Women in Ag Educators National RME Conference and Annie’s Meeting

The ANNIES national leadership team invites you to join us for an RME post-conference National ANNIES Meeting on March 29, 2012, from noon-8 p.m. at the Peabody Hotel in Memphis, TN. For more information about the RME conference and the ANNIES meeting, please visit http://www.extension.iastate.edu/annie/2012RME.html. We look forward to seeing you there!

ANNIES National Meeting Online Registration Link: https://www.ucs.iastate.edu/mnet/annienational/quickregister.html

“The RME national conference is most helpful and useful! I enjoy getting to know other Annie’s Project coordinators and learning from them. Having a personal connection makes it much easier to approach these individuals and to have this opportunity to know what they are involved in is very useful and assists in our programming efficiencies and effectiveness.” - Marsha Laux, Annie's Project Iowa State Coordinator

“Peer networking is the greatest benefit to me. I am happy to see my colleagues from across the country and learn from their experiences. I have respect for my peers and the RME conferences allow us to share time together that we can’t get at other conferences,” - Tim Eggers, ISU Extension Field Specialist and Annie’s Project Iowa Facilitator
5 Things to Help Organize Your Annie’s Project Team in the New Year

By: Marsha Laux, Iowa Annie’s Project State Coordinator

1. Use a free online scheduling tool. When trying to figure out the first best time to meet, use the free online scheduling tools, such as Doodle or other similar tools. Doodle is easy to use and you can send people several choices for meeting times and it is easy to see the team’s availability. (Available at www.doodle.com).

2. Use electronic reminders. If you use Microsoft Outlook, use the Task and Calendar features to your advantage. When setting a conference call or a meeting, use the Invite Attendees feature and the event gets plugged directly into their calendar (if they accept the invitation). Be sure to set a reminder before sending it to them.

3. Don’t forget about the phone. Sometimes we get too wrapped up in only using e-mail. A short phone call will help “touch base” with your planning team and can provide a better platform for back and forth conversation, which can be too limited with e-mail.

4. Use a file sharing system. Dropbox or similar tools are useful for accessing and sharing files your team is working on or developing. It is a good way to keep the latest version of your documents and photos handy, plus it can be accessed on all computers and devices and in several places. (Available free at www.dropbox.com).

5. Develop a tracking system. Keep track of your communication activity and other important data about your instructors, certified Real Colors presenters, and others. Find what you know and works best for you. A simple Excel spreadsheet can work to track contact information, staff photos, brief notes and can also be used as a log for various activities.


Making Strides with Annie’s Project in Iowa

By Lani McKinney

Since the first Annie’s Project was delivered by Bob Wells in Ainsworth, Iowa in 2004, Iowa State University (ISU) Extension and Outreach has delivered more than 50 Annie’s Project courses and helped expand the program created in Illinois by Annie’s Project founder, Ruth Hambleton, to Iowa and 29 more states. Thanks to a USDA Risk Management Agency grant for FY2012, Iowa is bringing new energy and focus to programs within the state. At the same time, Iowa continues to build the regional and national Annie’s Project programs through a three-year USDA North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Professional Development grant, a three-year USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program grant, and several smaller projects.

To help with all of this, the Iowa leadership team appointed a new Annie’s Project State Coordinator, Marsha Laux. Marsha has served the citizens of Iowa and the nation for ten years through the ISU Extension and Outreach Value Added Agriculture Program. She was instrumental in creating the national Agricultural Marketing Resource Center (www.agmrc.org) and has worked on many Iowa projects from community development as well as local food systems to business skills training. While continuing with these other responsibilities, Marsha is bringing her talent and enthusiasm to this new support role for Annie’s Project educators and programs in Iowa. “I hope to continue organizing and growing Annie’s Project programming in Iowa,” explains Marsha, “for instance, we recently implemented a pilot project for online class registration.”

Iowa is fortunate to have a strong Annie’s Project leadership team and many new or experienced educators to deliver the program across the state. Tim Eggers, Lani McKinney, Madeline Schultz and Bob Wells handle many of the national Annie’s Project tasks on a daily basis. Dr. Mandi Anderson, Dave Baker, Heidi Carter, Kelvin Leibold, Dr. Margaret Smith and the Extension Communications team also have key leadership roles in specific Annie’s grant activities. The team is pleased Marsha, as the new state coordinator, can focus on Iowa to make sure the Annie’s Project mission is upheld within the state. Annie’s Project, a proven program, is a way to reach out to Iowa women and help increase their understanding of farm and ranch risk management. “Helping Iowans involved in agriculture to make informed decisions, understand business planning, and know how to access information that is both useful and timely has always been a driving factor in all my work at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach,” shares Marsha. “More than anything, I want Annie’s Project to run smoothly and be widely promoted in our state. My involvement will develop the infrastructure to help make that happen as we grow. I want to make a difference in the lives of Iowa women involved in agriculture,” confirms Marsha.

Marsha’s own personal experience in farming fuels her desire to be a part of the movement to make risk management education available to women. “My husband and I farmed full time in the 1970’s and 1980’s,” explains Marsha, “It was not a good time to be farming and the farm crisis impacted me personally. We were young and worked long and hard at several jobs to be successful, yet we had to make the decision that working off the farm was more profitable than staying on the farm.” That was a hard lesson to learn for Marsha and her family. She feels having access to risk management programs might have made things much easier on them. “Living through something like that makes you want to help others avoid the pain of either losing the farm or their livelihoods,” adds Marsha.

In addition to those listed above, the most recent list of trained Annie’s Project educators in Iowa also includes Jennifer Bentley, Mary Clancy, Aleta Cochran, Jim Jensen, Steve Johnson, Amy Kelly, Joyce Lash, Ronald Lenth, Catherine Lents, Tom Olsen, Melissa O’Rourke, Morgan Schafbuch, Kristen Schulte, Lori Scovel, and Teresa Wiemerslage. “Having a little money from statewide grants and sponsors to help defray the costs has

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been a key reason why it is easier for educators to make the commitment to Annie’s Project in their local area,” according to Marsha. On September 21, 2011, Marsha led a planning meeting with Iowa facilitators to talk about course delivery. Organizing this meeting was primarily to get educators in the same room for a day to learn from and motivate one another and to see ways to work together on programming. Currently, Iowa has eight classes planned for January through March of 2012 and is planning an additional four to six courses this year. Some of these will focus specifically on value added agriculture using new materials Marsha is developing and gleaning from other states. “The network of Annie’s Project educators is one of the greatest values in its success,” observes Marsha, “We learn from one another about what has worked and what hasn’t. The applicable knowledge provided in this network is huge.”

The steady expansion of national interest in Annie’s Project and the constant challenge of attaining adequate funding to meet the demand has brought about many changes over the years. “I’ve been working since my first planning session for the Harlan Annie’s Project in the fall of 2004 to increase the efficiency of the program,” shares Tim Eggers. While in some years grants and sponsors take care of the expenses, other years can be quite lean. “In the long run though,” concedes Tim, “confidence in Annie’s Project impacts help me get the funding I need every time.” Tim finds that oftentimes, people tell him about Annie’s Project. Even though he has trained many state coordinators and local facilitators across the country, he is always pleased to hear people tell him about the program. “In preparing for a 2011 course in Mt. Ayr, Iowa, I visited an ag lender in Creston who stressed to me that the Annie’s Project needed to be facilitated with the proper methodology. That is awesome!” Annie’s Project had such an impact on her clientele when Tim delivered the program in a nearby community in 2006 that she wanted to make sure it was done just as well 39 miles down the road in 2011.

Annie’s Project demonstrates significant impact on the lives of Iowa women which has continued to generate support from administrators. Marsha, herself, witnessed its significance in the life of a neighbor. She had lost her husband nearly ten years ago and was overwhelmed with the farming operation, but jumped right in. Marsha shares, “She was raising two teenage sons and had the obligation to them to try to hold the farm together and make it successful. She participated in Annie’s Project in February 2011, and I heard her say many times how much impact this information had on her operation as she is still learning, even after managing the farm since her husband’s death. She has brought one of her sons into the farming operation, but it hasn’t been easy. Annie’s Project gave her what she needed and she said she wished she had taken the course earlier.”

While Marsha feels she’s had a steep learning curve, she stressed how much she appreciates her colleagues who have taken the time to help her. “Their involvement and knowledge of other state’s programs has made the Iowa program development process much easier for me. It is a sharing, not a competitive environment, and that is one of the successes of Annie’s Project,” acknowledges Marsha. Web resource development seems to be a focus for everyone in 2012. Just this month, Tim Eggers and Heidi Carter posted updates for new evaluation tools to the national Annie’s Project educator website at www.extension.iastate.edu/feci/annie/begin.html. They also posted new resources on steering committees, budgeting, speaker selection and vetting guidelines, instructions on RMA grant reporting, ideas for course promotion, and other documents. While these resources were put together with the state of Iowa in mind, Tim hopes these will be very useful to any Annie’s Project class facilitator across the country. While Iowa has always used the national website in the past for their online needs, state leaders set in motion plans to develop a more state specific website that will be linked to the national website. As Marsha points out, “Having a comprehensive, thorough and up-to-date Iowa website not only will help meet the needs of the state on a continuing basis, but also will help keep communication avenues open and transparent.”

Annie’s Project in Iowa has seen many changes in the last eight years. However, the goals and expectations of the participants, facilitators and coordinators has stayed the same: to empower farm women to be better farm business partners through networks and by managing and organizing critical decision making information. Iowa is striding out to meet the challenges and expectations that lie ahead in 2012.

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Our next newsletter will be coming out the first week in February. Stay tuned!