

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Extension and Outreach

Success Story

Title

County Professional Linda Cline Hosts Farm Management Programs For Women In Ag

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Author's Location

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CoReporter(s) - ISUEO Staff

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Relevance

The 2017 Census of Agriculture reported 960 farms in Webster County with a combined \$106 Million in net farm income. Women have significant employment, management and ownership on family farms in the county. There were 525 women farm operators who represented 34 percent of all farm operators in Webster County. Local steering committees suggested farm business management, grain marketing and financial management were topics of importance to women in the county and surrounding region. Working with the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach (ISUEO) farm management specialists to meet a variety of needs for all audiences in the agricultural community is a long-term commitment for Webster County Extension. Most recently, the county selected Mental Wellbeing and Reviving the Economy Including Agriculture as their top two COVID-19 recovery priorities.

Response

When it comes to Agriculture and Natural Resources programming, Linda Cline believes in the Field of Dreams. “If you offer it, they will come,” says Cline. Linda served Webster County Extension as a Youth Coordinator for 20 years before becoming the Program Coordinator in 2016. She organizes several agricultural programs each year including Annie’s Project, Master Conservationist, Crop Advantage, ProAg, Farmland Leasing, drainage workshops, and estate planning workshops. In addition, she organizes ISUEO Economic Development events such as entrepreneurship workshops and leadership workshops. Linda is a Prosper Team Leader and brings ISUEO Human Sciences programs such as Strengthening Families and Finances for Caregivers to Webster County. She serves on the county’s National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI) committee where she is working to bring suicide prevention training to faith-based communities.

Linda enjoys developing a bond with people she meets and personalizes her messages to them with individual calls or texts. “Linda is always eager to offer programs that benefit her clients. She goes to extra effort to recruit people that she thinks will benefit from the programs and often talks with them individually to fill classes,” says Kelvin Leibold, ISUEO Farm Management Specialist. Jon Flattery, Webster Extension Council Vice-President, agrees Linda is a natural when it comes to recruiting audiences. “Linda gets out in the community. Her connections are unbelievable. She looks out for everyone’s best interest and has earned a lot of trust,” comments Flattery. Linda goes above and beyond the expectations of the Webster Extension Council. “She is perfect for her role, loves the mission of ISUEO, and brings a lifetime of experience to her work,” notes Flattery.

Personally, Jon feels the most impactful programs for his family have been the women in ag programs such as Annie’s Project. “As a husband and wife you try to work things through, but when my wife can network with other women it really reinforces her understanding and this brings a lot of value to our farm business,” states Flattery.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020, Linda quickly shifted an Annie’s Project course online so the participants could complete the six-session program. Then she continued programming as the pandemic eased by moving Women Marketing Grain and another Annie’s Project course to larger venues. She adopted new health protocols to make sure women could safely learn the new skills they were seeking.

A mental health component was added to Linda’s most recent Annie’s Project course. She brought in a local therapist as a guest speaker. “The participants felt like this was a safe space and it was amazing how easily the audience shared with the speaker and others in the room,” commented Linda. “It showed that people are struggling and you just don’t know what families are going through,” she added.

“Linda is an excellent collaborator with the farm management team on many different programs, especially programs for women,” relays Leibold. “She regularly attends our annual statewide or national planning meetings and we often invite her to share her best practices,” adds Leibold. Working with Kelvin, Linda offered three Annie’s Project courses, two Women Marketing Grain courses, and one Women Managing Farm Finances course; reaching 86 women since taking on her Program Coordinator role.

Type of Change(s)(s)

- Learning Changes
- Behavior Changes
- Condition Changes

Impact Statement

It is rewarding for Linda to see several 4-H alumni coming back to attend Annie's Project. Two daughters and their Mom came to the course together. Then they brought Dad to an estate planning workshop. "It is interesting to watch the women grow and take the learning to other aspects of their life as well as to their families," shares Cline.

Linda is pleased to hear past program participants tell others they better go to an Annie's Project class. "They know it is well worth their time and they are going to get good information," says Cline. She understands it is a major commitment for women to attend a multi-session program. She strives to follow up with participants to send them additional resources and make sure all their questions are answered. "If you promise something to someone, you act on it," states Cline. Women always like the grain marketing sessions and enjoy the stories guest speakers share. "You can just tell those women feel less intimidated by grain marketing after the class. You can see they 'got it' and they want to go farther," comments Cline.

"I think Linda makes our job as a council extremely easy - you know she is always working hard and doing things for the county. No body works harder than Linda," states Flattery. The council is proud of the work Linda does and appreciates her monthly reports of programs and outcomes. "It's amazing how much she has going on. She follows up with people and gets them to come to other programs. Her work is very impactful," adds Flattery.

Jennifer Rolland is busy farmer with a full-time job off the farm. She enrolled in Annie's Project, Master Conservationist, estate planning workshops, and other programs offered by Linda. "I really appreciate that Linda reaches out to me to let me know what is going on. I can't always attend the extension programs I'm interested in, but I've learned so much from the ones I've been a part of," says Rolland. One of her favorite things about Annie's Project was connecting to other women. "I ran into one of the young ladies from the class this week and it was so nice to have that conversation about farming," shared Rolland. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in the midst Jennifer's Annie's Project, Linda made sure Jennifer could finish the course. "Linda went above and beyond to make sure I didn't miss out. She set me up with a computer at the extension office so I could participate virtually in the remaining lessons," explains Rolland. After taking Annie's Project, Jennifer and her husband converted some field headlands to grassland to conserve soil and water. She is also more aware of grain marketing concepts and tries to improve her skills.

Participants in Linda Cline's Annie's Project and other farm business management courses for women expanded their networks and took important actions to manage their farms or agribusinesses. When Extension and Outreach extends knowledge and empowers women, we create a more sustainable Iowa by expanding agricultural businesses, conserving natural resources, and supporting the community of women in agriculture.

ISUEO Signature Issues

Food & the Environment --> Farm Business Management

Outcomes

Linda uses the farm management team's surveys to collect feedback. Below is a summary of specific outcomes gathered from two recent courses.

Annie's Project participants are given a pre- and post-course survey. On the most recent course we have data for, February 2020, there were 15 survey respondents. Of these, 60 percent indicated they had been farming fewer than 10 years; 20 percent indicated 11-30 years, 13 percent indicated more than 30 years, and 7 percent is unknown. At the start of the course, 27 percent of survey respondents indicated they 'know quite a bit' or were 'completely familiar' with the components of a balance sheet; while at the end of the course, 100 percent indicated they 'know quite a bit' or were 'completely familiar.' At the start of the course, 13 percent of respondents indicated they 'know quite a bit' or were 'completely familiar' with where to find information on cash rental/leasing rates; while at the end of the course 88 percent indicated they 'know quite a bit' or were 'completely familiar.'

At the start of the course, 33 percent of survey respondents indicated they explored ways to manage price swings in the marketplace; while at the end of the course, 75 percent had taken this action. At the start of the course, 40 percent of respondents indicated they visited the USDA Farm Service Agency office; while at the end of the course, 88 percent had taken this action. In open-ended questions, respondents indicated they made changes to improve profitability including "comparing profitability of each enterprise," and "being aware of break-even price in decision-making."

Respondents indicated the two most valuable topics were 'marketing' and 'estate planning.' There were 88 percent of respondents who indicated the course provided a 'safe and nurturing environment for learning'; and 100 percent of respondents indicated the 'women-centered environment was important.' In open-ended questions, examples of most important things respondents learned were "Ag Decision Maker has a lot of valuable information," and "others had the same needs as I did." Examples of most important actions steps respondents took were "taking an honest look at our cost of production," and "opening a dialogue with my family on farm transition."

Women Marketing Grain participants are given a pre- and post-course survey. On the most recent course, July 2020, Six women completed the surveys. Of these, 67 percent indicated they had been farming fewer than 10 years, and 33 percent had been farming more than 30 years. At the start of the course, none of the survey respondents indicated they knew the relationship between cash and futures prices movements in the market; while at the end of the course, 100 percent said they 'know quite a bit' or 'am completely familiar.' At the start of the course, there were 17 percent of respondents who indicated they knew how crop insurance is used to reduce production and price risks; while at the end of the course, 100 percent said they 'know quite a bit' or 'am completely familiar.'

At the start of the course, there were 17 percent of respondents who indicated they 'have completed' or were 'in progress' of assessing the market situation using basis quotes and futures prices; while at the end of the course, 100 percent were taking action. At the start of the course, 33 percent of respondents indicated they 'have completed' or were 'in progress' of following a marketing plan; while at the end of the course, 67 percent were taking this action.

Respondents indicated the two most valuable topics were 'basis, futures carry, and cost of

ownership;' along with 'cash, futures, and options contracts.' All respondents reported the course provided a 'safe and nurturing environment for learning'; and indicated the 'women-centered environment was important.' In open-ended questions, examples of most important things respondents learned were "how to take advantage of contracts" and "other women's experiences." Examples of most important actions steps respondents took were "made a marketing plan" and "watched the markets closer."

Location / Participant(s) Came From

- County
 - Webster

Partner(s)

- Business and Industry
 - County Extension Staff
- USDA