



WASHINGTON STATE
UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION



WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

Empowering women in
agriculture to achieve
goals and manage
risks

BY THE NUMBERS

In 2013, 319 conference participants responded to a program evaluation:

- 293 participants committed to using their farm visions to guide decisions.
- 291 established a better work-life balance.
- 288 developed a marketing plan.
- 278 will establish working capital to grow their businesses or sustain them.
- 273 will analyze their businesses for profitability.
- 265 developed a balance sheet.
- 259 will investigate insurance and government programs.
- 184 improved employee relationships.
- 300 planned to network with other women and develop a support network.

2014

ISSUE

Women agricultural producers face unique challenges in balancing the demands of both farm and family. Women farmers have emerged as an important segment of the U.S. agriculture community. Washington agriculture census data show that female principal farm operators increased 33.5% from 2002 to 2012. Women manage nearly 776,000 farmland acres and sell more than \$244 million annually in farm products.

Despite this dramatic growth, women producers remain underserved by traditionally male-dominated producer meetings. The typical woman involved in a farming operation has very little marketing experience, knowledge related to the accompanying business management, or understanding of risk-management issues. There are few support networks offering women opportunities to work together, share concerns, and strengthen their farm-family role. A larger knowledge base and stronger interpersonal relationship skills can make the difference between success and letdown for women farmers.

Women have indicated through surveys, focus groups, and evaluations their need for more resources. The *Women, Farms & Food* conference provides that resource.

RESPONSE

Women, Farms & Food addresses the risk management needs of women producers using technology and follow-up, skills-based workshops. The Women in Agriculture program began in Washington State in 2005, with annual state conferences offering speakers, practical advice, collaborative discussion, and networking opportunities.

Webinar technology is used to reach more than 650 women simultaneously in 26 locations in 4 states for an annual conference that begins with a keynote speaker. Speakers who have success with financial management, have a flourishing business, have been successful at managing risk, and use a winning marketing plan are chosen to present. Their stories are encouraging and can be applied to a variety of farming situations. Workshops throughout the day at each conference location include local speakers and producer panels. Follow-up workshops in select locations are tailored to be more in-depth and specific. A dedicated website, electronic newsletters, and social media contacts throughout the year keep women producers engaged and support their success. The program is continuing throughout the year with webinars presented by eXtension on topics recommended by participants, plus local workshops and facilitated opportunities for women to network with other farmers in their areas.



QUOTES

“The conference inspired us to take our farm to the next level. We upgraded our bookkeeping methods and now know what areas of our farm make money and the enterprises we either need to improve or quit doing.”

“I’m less afraid to contact potential customers because I learned how to do it from someone who is very successful!”

“I went to the conference to support my young student and I realized I gained so much for me. The presentations and networking with other women encouraged me to examine my time management and realistically evaluate my objectives.”

“I used my Personal Action Form and accomplished just about everything I planned to do. That was a great idea to write it down with a date to get started!”



IMPACTS

When women are asked what they want to learn and how they want to learn it, and are involved in shaping the delivery methods, locations, and topics, they participate—and behavioral change supports it.

The goal was to reach 200 women in both 2012 and 2013, but nearly 500 participated each year, and the number exceeded 600 participants in 2015. In 2014, 311 of nearly 600 participants returned copies of their Action Plan at the end of the conference. The responses showed that 257 women committed to rethinking their farm vision to meet financial, marketing, and production goals. Surveys indicated that women had developed farm visions and used them to make decisions, improved their financial record keeping, networked with other women, and improved their marketing skills. Women producers also participated in 10 extension Women in Ag Learning Network webinars and other follow-up sessions on marketing, succession planning, using social media, value-added products, and business management.

This project meets women where they are by bringing the educational opportunities to them. Women study the topics they need most and they learn via teaching methods that suit gender-specific learning styles. Our success with this project has been presented at five national meetings, and the program has been replicated successfully in other states.

Follow-up workshops target minority producers in their specific farming locations. Because of the increase in women minority-owned farm businesses, we use culturally appropriate methods for reaching Latino and American Indian women. Future plans include additional workshops for minority women in conjunction with Washington Tilth and Viva farms.

Since 2011, more than 200 scholarships were used by this audience and other aspiring farmers who otherwise would not have been able to attend. Three project team members are minorities who own and operate farm businesses and have the skills to continue making this project relevant and valuable for culturally diverse audiences.