

Home » 2011 » 01 » 02 »

E-MAIL PRINT

Women farmers thrive in male-dominated field

Sunday, January 2, 2011 | 12:01 a.m. CST; updated 12:31 a.m. CST, Sunday, January 2, 2011

Through Annie's Project, farm women can learn to network, manage information and improve their business skills. | BY ANGELA CASE AND NICK GASS


BY BY ANGELA CASE AND NICK GASS

Jennifer Benne and her husband, Dan, married in 1976 after meeting through a mutual friend. Over the next 13 years, they lived in St. Charles County while accumulating farmland in Audrain County.

In 1989, they moved to their farmland and began planting corn, wheat and soybeans. They raised four children — two sons and two daughters — and planned to form a partnership with both sons when they finished college.

MoreStory

Related Media



Sally Angell feeds her cattle Nov. 16 in Centralia. Angell's four daughters,

In 2007, a year before the youngest son graduated, Dan died, and Jennifer found herself with a farm to run.

Because the couple had an estate plan, transferring ownership was not difficult. In time, Jennifer formed the partnership with her boys, and they continued the operation.

advertisements

JF MEDICAL BROKERS
 A Division of Jobfinders Employment Services
Looking for Part time work?
Want to make extra Money?
 Then join us at **JF Medical Brokers**,
 a division of Job Finders.

We are currently seeking RN's and LPN's with one year hospital based experience to fill per diem shifts, 4-12 hrs each at area hospitals

Our pay rates are competitive to other temporary nursing agencies!
 Come in to apply or check us out at 1729 W. Broadway #4, Columbia, MO
Or call 573-777-8989

Serving Mid-Mo for 41 years



Joe Machens

11 locations - over 3,000 vehicles
 www.machens.com

MISSOURIAN
 COLUMBIA'S MORNING NEWSPAPER

Special Intro Rates

1 Year	6 Months	3 Months
\$49 ⁰⁰	\$29 ⁰⁰	\$19 ⁰⁰
a savings of \$107.50!* [*]	a savings of \$49.00!* [*]	a savings of \$20.00!* [*]

SUBSCRIBE TODAY!

The *MISSOURIAN* is delivered by 6:30 a.m. Tue.-Fri. and Sunday

* Savings based on newsstand prices - Additional charges for mail.

who range in age from 7 to 19, sometimes help her with farm chores.



Sally Angell walks through the gate of her cattle farm in Centralia. Angell has been raising cattle for 20 years and has been the sole operator of Angell Charolais for two years.



Participants listen to a guest speaker during an Annie's Project class in mid-November at the Advanced Technology Center in Mexico, Mo. Each Annie's Project class consists of a series of six three-hour sessions that are usually spread over a period of six weeks. From left are Delana Becker, Robin Bullard and Alice Willott.

"It's been three years, and everything is working out just fine," she said.

As a woman farmer, Benne joined a minority in the Missouri agriculture community. According to a 2007 [U.S. Department of Agriculture census report](#), women were principal operators of just 12 percent of the farms in the state — 12,754 of 107,825 farms.

Because women statistically live longer than men, they are more likely to inherit a family farm. Also, for a family to continue farming, they also must figure out how to transfer the business from one generation to another.

Estate planning can help in the process, but farming estates can be especially complicated for those who own or lease land, livestock, machinery, buildings and property.

Mary Sobba, an agriculture business specialist with MU Extension, said farmers can have complicated estates because their personal and business assets are often intertwined.

"You have a whole different group of assets than what a normal person would have," she said.

Benne credits her smooth transition to her husband, who took the time to educate himself about estate planning matters.

"My husband was a pretty sharp fellow," she said. "He went to some of the workshops that Extension offers, and he just gained a knowledge of what he needed to do. Fortunately that worked out for us. I know that's not the case for everyone."

Indeed, not everyone is as prepared as the Bennes were. In Missouri and elsewhere, women can take classes to learn more about estate management and other farm-related issues.

One such program is [Annie's Project](#), a nationwide effort provided by MU Extension. Ruth Fleck Hambleton, a former University of Illinois Extension employee, started the program in Illinois in 2003. It is named for the Hambleton's mother, who ran a farm and raised six children in the 1950s.

Sobba, a program instructor, said the curriculum was inspired by Hambleton's experiences.

"The curriculum is put together based on things that would've helped (Hambleton's) mother," Sobba said. "It's modern times now that we teach, but the principles are the same."

Through Annie's Project, farm women can learn to network, manage information

and improve their business skills. The courses were first taught in Missouri in 2004, and MU Extension has held 10 to 12 classes every year since.

Each class consists of six three-hour sessions spread over a period of six weeks taught at Extension offices throughout the state.

Sobba said classes cover five topics, which she describes as the five areas of risk: human interaction, legal, financial, marketing and production.

Annette Valentine of Lucerne enrolled in the class in 2007 to learn more about bookkeeping.

Valentine, who farms with her husband, said she is trying to learn more about probate taxes on land and machinery.

"It's a good program, especially for women who want to get more involved in the farm," she said.

"Typically, females are going to outlive the males," Sobba said. "There's a lot of single women whose spouses have passed on who are landowners."

Estate planning is not the only obstacle women farmers face. Sobba said some women, especially wives who run farms with their husbands, might struggle to be taken seriously.

"If you go out to a bank or an insurance agent, a lot of times they'll anticipate the wife doesn't know a whole lot about the topic," Sobba said. "In many cases that's not true, but I think it's the stereotype."

Sally Angell, a cattle farmer from Centralia said she has found that reputations are based on the quality of work, not gender.

"Everybody in agriculture is geared toward the same goal, and that's producing a quality product for the consumer," Angell said. "I respect them just like they respect me, so I'm really not treated differently."

Sharon Oetting, a full-time co-operator of a hog farm in Concordia, said people outside the farm community often react with surprise when they find out she's a farmer.

"If you go on vacation and meet people from different parts of the world or different parts of the country, they are very intrigued that you're a woman and you're a farmer," she said. "I guess it's just not one of those things they align with that particular gender."

Still, women like Angell, who has been farming for years, understand the appeal of the profession.

"I didn't want to go work somewhere for 40 hours a week," she said. "I could do my work on the farm with my children with me. Sometimes that was difficult, but I made it work."

"I really just like working with the environment and the land and producing a product that I can feed my family and my friends."

 **Show Me the Errors** ([What's this?](#))

Report corrections or additions here. Leave comments *below* here.

You must be [logged in](#) to participate in the Show Me the Errors contest.

Comments

Leave a comment

Speak up and join the conversation! You can comment below. (Click [here](#) to register.) Please be civil and refrain from profanities and name-calling; in other words, don't say anything you wouldn't otherwise say in public. If you see something objectionable, [please tell us](#) which comment and why it should be removed. Your real name is required to register and **your first and last name will be published with every comment**. Read the full comment policy [here](#).

You must be logged in to comment.

Username:

Password:

[Forget your password?](#)

Don't have an account? [Register here](#).

Missourian [About the Missourian](#) • [Progress in Columbia](#) • [Advertise with the Missourian](#) • [Subscribe to the Missourian](#) • [Wires](#) • [Comments Policy](#) • [Neighborhoods](#) • [Feeds](#) • [Contact Us](#)

News [Crime](#) • [Local](#) • [City/County Government](#) • [Higher Education](#) • [K-12 Education](#) • [State News](#) • [Business](#) • [Elections](#) • [Other](#) • [Economy](#) • [Politics](#) • [Weather](#)

Sports [College Sports](#) • [High School Sports](#) • [MU Football](#) • [MU Men's Basketball](#) • [MU Women's Basketball](#) • [National Sports](#) • [Other local sports](#) • [Tiger Kickoff](#) • [Tiger Tipoff](#) • [Youth Sports](#) • [MU Baseball](#) • [MU Softball](#) • [Sports commentary](#) • [State Sports](#)

Lifestyles [Arts](#) • [Boone Life](#) • [Faith](#) • [Features](#) • [Health](#)

Opinion [Today's Question](#) • [Letters to the Editor](#) • [Week in Comments](#) • [Dear Reader](#) • [Local Columnists](#) • [Guest Commentaries](#)

Special [Collegietown 2010](#) • [Homecoming 2010](#) • [How sustainable are you?](#) • [Welcome Back 2010](#) • [Show-Me State of Mind](#)

Sections