

Farmland Access, Tenure and Stewardship

November 2016

21ST CENTURY MANAGEMENT: *Enhancing Educational Programs for Women Farmers & Ranchers*

Background

Based on current projections, a significant portion of agricultural land will be transferred in the next decade. Much of that land is or may end up in the control of women land owners and, given current trends, many of those looking for farmland will be women. To that end, our content team has been looking at priority issues that beginning farmer and rancher women face when addressing farmland access, tenure and stewardship; current programs that address these issues as well as gaps to success.

What We Know Thus Far

Our content team identified the following as priority farmland access, tenure and stewardship issues of significance to beginning farmer and rancher women (BFRW).

BFRW must have the requisite business, production, and financial management skills in place before and while entering farm leasing and/or succession arrangements, as well as the confidence to articulate and demonstrate these skills to potential landlords, business partners, and/or family members. We recognize that women often face a higher bar than their male counterparts because of current societal attitudes about farm operators, including documented gender bias.

The cost of and the competition for farmland is a significant barrier to accessing farmland among beginning farmer and ranchers. Since women tend to acquire smaller farmland acreages, cost and com-

petition for land is particularly problematic as often these acreages are being sought by both farmers and non-farming landowners.

Traditional models of inheritance and tenure do not favor BFRW. Primogeniture, the custom of the firstborn son to inherit his parent's real estate, is still a dominant pattern in agriculture today, although there is increasing evidence that it may be beginning to change. The dominant alternative farmland access strategy, leasing, may be a good, lower risk first step but it is unclear how well this strategy meets the

needs of BFRW who tend to seek smaller farmland acreages. Our research shows that women do tend to lease less farmland than their male counterparts.

State and federal conservation programs are incredibly valuable but there is a general lack of awareness about programs

among BFRW. Further, in several cases program policies and eligibility requirements are barriers to participation among BFRW. In addition, and most importantly, our team cited the "intimidation factor" among women in approaching USDA service centers as a significant barrier to pursuing these programs.

Our team recognized the need for effective communication and common understanding among all parties when engaging in farmland access, tenure and stewardship, particularly when discussing inter- and intra-family tenure arrangements, as well as among farmer-to-policy maker interactions for effec-

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tive farmland stewardship programming.

Strategies for Supporting BFRW

We believe we can improve farmland access, tenure, and stewardship for beginning women farmers and ranchers through:

- Education and peer support to help BFRW think through lease agreements, succession and conservation planning;
- Research of the reasons for current “mismatches” between the size of farmland acreages BFRW tend to access and their risk tolerance for leasing.
- Attention to scale issues of USDA conservation programs and crop insurance which tend to favor larger scale farmland acreages and commodity agriculture.
- Improved messaging for BFRW and service providers alike, including more effective outreach about USDA conservation programs.
- Support of BFRW in building confidence to combat the intimidation factor, especially when approaching USDA service center.

Next Steps

Our team plans to address the following within the next six to twelve months:

- Investigate current tenure patterns among BFRW, assess how reasonable is leasing as an alternative tenure strategy for BFRW, and identify other tenure strategies that may fit well with this audience.
- Identify how BFRW most prefer to learn about state and federal conservation programs to support stewardship efforts and develop or adapt curricula designed around those learning preferences.

- Reach out to other BFRDP projects that are specifically focused on farmland access and tenure to ensure that the specific needs and preferences of BFRW will be met.

Resources

Our team is currently developing a list of curricula, programs, and other resources that serve BFRW around farmland access, tenure and stewardship.

The following are just a few examples. We welcome additions and feedback!

- ***Heart of the Farm***: a risk management education program for women farmers in Wisconsin that includes farm succession, financial analysis, communication, retirement planning, and other topics.
- ***Managing for Today and Tomorrow***: a course developed by Annie’s Project that focuses on planning successful farm transitions, including succession, business, and estate planning.
- ***Women Caring for the Land***: a program developed by the Women Food and Ag Network (WFAN) designed to serve women farmland landowners who are interested in learning more about conservation.
- ***Bridge Loan Program***: This Missouri Department of Agriculture program provides short-term loans to help purchase, erect, or implement an approved USDA NRCS and/or MO Department of Natural Resources Soil and Water Conservation Program/District (SWCD) conservation practice.