the EI and conflict relationship. Family farms tend to be high in conformity and low in conversation [62]. In these settings, members are often expected to have similar perspectives and not talk about issues at hand. If family farm members are not able to hold any alternative perspectives, much less talk about them, conflict is suppressed and builds internally until a later point. Additionally, the conflict resolution styles used are likely tied closely to EI [55], as the skills of emotionally intelligent individuals in the context of understanding and empathy are important for achieving collaborative conflict solutions. Further work will need to consider the role of conflict resolution and conflict management strategies to fully understand how EI relates to the conflict types.

Lastly, this study relies on individual-level measurement for intragroup conflict. Research with intragroup conflict theory often argues for measurement at the group level to provide a better picture of how conflict is perceived by all group members. However, maintaining the individual scores is also important as most intragroup conflicts start at the individual or dyadic level [69]. By collecting individual-level data from all family farm members, future work would be able to explore differences in scores between family farm members and provide a greater understanding of the nature of conflict in family farms. Relatedly, the measurement of status conflict focuses only on issues of influence and

dominance within groups, not the potential reasons for a member's status. Within family farms, members may have lower status based on their sex or traditional notions of gender roles [70], or due to marrying into the family [40]. These are all important characteristics to consider when studying status within family farms. As researchers continue exploring status conflict, it is important to consider the reasons why individuals may have higher or lower status, and reflect this in the measurement and conceptualization of status conflict.

5.6. Summary

Conflict is an emotional experience [22,23] that influences how the family farm can function. For family farm members in this project, EI skills offered ways to mitigate family farm member conflict, thereby sustaining the family farm and family relationships. Conflict within family farms can lead to the loss of the farm [19]; however, the use of EI can help prevent these conflicts, leading to long-term satisfaction with the family farm [29,30,62], and sustainability [14]. Though economic and environmental sustainability are key concerns for family farm members, sustainability also depends on maintaining relationships between family farm members [13]. This project built on the importance of EI for organizational sustainability [12–16] by focusing on how EI, specifically awareness of one's own emotion, management of one's own emotion, and management of others' emotion, can help prevent conflict within family farms. As family farm members balance between business and personal relationships, higher EI skills can help family farm members prevent conflict and sustain their farm for generations to come.

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Data Availability Statement: The data are not publicly available due to confidentiality agreements with the participants and IRB requirements. Any questions can be directed to the author.

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