

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Extension and Outreach

Success Story

Title

Rural Women Of North Iowa Creates Community

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Author's Location

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AMES IA

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CoReporter(s) - ISUEO Staff

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Relevance

As leaders, family communicators, and visionaries of tomorrow's rural landscapes, women in Iowa are influential decision makers. We extend knowledge and empower women because their success leads to improved agriculture systems a more food secure world. Emmet County is home to 475 farms. Of these, a woman is the primary operator on 43 farms with an average farm size of 115 acres and average sales of \$93,465 (before expenses.) Overall, 35 percent of farms in the county have at least one woman operator. Emmet County is home to 268 women-owned firms and many of these are agri-businesses. Of all women in the county 21 years old or older, 62 percent are in the civilian workforce. In the county, 14 percent of the population lives below the poverty line.

Palo Alto County is home to 874 farms. Of these, a woman is the primary operator of 82 farms with an average farm size of 149 acres and average sales of \$139,171 (before expenses.) Overall, 37 percent of the farms in the county have at least one woman operator. Palo Alto County is home to 100 women-owned firms and many of these are agri-businesses. Of all women in the county 21 years old or older, 59 percent are in the civilian workforce. In the county, 12 percent of the population lives below the poverty line.

Sources: Indicators Program, Women in Agriculture, <http://indicators.extension.iastate.edu> and Census Bureau, Quickfacts, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts>.

Engaging local audiences of rural women in education and networking has been a constant goal for Britney Rosburg, Emmet County Program Director, and Angie Strohman, Palo Alto County Program Coordinator. Building on the county experiences with three Annie's Project farm management courses held from 2007 to 2009, the partners began working with Melissa O'Rourke, ISU Farm Management Specialist, when she came to the area. Melissa, Angie and Britney held three more Annie's Project courses and one Managing for Today and Tomorrow farm transition planning courses in their counties from 2012 to 2015. In all, 117 women participated in these courses. Women continue to request additional opportunities for learning about agriculture and business and Angie and Britney continue to innovate to meet their needs.

Response

Britney Rosburg, Emmet County Program Director, and Angie Strohman, Palo Alto County Program Coordinator began an innovative program for women. Rural Women of North Iowa is a support group for women in agriculture. Angie and Britney lead four meetings each year on topics requested by women. “We are trying to offer a support network for women in our rural communities to give them a better understanding of farming and to create new connections and friendships,” says Britney. “Women are taking on new roles in agriculture and they want an educational atmosphere where they can ask questions and learn in their own style, so that’s what we, as ISU Extension and Outreach, are trying to provide,” explains Angie.

The idea for Rural Women of North Iowa grew out of the success of Annie’s Project and Managing for Today and Tomorrow in Emmet and Palo Alto counties. “After those classes were over, the women who participated told us they enjoyed the programs but would like to go more in depth on some of the topics,” says Britney. “The reactions we’ve received have been very positive. Women want these kinds of programs and they attend them,” adds Angie. The dynamic duo offered six programs to date as listed below. An average of 20 women attended each event (120 participants in total.)

Rural Women of North Iowa Programs

1. Sept. 1, 2015: Agronomy with Melissa Bockman, Owner of Bockman Ag, LLC.
2. Nov. 17, 2015: Grain Marketing with Lakrecia Johnson, Commodity Buyer at POET Biorefining.
3. Mar. 9, 2016: Agricultural Advocacy with Marji Guyler-Alaniz, FarmHer Entrepreneur.
4. June 13, 2016: Farm Management Roundtable: Grain Marketing with LaKrecia Johnson, POET; Crop Insurance with Nicole Tift, FCSAmerica; Farm Financials with Val Weis, FCSAmerica; Farm Bill Programs with Michele Bell, FSA; and Your Local Elevator with Kayra Weisbrod, Stateline Coop.
5. Sept. 8, 2016: Big Data with Peter Bixel, SciMax Solutions
6. Nov. 1, 2016: Rural Inspiration with Karen Schwaller, local freelance writer, author, speaker, farm wife and mother.

The dynamic duo isn’t stopping with the success of Rural Women on North Iowa. They are bringing a new course to their counties in March 2017, based on requests from women in their network. Gary Wright, ISU Farm Management Specialist, and Paul Kassel, ISU Crops Specialist will lead the four-session Women Managing Crops course.

Angie and Britney collaborated with Madeline Schultz and Gary Wright on a successful USDA-NIFA Extension Risk Management Education grant application for 2017 and 2018. The new project begins this March, too. As part of the project, Angie and Britney will involve their Rural Women of North Iowa network in organizing a local agriculture bus tour that includes the topics of water quality, manure gas safety, and financial management. Angie is excited to be part of the statewide grant and work with other county women in ag networks across the state. “This is awesome!!! I’m so excited to help and I really want to be active in this grant. I am more than willing to do whatever needs to be done,” says Angie.

Britney and Angie each attended two national Annie’s Project professional development programs in Ames, Iowa. They both take advantage of as many statewide opportunities as possible to learn from their peers and share their own expertise. Britney attended three

statewide meetings since 2013, and Angie attended four statewide meetings since 2014. This keeps them thinking creatively about what more they can do for women in their counties and helps them offer higher quality programs. This cooperative pair are role models for other county extension staff. They listen to women in agriculture in their counties, learn all they can about serving this audience, partner with others in extension and in their communities, and provide innovative programming that offers meaningful learning experiences and creates community. "Rural Women of North Iowa is our way of continuing to meet the educational needs of this audience," says Britney.

Type of Change(s)

- Learning Changes
- Behavior Changes
- Condition Changes

Impact Statement

Through their unique ability to create community and provide innovative programming for women in agriculture, Angie and Britney are supporting an atmosphere of life-long learning and connection to the research-based education offered by Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. The Rural Women of North Iowa program provides on-going opportunities for women to learn about agriculture. Emmet and Palo Alto Counties benefit through improved farm profitability, more rural families living above the poverty line, and more vibrant farm and mainstreet businesses. As women learn with and support one another, they adopt new practices to manage crops, handle and store manure, and care for livestock in ways that reduce nutrient loss and improve water quality. Angie and Britney's extension programs build community networks that support women, reduce stress, and lead to improved lives and greater rural lifestyle satisfaction.

ISUEO Signature Issues

Food & the Environment --> Farm Business Management

Outcomes

Britney and Angie successfully built relationships with local agribusinesses like Farm Credit Services of America and Maxyield to help sponsor some costs of their Rural Women of North Iowa programs. The county extension professionals are not only maintaining program consistency and momentum, but picking up speed.

Since 2012, Angie and Britney worked together innovatively to offer and plan for:

- 3 Annie's Project courses
- 1 Managing for Today and Tomorrow course
- 6 Rural Women of North Iowa programs (more to come)
- 1 new Women Managing Crops course (March 2017)
- 1 bus tour for women in ag (Summer 2017)

The team successfully uses the ISU Extension and Outreach Women in Ag evaluation surveys with all of the courses. Pre-course and post-course surveys help them understand participant demographics and needs, assess changes in knowledge and behaviors, and understand participant goals, priorities, and interests. They receive an evaluation report on their individual courses right away later can review the statewide reports. Survey results indicate their courses were successful in significantly ($p < .001$) improving the knowledge of farm women in five areas of agricultural risk management: finance, human resources, legal, marketing and production. The survey respondents were empowered to take important actions towards their goals. More than 40 percent of survey respondents were beginning farm women (farming less than 10 years.)

Britney and Angie collect one-page surveys from women participating in the Rural Women of North Iowa programs. The surveys indicated nearly all participants thought the programs were outstanding on a four-point scale. Women commented on what they were learning. One woman wrote, "So glad I was able to attend. Very enlightening and informative. The speaker was very enjoyable." They often noted they heard about the program from extension, or local newspapers. One woman said, "Husband saw it in the farm column and suggested I come." Women wrote about why they came to the program. Networking and curiosity were popular comments, "Came for the information, to meet the speaker in person, and to enjoy other ag women's company." Suggestions for future programs included, "The time frame was good. Keep involving the younger women, especially pleased to see the age range here."

Location / Participant(s) Came From

- County
 - Emmet
 - Palo Alto

Partner(s)

- Business and Industry
- County Extension Staff