

Growing Programs for Farm & Ranch Women

November 2016

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

Launched in October 2015, the **21st Century Management: Enhancing Educational Programming for Beginning Farm and Ranch Women** project is working to expand opportunities for educators interested in improving, expanding and starting outreach programs for beginning farm and ranch women.

This four-year initiative brings together a diverse, national team of educators, research and women working in agriculture to existing programs and curricula; identify gaps in targeting women; and create a central repository where educators can access curricula and training materials.

“We view this project as a way to validate the important work that has been going on around the country for decades while acknowledging that women remain under-served in many areas of agriculture,” says University of Vermont Extension Professor Mary Peabody director of the project.

Funding for the project is from the USDA Beginning Farmer & Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) and Agribank.

Project Focus

The project is organized around key topics of high importance to farm and ranch women:

- Leadership;
- Business scale and profitability;
- Land access, transfer and stewardship;
- Legal Issues; and
- Farm safety, mechanization and ergonomics.

Additionally, an evaluation team is working to identify peer-reviewed, reliable information to help future educators select the best curricula for their audience. Training will also be available as we collectively learn best practices in delivering education and technical assistance to women farmers and ranchers.

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Why Women, Why Now?

The most recent USDA Census of Agriculture reports women comprise 14% of principal operators and 30% of all farm operators. The number of U.S. farms operated by women nearly tripled over the past three and a half decades, from 5 percent in 1978 to 14 percent most recently (Census of Ag, 2012).

The increase in the numbers of farm and ranch women is not without challenges. Many women are drawn

to farming as a way to support their family and to strengthen local community yet more than 90% of women-operated farms reported sales and government payments of less than \$50,000.

Moreover, women operators are still not applying



This material is supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA under award number 2014-68006-21873

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for and utilizing agricultural support programs as effectively as their male counterparts and the businesses of many beginning farm and ranch women are not surviving the first five years. Further, the average age of all women operators is 55.6 years with only 8 percent 34 years and under. Clearly this is not sustainable for farm and ranch women or for our global food system.

As the number of women operators increases, so does the number of programs developed to provide education and technical assistance to them. While these programs develop successful tools and techniques for addressing the needs of BFRW, there are many areas where women remain under served.

In addition, while many tools, assessments and curricula related to these programs are available for replication, there is no central repository where curricula and materials can be compared. Nor is there a system in place to determine which materials would be most effective with different audiences (e.g. non-English speakers, urban vs. rural, limited resource, commodity vs specialty crops).

Project Team

The project brings together a diverse team of educators and researchers with experience developing and delivering programs for beginning women farmers and ranchers. This team represents decades of research and program development related to beginning women farmers and ranchers.

The project director is **Mary Peabody**, University of Vermont Extension, who also chairs the Farm Scale & Profitability team. Peabody is the founding director of the Women's Agricultural Network (WAgN) in Vermont. Launched in 1994, WAgN was one of the first programs in the country focused on providing education and technical assistance to BFRW. Peabody has 25 years' experience working with BFRW, developing beginning farmer education, designing curriculum and evaluating programs.

Beth Holtzman, also University of Vermont Extension is helping to coordinate the project and serves on the Leadership content team.

The project management team includes:

- **Evaluation:** Madeline Schultz, Iowa State University Extension and Arlene De La Mora, Iowa State University;
- **Leadership:** Carolyn Sachs, and Patty Neiner, Pennsylvania State University;
- **Farmland Access, Tenure & Stewardship:** Debra Heleba, University of Vermont Extension;
- **Farm Safety, Mechanization & Ergonomics:** Karen Funkenbusch, University of Missouri Nadia Navarrete-Tindall, Lincoln University;
- **Legal Issues:** Janie Simms Hipp, University of Arkansas School Of Law and Indigenous Food & Agriculture Initiative.

The leadership team is be guided in their work by a national group of advisers consisting of farmers, ranchers, educators and business owners.



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