

THE RECORD RETENTION GUIDE FOR FARMERS



Prepared by:
Kopsa Otte + Associates LLC, CPA's
306 East Seventh
York, NE 68467
402-362-6636
E-mail – Info@kopsaotte.com

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What records does your business need to keep, and how long do you need to keep them? There are several categories of records that are important to a business, some for internal purposes and some for tax returns and other government requirements.

Tax and Accounting

First consider the records you need to substantiate your annual income tax return. The Internal Revenue Service says you must maintain adequate records to support almost every item of income and expense you claim. This means you must be able to produce receipts, invoices, canceled checks or banking records supporting all expense items. Similarly, you should keep sales, invoices, or bank records to support items.

Generally, the Internal Revenue Service can audit a tax return for three years after the date it was due or the date the tax was paid, whichever is later. However, if there is a major understatement of income, they can audit for six years after the due date (or almost seven years after the tax year). For that reason, you should keep most income tax records for seven years.

Corporate Records

Every incorporated business needs good corporate records, including documents associated with forming the company, bylaws, business licenses, and minutes of all board meetings. Shareholder records should include stock registers and records of all share issuances and redemptions. Also keep copies of all contracts and leases. Finally, don't forget current and terminated employee files, and records of employee pension or profit sharing plans. Most corporate and employee pension plan records should be kept indefinitely.

Computer Records

These days, more and more business records are stored electronically. While this saves time and space, it also increases the risk of accidental loss or damage. A hard disk in a personal computer can crash at any time, perhaps erasing months of data. Make sure your computer system is backed up regularly, and keep the backup copy in a fireproof location, preferably offsite.

The table below shows a recommended retention schedule for some of the more common business records for farmers.

ACCOUNTING RECORDS

Depreciation Schedules	Indefinitely
Expense Records	7 Years
Financial Statements (annual)	Indefinitely
Fixed Asset Purchases	Indefinitely (7 Years After Disposal of Property)
General Ledger	Indefinitely
Inventory Records	7 Years (Indefinitely for LIFO system)
Loan Payment Schedules	7 Years
FSA Records	7 Years
Sales Records	7 Years
Tax Returns	Indefinitely

BANK RECORDS

Bank Reconciliation	2 Years
Bank Statements	7 Years
Canceled Checks	7 Years (Indefinitely for R.E. Purchases)
Duplicate Deposit Slips	3 Years
Loan Records	7 Years (From the date of last payment)
Electronic Payment Records	7 Years

CORRESPONDENCE

Legal and Tax Correspondence	Indefinitely
Licenses and permits	Indefinitely

CORPORATE RECORDS

Board Minutes	Indefinitely
Bylaws	Indefinitely
Business Licenses	Indefinitely
Contracts and Leases Still in Effect	Indefinitely
Contracts – Major	Indefinitely
Contracts – Minor	Life + 4 Years
Insurance Policies	Life + 3 Years
Leases/Mortgages	Indefinitely
Partnership Agreements	Indefinitely
Shareholder Records	Indefinitely
Stock Registers	Indefinitely
Stock Transactions	Indefinitely

EMPLOYEE RECORDS

Benefit Plans	Indefinitely
Employee Files (Ex-employees)	7 Years/ Employee lawsuits statute of limitation
Employment Applications	3 Years
Employment Taxes	7 Years
Garnishments	7 Years
I-9's (After Termination)	1 Year
Payroll Records	7 Years
Pension/Profit Sharing Plans	Indefinitely
Quarterly Payroll Reports	5 Years
Time Cards	7 Years
W-2's	7 Years
W-4's	5 Years
Workers Compensation	11 Years

INSURANCE

Accident Reports and Claims for Settled Cases	7 Years
Fire Inspection Reports	8 Years
Insurance Policies – Expired	3 Years
Insurance Audit Reports	Indefinitely
Insurance Records	Indefinitely

REAL PROPERTY RECORDS

Construction Records	Indefinitely
Deeds, Mortgages and Bills of Sale	Indefinitely
Inherited Property Records and Valuations	Indefinitely
Leasehold Improvements	Indefinitely
Lease Payment Records	Life + 4 Years
Property Appraisals by Outside Appraisers	Indefinitely
Real Estate Purchases	Indefinitely

ITEMIZED DEDUCTIONS

Charitable Contributions	4 Years
Employee Business Expenses	4 Years
Home Mortgage Interest	4 Years
Medical Expenses	4 Years
Personal Property Taxes	4 Years
Real Estate Taxes	4 Years
State Income Taxes	4 Years