

# IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

## Extension and Outreach

### **Success Story**

#### **Title**

Women In Ag Leadership Conference Inspires Iowans

#### **Author:**

#### **Author's Location**

#### **CoReporter(s) - ISUEO Staff**

- Scarbrough, Lisa F [VAA]
- O'Rourke, Melissa R [EXTAG]
- Johanns, Ann M [ECONA]
- Tovar Jensen, Kitt [CALTX]
- Bartel, Cynthia [AGRON]
- Downing, Krista L [CO PD]
- Hargrafen, Jade [CO PD]
- Luvaga, Ebby S [ECON]
- Schultz, Madeline M [VAA]

#### **Relevance**

Women have vital roles in Iowa's agricultural economy. Nearly 35,000 women are making key decisions on Iowa's 86,000 farms every day according to the USDA 2017 Census of Ag. The census indicates a majority (60.9 percent) of these women also have off-farm careers. Women own 47 percent of all Iowa farmland according to the Iowa Farmland Ownership and Tenure Survey 1982–2017: A Thirty-five Year Perspective. For the 2021 academic year, women are more than half (57.1 percent) of the undergraduates in the Iowa State University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Women in agricultural careers from legal services, to livestock production, research and land sales are helping keep Iowa vibrant and resilient. The conference committee goals are to offer a women-centered program that replenishes spirits and deepens aspirations to lead within families and across the global agricultural industry.

#### **Response**

*Lead Like Someone Left the Gate Open* was the conference theme. There's no better time than now for women in agriculture to re-think boundaries and chase dreams. We worked with extension and non-extension women on the leadership conference planning committee to bring together women in agribusiness, women in farming, students of agriculture and all interested people for two days of personal development, networking, and renewal.

In 2021, attendees had a unique opportunity to get up close and personal with Iowa's own world-class agricultural speaker, Jolene Brown. We got to know her well as she took us through a special leadership journey with three presentations to help build a solid business foundation, use passion and purpose to light the fires, and celebrate agrarian roots.

Our campus tours let attendees choose to experience the turfgrass at Jack Trice Stadium, explore a rooftop greenhouse conservatory, discover the world of plant pathology and entomology, or time-travel with a visit to the 1860 Farm House and 2020 ISU Creamery. We learned from a panel of three entrepreneurs. Lynn Bolin and her family offer farm stay guests a chance to 'sleep with the cows.' Kim Anderson and her husband transitioned to organic production and opened Blueberry Bottom to the community. Katie Holtz stepped up to the Vice President role in her family's innovative PigEasy agribusiness. Our concurrent sessions offered a lot of variety. Attendees learned how to create more balance in life, land that next leadership role, get more out of social media, or innovate crop production and conservation. This year's Women Impacting Agriculture honorees, Marilee Jones and Cindy McCullough, shared how they built businesses and created community. Dr. Carmen Bain welcomed attendees to the conference and shared how women are making a difference in agriculture. We were pleased to have Dr. Amani Elobeid as our capstone speaker. She shared her leadership journey from the University of Khartoum in Sudan to earning her PhD at Iowa State University to receiving an Excellence in Teaching award and advising the ISU Agricultural Business Club.

The two-day, 14-hour women-centered conference was held at the Gateway Hotel and Conference Center in Ames, IA and drew an attendance of 98 men and women. Many conference speakers, committee members, and attendees were ISU Alumni.

A major sponsor for the conference was Farm Credit Services of America, which made it possible to keep registration cost low at \$75.00 per person.

### **Type of Change(s)**

- Learning Changes

### **Impact Statement**

When Extension and Outreach extends knowledge and empowers women in agriculture, we can create a more sustainable Iowa by expanding agricultural businesses, conserving natural resources, and supporting the community of women in agriculture. Women in the agricultural industry can contribute to food security and agricultural sustainability.

### **ISUEO Signature Issues**

Food & the Environment --> Farm Business Management

## Outcomes

## **Demographics:**

Nearly half (44.7%) of survey respondents were farmers or farmland owners, while less than a quarter each were working in agribusiness (20.4%) or education/non-profit (21.4%). The other respondents were students or worked outside of agriculture. The conference drew women of all ages. Just over a quarter (26.5%) of survey respondents were 35 years old or younger; nearly one-third (30.9%) were 36 to 45 years old; another 16.8% were 46 to 55 years old; and just over a quarter (26.5%) were 56 years old or older.

## **Marketing and Communication:**

More than half of survey respondents indicated they heard about the conference through extension, 39.5% through an extension email or newsletter and 15.2% through an extension website or social media. There were 21.2% who heard about the conference through word of mouth and 9.1% through ag publications.

## **Additional Participation:**

There were 27 survey respondents who indicated they would like to be part of a peer group and provided contact information. The women requested topics around the following four themes: a) Succession Planning, b) Leadership and Networking, c) Farm Management and Production, and d) Finance and Money Management. Thirteen survey respondents indicated they would like to serve on a planning committee for next year and provided contact information.

## **Women-Centered Environment:**

The conference's women-centered environment was valued by 100% of survey respondents.

## **Conference Quality and Goals Met:**

1. Survey respondents rated the quality of the conference's professional development highly. The scale was 'poor,' 'good' or 'excellent.'

- 84.9% of respondents rated the organization of the conference as 'excellent;'
- 81.5% rated the interaction with speakers as 'excellent;'
- 78.8% rated effective use of time as 'excellent;'
- 78.5% rated the overall quality of the professional development as 'excellent;'
- 78.5% rated the interaction among participants as 'excellent;'
- 76.9% rated the resources and materials as 'excellent;'
- 75.8% rated the applicability of information as 'excellent;' and
- 71.2% rated the selection of topics as 'excellent.'

1. Survey respondents indicated the conference strengthened their leadership capacity. The scale was 'no change,' 'yes, moderately,' or 'yes, a great deal.'

- 67.7% of respondents rated connecting with other women who inspire their leadership journey as 'Yes, a great deal;'
- 58.5% rated increasing their belief in themselves and the power of life-long learning as "Yes, a great deal;'
- 44.6% rated giving them practical leadership skills they can use as 'Yes, a great deal;' and
- 38.5% rated increasing their overall level of leadership capacity as 'Yes, a great deal.'

## **Key Take-Home Messages and Insights:**

Survey respondents shared speaker messages or insights they found useful. A majority of

these centered on Jolene Brown's workshop and two general session presentations. The strongest themes were about being a business first family, rather than a family first business; and planning for farm transition and generational succession. Other popular themes were on: finding/creating joy and humor in life, using professional advisors (i.e. CPA, Attorney) to get the business right, improving communication, having family business meetings, and taking action using Jolene's 8 Questions. Other insights shared were on business structure and documentation, letting go of what's holding them back, recognizing that consumers decide the value of ag products, and building relationships with others. Survey respondents stated:

- "Do you want to be a family-minded business or a business-minded family?"
- "A farm operation doesn't need to be sized to bring in children, they need to add their own value to it"
- "I didn't know how LLC's were run and my in-laws are starting one, so I benefited a lot from that information"
- "Still laughing about Jolene and the hand signals...my husband and I are not on the same wavelength with hand signals"
- "Nothing happens until you let go of what is holding you down"

Responses indicated other general session speakers were inspiring. Survey respondents stated: "I loved hearing from the panel, they all are different types of farm business and that applied to me quite a bit."

- "There would be a 20-30% increase in productivity globally if women had the same access to assets, services, and technology as men"
- "It's great to be a non-traditional candidate"

Insights shared included those from the tours. Survey respondents stated:

- "On the stadium turf tour, discussion of getting grass to emerge at the Horticulture farm is enhanced by soil additives"
- "Others who attended the greenhouse tour indicated a lot of planning and contingency planning, even in a controlled setting, is needed."

There were plenty of comments from the healthy balance concurrent session. Survey respondents stated:

- "Implement more 'energy fillers' in each day. Focus on establishing habits and rhythms more than accomplishing specific health goals."
- "Energy is the communication between the mind, body and soul"

Important messages were gleaned from all other concurrent sessions. Survey respondents stated:

- "Really enjoyed learning about cover crops"
- "You can be a leader... you have the qualities"
- "Maybe I should reconsider email marketing because I do have a list now"

### **Knowledge Gained:**

Survey respondents rated their change in knowledge highly for the ISU campus tour they attended. The scale was 'no change,' 'learned a moderate amount' or 'learned a great deal.'

#### 1. Turfgrass at Jack Trice Stadium (9 responses)

- 100% 'learned a great deal' about how turfgrass is managed for sports.

- 100% 'learned a great deal' about the role of ISU in the turfgrass industry.

1. Farm House Museum and ISU Creamery (15 responses):

- 75.0% 'learned a great deal' about how the ISU Creamery benefits students and industry
- 75.0% 'learned a great deal' about the role of the Farm House in Iowa's ag history.

1. Greenhouses at Bessey and Horticulture Halls (14 responses)

- 28.8% 'learned a great deal' about how campus greenhouses support research from corn to lettuce
- 71.4% 'learned a great deal' about the role of technology in greenhouse production.

1. Insect Zoo and Plant and Insect Diagnostic Clinic (6 responses)

- 33.3% 'learned a great deal' about how insects contribute to agriculture and the environment.
- 50.0% 'learned a great deal' about the role of the diagnostic clinic in assisting Iowa farmers and homeowners.

Survey respondents rated their change in knowledge highly for the general sessions they attended. The scale was 'no change,' 'learned a moderate amount' or 'learned a great deal.'

1. If We Huff and Puff Will We Blow Your House Down? - Workshop (55 responses)

- 87.3% 'learned a great deal' about how to honor the family by doing the business right
- 87.3% 'learned a great deal' about the importance of people and good will to their business.
- 90.1% 'learned a great deal' about tools/steps to use to strengthen the foundation of the farm or agribusiness.

2. Let Go of the Rope! - Keynote (61 responses)

- 77.1% 'learned a great deal' about how letting go can help launch your future.
- 78.7% 'learned a great deal' about how pace, people, process and product has changed in ag.

3. Soaring High with Entrepreneurship - Panel (57 responses)

- 61.4% 'learned a great deal' about how women can use unique talents to create new businesses in ag.
- 58.9% 'learned a great deal' about how to connect ag products to customers.

4. Harvest the Humor: A Celebration of Life on the Farm – After Lunch (59 responses)

- 83.1% 'learned a great deal' about the importance of connecting with sisters in ag for well-being and mentoring.
- 84.8% 'learned a great deal' about why we need to celebrate and thank others.

5. An Unconventional Candidate's Path to a Career in Agriculture - Capstone (42 responses)

- 45.2% 'learned a great deal' about speaking up for yourself and your qualifications.
- 40.5% 'learned a great deal' about how to move past barriers.

Survey respondents rated their change in knowledge highly for the concurrent sessions they attended. The scale was 'no change,' 'learned a moderate amount' or 'learned a great deal.'

1. Healthy Balance Exists and You're So Much Closer Than You Know (33 responses)

- 57.8% 'learned a great deal' about how to find balance in the chaos of life.
- 60.1% 'learned a great deal' about tips to use to improve health.

2. Find Your Wings to Transform Your Leadership Journey (12 responses)

- 58.3% 'learned a great deal' about how to prepare for your next leadership role.

- 50.0% 'learned a great deal' about where to look for your next leadership role.
3. Are You Using Social Media or is it Using You? (12 responses)
- 25.0% 'learned a great deal' about how to boost engagement.
  - 33.3% 'learned a great deal' about what is new or different in social media.
4. Systems Approach to Achieving Soil and Water Conservation with High Yield Row Crop Production (9 responses)
- 44.4% 'learned a great deal' about how perennial ground cover can improve soil health.
  - 33.3% 'learned a great deal' about where to access the Cover Crop Economic Simulator tool.

### **Suggestions and Comments:**

Two common themes on suggestions for next year's conference were including more information/speakers specifically for women in agribusiness and including financial education. Suggestions included bringing back Amani Elobeid to speak on diversity and inclusion, as well as hearing more from Jolene Brown. Sessions on leadership, grain marketing, agronomy, technology, ethics, and niche production were proposed. Some ideas on the structure of the conference were to provide some regional or virtual events during the year with the same speakers, have industry specific breakouts, and find ways to attend more than one concurrent session. Survey respondents stated:

- "Why should women be in ag? The technology side of ag and the ethics battle about it. What are skills/careers in the ag world that could use a woman's perspective or influence?"
- "Accounting/taxes, becoming a LLC or other business venture, office leadership"
- "...as someone also having an off farm agricultural job, was hoping for more leadership insights for that"
- "You may want to consider having a panel of financial planners/estate attorney ... on estate planning."

When asked what else they would like to share with us, several compliments were shared.

Respondents also offered opportunities for improvement on the food, venue, structure, and inclusion of women in agribusiness. Comments were to have a hot meal rather than a salad entrée for lunch, have more sessions that are concurrent and fewer general sessions, move the timeframe to a Tuesday/Wednesday rather than Monday/Tuesday, and post the full conference schedule earlier to allow time to plan. Survey respondents stated:

- "This was my first time attending this conference! It was AMAZING - one of the best I have attended!"
- "This is an amazing conference that always seems to come about when I personally need verification that I am doing a good job in my profession and that there are other women to network with and support!"
- "This conference was beautifully put together, planned and executed."
- "Jolene Brown was amazing! Would love to hear her again!"
- "This was a wonderful opportunity for learning; enjoyed meeting many people at a great conference."
- "A lot of women, myself included, work in ag business and aren't on the farm. We still face the same struggles of being in a male dominated career. Is there a way to find speakers and or mentors to provide guidance in that area also?"

On the timing or dates of the conference, there were 42 survey respondents selecting 'keep the same - after Thanksgiving.' Other selections included 21 responses for 'move earlier in November' and 17 responses for February. The months of January, March, September and December were each selected 6 to 11 times. Survey respondents could select more than one response.

**Location / Participant(s) Came From**

- Multi-State

**Partner(s)**

- Business and Industry
- County Extension Staff