

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Extension and Outreach

Success Story

Title

Washington County Women In Ag Advisory Board Improves Agricultural Sustainability

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Author's Location

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CoReporter(s) - ISUEO Staff

- Adrian, Nancy A [CO PD]

Relevance

Women farm and agribusiness professionals have significant employment, management and ownership of Washington County's farms and businesses. With training and support, these women make influential decisions that contribute to the county's economic vitality and Iowa's agricultural sustainability.

Washington County is home to 1,139 farms. Of these, a woman is the primary operator of 80 farms with an average farm size of 146 acres and an average sales of \$92,157 (before expenses.) Overall, one in three farms in the county has at least one woman operator.

Source: Indicators Program, Women in Agriculture, <http://indicators.extension.iastate.edu>.

Washington County is home to 676 women-owned firms and many of these are agribusinesses. Of all women in the county, 21 years old or older, 62 percent are in the civilian workforce. In Washington County, 11 percent of the population lives below the poverty line.

Source: Census Bureau, Quickfacts, Washington County, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts>.

Engaging women in learning more about their agricultural businesses is a long-term commitment for Washington County Extension and Outreach. In 2004, they held the very first Iowa Annie's Project, which Nancy Adrian participated in. Since that time, the county hosted two more Annie's Project courses, a Women Marketing Grain course, and a Managing for Today and Tomorrow farm transition planning course for women. In all, 98 women participated in the five courses. Women continue to request additional opportunities for learning more about agriculture and business.

Response

Nancy Adrian, Washington County Extension Director, is leading her county into the future with the help of the local Women in Ag Advisory Board.

One summer day in 2015, a woman from the state of Washington, with ancestors who homesteaded Washington County farmland, contacted Nancy to see how she could help educate current and future farmers and encourage agriculture sustainability. She flew to Iowa to meet Nancy and others she gathered in September, 2015. "When I answered the phone that day, I had no idea where this would take us," says Nancy.

Out of this grew a 30-member Women in Ag Advisory Board of women farmers and land-owners, extension council members, business people, USDA employees, and extension specialists. They meet regularly to brainstorm challenges for women in ag and how to meet individual needs. "I think the fact that we have an advisory board is HUGE," says Nancy. The diverse makeup of the board allows them to access information from different sectors and address issues facing women in all different facets of agriculture. "The board gives women and other members of the ag community a forum for voicing their issues or concerns, and improves the flow of knowledge and communication on agricultural issues throughout the county," says Nancy. Together, the board develops new programs that benefit farmers and rural communities in Washington County. They help bring new sources of funding to extension programming. The board works with Hills Bank and Trust and obtained a \$4,000 Riverboat Foundation grant in support of the new women in ag conference. The board reaches out to individuals who have attended past extension programs to ask for feedback and spread the word about what they are accomplishing. "One of the surprising benefits of the advisory board is that women on the board are gaining the confidence to become more involved in the decision-making process on their home farms and are asking more questions about their family farming operations," says Nancy. Helping women become better farm business partners and prepare for unexpected events is important to Nancy. She is representative of the 67 percent of farm women in Iowa who hold off-farm full or part-time jobs and may or may not know much about managing the farm business. In the spring of 2007, Nancy's husband, Bob, was on a grain truck, leveling out corn that had been loaded, when he fell 13 feet, suffering a traumatic brain injury. As he recovered from the accident, Nancy had to step up to new challenges and learn to manage their 500 acre farm.

With this personal experience and her all out dedication to educating women in agriculture, Nancy and her advisory board brought Rebecca Vittetoe and Meaghan Anderson, ISU Crops Specialists, to the county with their Agronomy in the Field for Women program in 2016. More than 30 women benefited from the summer-time meetings at the ISU Southeast Iowa Research Farm in Crawfordsville. Based on surveys completed by participants, agronomic learning continues in the classroom throughout the winter in 2017 and plans are already underway for summer-time sessions back at the research farm.

The board also brought Ryan Drollette, ISU Farm Management Specialist, to the county to lead a young farmer group, which usually draws 20 people, including several young women. "The group helps prepare young people to become the next generation of farmers in our county," says Nancy.

Washington County started a farming book club with seven girls and young women with

events in winter 2015 and 2016. The county held a series of agriculture workshops for women in winter 2017. Extension specialists and other local professionals covered topics selected by the advisory board. The first two programs were attended by a total of 40 women.

Women in Ag Education Series Topics:

- USDA Programs and What They Can Do for You (February)
- Insurance Mistakes You Don't Want to Make (March)
- Agriculture in Costa Rica (April)

On March 25, 2017, Washington County Extension and Outreach and the Women in Ag Advisory Board will host their first Women in Agriculture Conference, "Cultivate Connections." The keynote speaker is Jolene Brown, an Iowa farm woman and international expert in farm family succession planning. More than 100 women from across Iowa are expected to attend the event. Nancy's passion and commitment for educating women in agriculture is evident as she says, "We are pulling out all the stops this year so we can have a very successful event!"

Type of Change(s)

- Learning Changes
- Behavior Changes
- Condition Changes

Impact Statement

Public Value: Through the leadership and dedication of Nancy Adrian, farmers, farm-land owners, Extension and Outreach team members, USDA employees, and other individuals and businesses came together to form a Women in Ag Advisory Board that is improving agricultural sustainability in the Washington County. Through research-based educational opportunities, farmers, aspiring farmers, women in agribusiness and other community members and consumers are learning more about agriculture. Washington County benefits through improved farm profitability and more rural families living above the poverty line. As more young farmers and women farmers learn with and support one another, they adopt new practices to better manage crops and livestock, improve manure storage and handling, and reduce nutrient losses to improve water quality. Extension and Outreach programs build community networks that support individuals, reduce stress, improve safety, and maintain farm and main street businesses.

ISUEO Signature Issues

Food & the Environment --> Farm Business Management

Outcomes

Needs Assessment and Program Development: The Women in Ag Advisory Board meets twice each year to assess needs in the county, initiate programs to address those needs, and gather the resources needed for successful extension programs. As a result of the advisory board, the following new programs were started: Farming Book Club, Agronomy in the Field at the ISU Southeast Research Farm, Washington County Young Farmers Group, Women in Ag Educational Series, and the March 2017 Women in Agriculture Conference, "Cultivating Connections."

Program Evaluation: The Agronomy in the Field and Young Farmers Group collected surveys from participants to identify topics of interest, determine the best timing for programs, and evaluate participant learning. Preliminary results indicate women are using new agronomic skills to make good farm business decisions that have the potential to improve yields, save input costs, and reduce nutrient loss. Preliminary results indicate young farmers are gaining livestock, crop and financial skills that have the potential to help them start or expand their businesses, work more cooperatively with family members or other established farmers in the county, and take better care of their livestock and fields.

Location / Participant(s) Came From

- County
 - Washington

Partner(s)

- Business and Industry
- County Extension Staff
- Local Government/Agency
- Individuals