

*Women, Land & Legacy*



## Reflections on 20 Years of WLL

In August 2003, a team was created to develop a project for women landowners in Iowa. The driving force was the fact that approximately half of Iowa’s farmland was owned or co-owned by women, a statistic that still exists today (47%). There was also concern for women who hadn’t been very involved in the farm operation and the support and resources needed, especially if they experienced the unfortunate event of the passing of their farming husband. That team developed Women, Land and Legacy (WLL), which has become much more than the original vision over the past 20 years.

There are two remaining WLL State Team members from that original development team, Carol Richardson Smith and me, Tanya Meyer-Dideriksen. As I approach my retirement on 12/30/23 I reflect on the tremendous success of WLL and my trust that it will continue for decades to come.

In 2004, WLL began with 5 pilot counties across the state and the first Listening Session in Howard County in September 2004. By 2005, there were 10 additional counties ready to get started. Since then, 65 counties have been involved in WLL. Currently, there are 45 active counties which is 21 chapters. A WLL chapter can be one county or multiple counties.

Today, a new chapter still gets started with a Listening Session and the same questions are asked of the local women as were asked in 2004, with very different responses! Through the Listening Sessions, we learn about women’s connections to the land, decisions they would like to make, and the information and resources they need to make effective decisions for their land and farm operation. Today, there are discussions about climate change, urban sprawl, and interest in urban agriculture, soil health and



*Tanya Meyer-Dideriksen*

and the traditional topics of estate planning, conservation practices and programs, and FSA programs. Once a WLL chapter gathers information from the Listening Session, the local team plans and implements Learning Sessions on the topics requested. Approximately 10,000 women (and men) have participated in and gained valuable information and resources from those Learning Sessions.

In 2003-04, we didn’t think about developing a website ([www.womenlandandlegacy.org](http://www.womenlandandlegacy.org)), social media, or a newsletter. Today, social media, primarily Facebook, is a key method for sharing WLL and partner information on the statewide Facebook page and pages of individual WLL chapters. The WLL website and this newsletter are also valuable sources of WLL information and resources.

The keys to WLL success are the local team leadership and addressing local concerns as well as the tremendous partnership between federal, state, and local government with non-profit organizations, schools, colleges and universities, faith-based organizations, and others. WLL will continue to grow and provide needed resources for Iowa’s agricultural women!

### The WLL State Team shares from their experience with WLL:

- **“I was so honored to be asked to join the State Team, a really dynamic group of women who care about taking care of our state, our land and the people in it. I think it’s important to have women-only spaces where we can talk about what’s important to each other and really listen to the answers. I also think we have so much work to do to empower women to play leadership roles in agriculture. We’ve made big strides but there is more work to do in centering our perspective and realizing our goal of caring for the land.”**

**Catherine DeLong, ISU Extension**

## Meet the WLL State Team Members

In 2023 the WLL State Team members have been introduced through the Women, Land and Legacy News. This issue introduces the final two members, Jolene Bopp and Molly Toot.

**Jolene Bopp** became a member of the WLL State Team in 2023. She is a public affairs specialist with a passion for telling stories that matter. She has worked in the field for over 15 years, in both the private and public sectors. She is skilled in crisis communications, media relations, social media marketing, graphic design, photography, website development, and government relations.

She got her start in public affairs when she joined the Marine Corps and enjoyed the challenge of organizing and escorting foreign media and developing and responding to crisis communications.

After she got out of the Corps, she and her husband moved to New Orleans where she finished her bachelor's degree in public relations with a minor in marketing at Tulane University. She started working as a marketing coordinator for a non-profit called FestiGals, where she designed promotional advertisements for magazines, billboards, websites, and streetcars.



*Jolene Bopp*

In 2018, they moved to West Des Moines where she worked as the communications director for the American Heart Association. She developed, coordinated, and carried out internal and external communications and marketing for AHA programs, services, and government relations advocacy efforts across the state of Iowa and in Duluth, Minnesota.

In 2021, Jolene came to NRCS as a Public Affairs Specialist. She was excited to have the opportunity to work for an organization that is making a difference across the nation through conservation. Her favorite part is taking photos, designing new marketing materials, and sharing NRCS' story and also those of our communities. She was recently selected to serve as the Federal Women's Program Manager, which brought her to the WLL State Team.

Jolene grew up on a small ranch in Texas and a small farm in Wisconsin where her family raised cows, pigs, and chickens. She and her family recently started a garden and are always experimenting with new ways to be more sustainable. Their son, James (9), loves helping in the garden, and their daughter, Ren (12), loves picking out what flowers to grow.

When they aren't gardening, she and her husband are usually running kids to various sporting events or working on house projects.

**Molly Toot** joined the WLL State Team in 2022. She has been working in agriculture for nearly 30 years in various sales, marketing and leadership roles with Syngenta and Land O'Lakes. Approximately 10 years ago she started working in agriculture sustainability with the development of the Truterra platform. Today Molly works for Landus, based out of the Des Moines headquarters office, and serves on the Executive Leadership Team as Senior Vice President of Administration leading HR, IT, EHS, Events and Sustainability. Molly resides in Ankeny, Iowa and has 3 adult children and one granddaughter.



*Molly Toot*

## WLL Value Statement

This year, the WLL State Team developed a 5-year Strategic Plan and have made great progress toward several of the action items. One of those is the development of an impactful WLL Value Statement. An organization's value statement is a summary of the unique target audience, product or service provided and how that fulfills a distinct need for the intended audience. It is compelling and cannot be applied to any other organization.

The WLL statement will now be used in much of the publicity and promotion, including on the website, social media, and on the updated WLL brochure that will be available soon.

The first introduction of the value statement is occurring in this newsletter!

## The WLL Value Statement is:

Women Land and Legacy is a locally led initiative empowering and connecting women interested in agriculture and conservation, fostering support and opportunities using a bottom-up approach that prioritizes their voices.

## Thank You to All Who Have Made WLL a Success for 20 Years

We are celebrating 20 years of WLL. There have been many USDA employees, state and local government employees, other partners, and Iowa's farm women that have created what WLL is today! Thank you to all of you!

From the local teams and the businesses and partners that have supported their efforts to the tremendous leadership support and guidance from NRCS, FSA and Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS). A huge thank you to the women farmers that have participated on local WLL teams, hosted Learning Sessions, attended events and joined the local team members in providing priceless input to the development of the strategic plan! WLL wouldn't be what it is today without you! There are many additional resources and opportunities on the horizon, so stay tuned! Here's to the next 20 years!

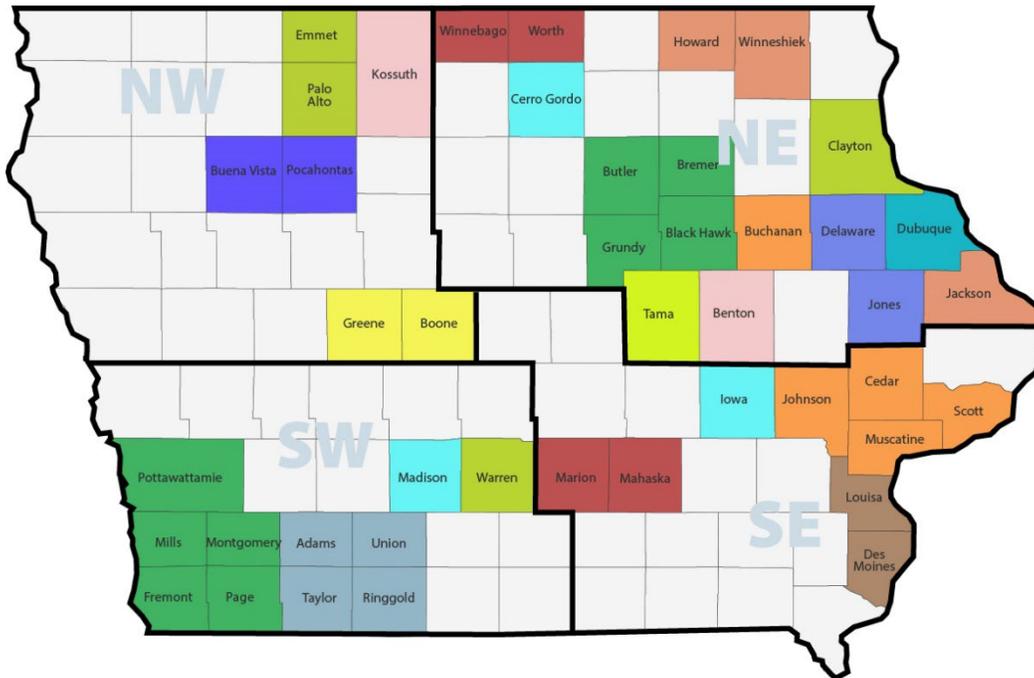


*WLL State Team on 11/30/23 (L to R): Amanda Hartman, Jolene Bopp, Mollie Aronowitz, Tanya Meyer-Dideriksen, Molly Toot, Carol Smith, Kate Bussanmas. Missing: Lisa Scarbrough, Catherine DeLong, Angie Sebastian, Rachel Burke.*

**OPPORTUNITIES**

Delaware-Jones WLL Chapter “The Future of Your Farm is O SO Good” January 11, 2024, from 5 – 8pm at O So Good Winery (30516 Pin Oak) in Dyersville. Steve Bohr will present “Perfect Storm in Farm Transition”. RSVP to [delawarejoneswll@gmail.com](mailto:delawarejoneswll@gmail.com) to reserve one drink token. Free event.

**Iowa Counties with WLL Teams**



**About Women, Land and Legacy**

Women, Land & Legacy (WLL) is a USDA-sponsored education and outreach program impacting thousands of Iowa women connected to agriculture. Working at the county level and utilizing dialogue, learning sessions and networking opportunities, WLL empowers women and provides resources for decision-making that impacts women’s land, families and community.



**Connect With Us**

[www.womenlandandlegacy.org](http://www.womenlandandlegacy.org)  
[stateteam@womenlandandlegacy.org](mailto:stateteam@womenlandandlegacy.org)  
[facebook.com/womenlandandlegacy](https://facebook.com/womenlandandlegacy)

**Want to Start WLL in Your County?**

Contact your local NRCS, FSA, SWCD or Extension Office. Or Contact Tanya Meyer Dideriksen, NRCS Outreach Coordinator, at [tanya.meyer@usda.gov](mailto:tanya.meyer@usda.gov).