

Women, Land & Legacy



Women, Land and Legacy News

February 2023

Newest WLL Chapter Brings Total Counties to 41

Interest in Women Land and Legacy (WLL) has grown since 2021, with the newest chapter increasing the total Iowa counties involved to 41. The Jones and Delaware WLL chapter got started during the summer of 2022.

A local team that includes NRCS, FSA, ISU Extension & Outreach, SWCD staff and commissioners, Farm Bureau, Farmers Savings Bank, Jones County Conservation, Maquoketa River Watershed Management Authority, and local farm women planned two Listening Sessions that were conducted on January 30, 2023. Despite extremely cold temperatures, a total of 58 women attended and participated to provide valuable input and feedback.

WLL local team lead, Alycia Willenbring (NRCS Resource Conservationist) shares, “We were delighted to see so much support from local women in the ag community who participated in our Listening Sessions. The conversation was enlightening and the engagement of everyone who attended was beyond expectation. We have a great idea of what events to host moving forward. We are excited to build networks for women in our counties and to support them through educational opportunities. Our goal is to plan three events for Jones and Delaware counties in 2023.”

Based on the session evaluations, the women participants felt that it was valuable to connect and network with other women in their community who share the same or similar agricultural goals and

concerns. Some of the women were surprised to see how many local women are involved in sustaining the family farm and making farm decisions.

During the sessions, the women were able to gain information about such topics as cover crops, soil health, and marketing. They were inspired and enthused about agriculture and its future, as well as excited to be part of their local WLL.

They discussed topics they need to learn more about, which will guide the WLL local team as they plan future Learning Sessions. Some of the topic requests included: soil health, succession planning and land transition, conservation practices, water quality, agricultural laws and taxes, NRCS, FSA and ISU Extension programs, timber, farm bookkeeping, landowner/tenant communication, alternative forms of agriculture and niche markets.

Counties interested in learning more about WLL or becoming active may contact NRCS State Outreach Coordinator, Tanya Meyer-Dideriksen at tanya.meyer@usda.gov.



Jones and Delaware WLL Listening Session facilitated by Tanya Meyer-Dideriksen. Photo courtesy of The Monticello Express (Pete Temple)

Comments describing the most positive experiences about the December 2022 Jackson County Women Land and Legacy Listening Session:

- “Knowing I’m not alone, there are other women in the same situations”
- “Connecting with other women in the community with the same views and goals”
- “I enjoyed listening to different women’s inputs, experiences and thoughts”
- “It’s good to know there are other women who can help with my questions”
- “Sharing ideas with others at my table and then all tables sharing with the whole group”

Meet the WLL State Team Members

The Women Land and Legacy (WLL) State Team has been growing recently and includes an impressive group of strong intelligent women. In each of the WLL newsletters in 2023, state team members will be introduced. This issue introduces Mollie Aronowitz and Carol Richardson Smith.

Mollie Aronowitz, who joined the WLL State Team in summer 2019, grew up in a farming family in northern Iowa and continues to participate in the corn-soybean operation that celebrated 100 years in 2020. Mollie works for People’s Company as a land manager and works closely with non-farming landowners. She often interacts with tenants to execute farm leases, oversee improvement and repair projects, and monitor USDA projects and programs.

Mollie spent her twenties working in public gardens in the Midwest. Tending a manicured garden while interacting with and educating the public has many similarities to her current work on agricultural land. “So much of our work is relationship driven. We are looking at the land and figuring out how to best partner and interact with the larger landscape,” Mollie says. “There is tremendous opportunity to problem solve-if we ask questions and think outside the box, we can find solutions that help all parties.”

Mollie lives in Ames with her husband John, and their two children Leigh (8) and Jack (6). They enjoy the energy of living in a college town and cheering on the Cyclones!



Mollie Aronowitz with her daughter, Leigh.

Carol Richardson Smith grew up in northern Minnesota with three sisters and parents who were very involved in the community. Her contact with farming came not only from her New England heritage but the idea that people ought to know where their food comes from. 4-H membership brought Carol role models who were Extension Home Economists and led her to Iowa State University and the College of Home Economics.

Carol has been a vocational classroom teacher, teaching children and adults (mostly girls and women). She describes Extension as her “first love” and was a county home economist and county director. Carol shares, “I loved the development work in those positions. This led me to finish my master’s work in international development studies.”

She worked for National Catholic Rural Life (NCRL), designing and managing a program for rural community support. “One of the partnerships for this program was USDA State Outreach Council, leading me to Women Land and Legacy as a member of the state team”, says Carol. **She was a founding member in 2003/2004.**

Carol enthusiastically adds, “I have an abiding interest in the welfare of women which has led me to many volunteer activities. Since leaving NCRL, I have continued as a member of the Women Land and Legacy state team, representing non-profits and organizations with these same interests.”

She serves as a long-standing board member of Self-Help International (located in Waverly) and has traveled to their program area in Ghana West Africa to participate in evaluation and planning, especially for women’s programming.



Carol Richardson Smith, at home near Perry, IA.

Carol was a “founding mother’ of Women Food and Agriculture Network (WFAN) and has been a board member of Iowa Community Capital. “Perhaps the activity that has taught me the most about all kinds of women and their needs and challenges was participating in retreats and the leadership committee for the REC retreat program at the Iowa Correctional Institution for Women,” Carol mentions.

Carol and her husband, Bob Smith, live on an acreage with a large garden west of Perry, IA. They have two sons, two daughters and four wonderful granddaughters. Carol and Bob enjoy the diversity and the spirit of the Perry community.

Of Women and Land: How Gender Affects Successions and Transfers of Iowa Farms

From working paper 22-WP 631, Center for Agricultural and Rural Development, Iowa State University. Maule, Beatrice, Wendong, Zhang and Qing, Liu, April 2022.

The researchers and authors of this working paper used 591 responses to the 2019 Iowa Farm Transfer Survey to examine factors in farm successor choices among Iowa farmers with a focus on female successors and landowners. Successor is defined as those who will eventually take over “management” as opposed to the “ownership” of the farm business.

Based on their study, the probability of farmers choosing a daughter(s) as farm successor(s) increases when the farmer is female, only has daughters, when the daughter has farming experience or an agricultural job, or when the farm operation is a partnership with a wife. In contrast, the researchers expect farmers are less likely to choose daughters if a son is the oldest child or they have more sons than daughters. The research shows 63% of farmers with sons and daughters, chose the son as the successor.

Sons that have an agriculture-related job show an increase from 36.3% to 65.2% to be chosen as the main successor. Daughters that have an agriculture-related job show an increase from 5.4% to 20.7% to be chosen as the main successor.



Results reveal the significant gender imbalance in farm succession decisions in the contemporary U.S. are based somewhat on traditional assumptions that females are less productive and less fit to run a farm than their male counterparts. Older farmers and those that have more years of farming experience are less likely to choose a female successor. It is, although, important to stress that with the advent of precision agriculture machinery, the ideal skillsets for a successful farmer have shifted from physical demands and agronomy-centered knowledge to those focused on marketing, finance, computer skills and entrepreneurship. This shift may potentially increase the number of female farmers and lessen the mindset of inferiority.



Rather than be named a successor, more women inherit land with equal shares as other siblings as “tenants in common” or jointly with a spouse as “joint tenants”.

The paper indicates that the gender imbalance creates an effect on farm succession, transfer, and inheritance decisions not only on Iowa farms but across the U.S.

The findings suggest there is value to involving women landowners in farming operations and educating women, especially young women, on farm management decisions which will enable them to choose farming as a career path, help close the gender gap in farmland access and succession and could help encourage and empower women and girls in agriculture. There tends to be less farming-related investment or education given to girls during their childhood or adolescent years, even for females that grew up on a farm.



Research results highlight the importance of agriculture-related skillsets and training of women and suggests measures should be taken to help women build these skillsets early in life.

This model is based solely on data from one survey in one state, Iowa and in only one year, 2019. Although, it is believed that it provides an accurate snapshot of the current situation in Iowa and the U.S. Corn Belt.

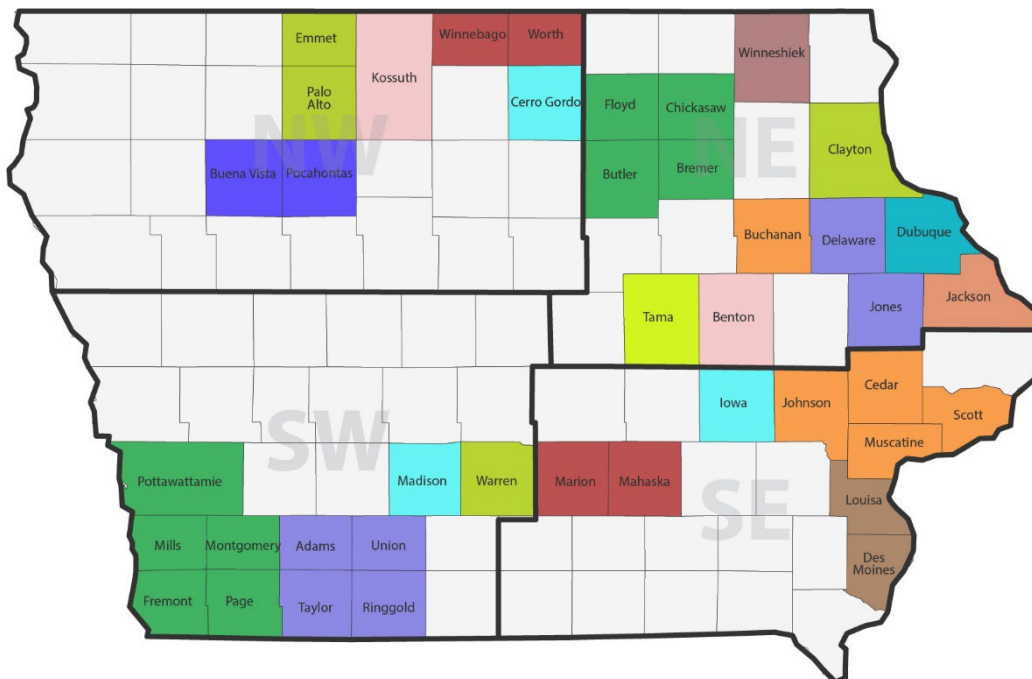


OPPORTUNITIES

SW Iowa WLL Chapter “Women Gaining Ground Conference”: March 4 at Clarinda High School beginning at 8am. Presenters: Leslie Norris-Townsend regional talent show host and producer), Brandon Dirkschneider (certified financial planner & farm succession coordinator), Stephanie Downs (Senior Wellbeing Coordinator at ISU) and many breakout sessions. Register by 2/24/23 at <https://go.iastate.edu/1QG4MG>. \$35 fee.

Tama WLL Chapter “Nuisance Wildlife”: March 23 at Toledo Public Library. Registration & food at 6:30pm and program 7-9pm. Presenters: Kaycie Waters (Extension) and Bruce Rhoads (Backwater Wildlife Solutions, Chelsea). RSVP to melody.bro@ia.nacdn.net or 641-484-2702.

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
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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.