Women, Land & Legacy

RBEG Comes to a Close

Since 2012, the WLL State Team has been working on projects related to a Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEG) from USDA Rural Development and reporting accomplishments to WLL Local Teams through this newsletter. This grant project came to a close December 31, 2014. Many goals have been accomplished through the project that developed tools, resources and assistance for local teams.

WLL in Iowa and Tama counties plus the Meskwaki Nation were key partners for this project. The WLL State Team had received requests in years prior to receiving the grant to connect WLL local teams, develop resources to enhance local teams, and expand WLL efforts.

In response to this, the state team first utilized the RBEG funding to develop a statewide WLL Facebook page and to assist local teams interested in developing their own WLL Facebook page, a quarterly newsletter, an updated and more user-friendly website with a blog, and social media training through workshops. The team also developed and printed updated WLL brochures for use by local (continued on page 5)

Melody Bro Named
Women, Land and Legacy Coordinator

Melody Bro joins the staff at Women, Food and Agriculture Network (WFAN) to increase outreach to women in rural Iowa. She will coordinate the Women, Land and Legacy program, where local groups of women hold ongoing meetings covering topics from farm management to conservation.

“Iowa has something special going on with this program,” says Bridget Holcomb of WFAN. “These local groups empower women to make so many positive changes to their farms and the land they own. Melody not only has the skills we were looking for, but she also has eight years of experience working in her local Women, Land and Legacy team. We couldn’t have asked for anyone more suited to this role.”

Bro has seen the effects of the program in Tama County, where she lives.

“It amazes me how passionate women are about the land and how eager they are to learn more,” Bro says. “Having seen the benefits of the program on the local level, I’m hoping to help make this program available to every woman throughout the state of Iowa.”

This is the first time that the Women, Land and Legacy program will have dedicated staff. The program’s successes are due to the efforts of the Women, Land and Legacy State Team, which includes women from many state and federal agencies.

“They have worked tirelessly to make this program what it is, and this will be a big step forward,” says Holcomb.

“Melody has done a tremendous job of facilitating Women, Land and Legacy efforts in Tama County for eight years and has assisted the local team in creating an extremely successful effort there,” says Tanya Meyer with the Washington County Natural Resources Conservation Service, and a member of the State Team. (continued on page 7)

What’s Going on in Your WLL County?

Please drop us a note when you have happenings in your groups! We’d love to hear and to share!

There’s no time like the present😊
**Women Gaining Ground Conference**

**WLL of Southwest Iowa**

Women, Land & Legacy of Southwest Iowa will be presenting “Women Gaining Ground,” a one-day conference designed to be fun and empowering for women from all walks of life. The conference will be held on Saturday, March 21, 2015 in Shenandoah, Iowa from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

This exciting new event will feature six breakout sessions where participants will learn more about spring decorating, entrepreneurial ag, western Iowa travel, bee-keeping, identity theft protection and local foods. The keynote speaker will be Holly Hoffman, from the CBS reality show, “Survivor.”

After all three of her children left for college, Holly Hoffman decided she wanted a challenge and an adventure in her own life. She wanted to step out of her comfort zone, and that is when she decided to apply to be on “Survivor”. After sending in one application, one audition DVD, and having one casting call, Holly made the show for season 21, “Survivor Nicaragua.” Holly finished fourth at the end of the season and was the last woman standing as well as the last member of her tribe. Little did she know, this was only the beginning of her journey.

Holly feels that what she learned from being on the reality show, she has been able to apply to the real world of survival. Soon after coming home from Nicaragua, she became an inspirational and motivational speaker. Holly encourages others to take opportunities and also focus on attitude, confidence, determination, desire, and faith.

Local vendors will be on-hand for participants to shop throughout the event. Morning refreshments and a delicious lunch will be provided. The cost is $25 per person. **Pre-registration is required.** No refunds; registrations may be transferred to another attendee at no charge. **The event will not be cancelled due to weather conditions.**

Details for the conference will be provided on our Facebook page at [https://www.facebook.com/womenlandlegacywgg](https://www.facebook.com/womenlandlegacywgg). Questions can be directed to Fremont County ISU Extension at 712-374-2351; Mills County ISU Extension at 712-624-8616; or Montgomery County ISU Extension at 712-623-2592.

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**SILT Gives Women Landowners New Legacy Options**

**Iowa leaders announce first-ever statewide nonprofit to preserve land to grow healthy food**

Landowners in Iowa have developed what could be a nationwide model for land conservation specifically for growing sustainable food through a newly-formed nonprofit, Sustainable Iowa Land Trust (SILT), a first-of-its kind partnership between landowners, land developers, farmers, local food advocates and planners.

**SILT** is a nonprofit land trust that allows Iowans to donate land or protect it with permanent restrictions, called easements, before that land is paved over by development or plowed under by a larger farm. In return, the group commits to protect that land for sustainable food production in perpetuity. Landowners can choose to donate all or part of their farm, and continue to live on their land for as long as they choose.

“Women landowners in particular have been looking for this option,” said SILT founder and president Suzan Erem who will protect her farmland with an easement from SILT. “Women want to leave a legacy of healthy food production with their land, and now they can.” Erem said landowners interested in learning more about a farmland or easement donation can fit into an overall estate planning strategy should contact her as soon as possible, and also talk to their tax and legal advisers.

Such donations will help new farmers get into the field. By permanently protecting land to grow healthy food, SILT removes development and commodity price pressures, reducing land costs for farmers and eventually lowering the price of the food that’s grown on it for their customers. Iowa currently imports 90 percent of its food, according to Crossroads Resource Center which has studied the state. Decreasing that reliance on out-of-state production increases farming opportunities for Iowans, SILT leaders say.

SILT is launching with one farm donation already committed and more than 1,500 acres of farmland being considered for permanent protection. SILT won the hearts of coastal millionaires and social impact investors as well as a $20,000 interest-free (continued on page 6)
**Worth & Winnebago WLL Program**

The Worth and Winnebago County Women, Land and Legacy program was held at the Country Inn and Suites at rural Northwood with guest speaker Ann Johanns, Iowa State University Extension Farm Management Specialist. Johanns spoke to the group about Estate Planning, Leasing, Farm Management Educational Tools on the Web, How to do Website Searches, and Finding Agricultural Educational Publications on the Web. The meeting was co-sponsored by the Worth and Winnebago County NRCS, FSA, Soil and Water Conservation Districts and Iowa State University Extension Services.

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**Successful First Year for Johnson County WLL**

The Johnson Co. Women, Land & Legacy team had a very successful first year and the planning team is excitedly preparing for 2015 and beyond! We’ve partnered with the Bur Oak Land Trust on what we’re hoping will be a series of land management events in the years to come. Our most recent event, Women, Land and Tools 101!, had close to 25 participants and will be followed with a spring 2015 hands-on event. Other events for 2015 are developing including a “farm crawl” with a tentative title of “A Day in the Life of a Woman Farmer”, monthly breakfast gatherings, and a learning session on financial planning. We look forward to reaching and connecting with more women from Johnson and neighboring counties. You can learn about news and events on our Facebook page, [https://www.facebook.com/womenlandandlegacyjohnson](https://www.facebook.com/womenlandandlegacyjohnson).

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**Has your email changed??**

Please update your email address for us at [http://womenlandandlegacy.wordpress.com/newsletters/](http://womenlandandlegacy.wordpress.com/newsletters/)

Or simply email us at stateteam@womenlandandlegacy.org.

Thank you!
Howard County WLL Group Met

Howard County’s Women, Land, and Legacy group saw a great turnout of 15 women on Thursday, November 6th, 2014. SunOpta Plant Manager, Julie Dietzenbach, started off the meeting with information about the SunOpta operations, followed by a tour of the facility. Participants enjoyed refreshments including Frito Lay white cheddar Cheetos which SunOpta provides ingredients for.

Women, Land, & Legacy is a collaborative group consisting of the ISU Extension, Howard Soil & Water Conservation District, USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency. Equal opportunity employers and providers. If you would like to be added to the mailing list, please call 563-547-3040 ext. #3.

Register online at www.swcs.org for the Iowa Cover Crops Conference before February 12th.

Walk ins Welcome as well!
RBEG Comes to a Close, continued from page 1...teams and a revised WLL Development Guide available in hard copy or CD. New WLL displays have been designed but not created for use until additional funding is identified by the state team or a local team. There are still WLL displays developed in 2008 available through the NRCS state office.

Through the RBEG, the state team worked with pilot counties to develop toolboxes now included in the WLL Development Guide to assist WLL local teams build and strengthen their local teams and add new members. Additionally, there is a toolbox to assist local teams that wish to expand their WLL efforts to include women owned or co-owned small rural businesses. Iowa and Tama counties have both utilized these tools to expand their efforts to new audiences. We hope other WLL counties will also be interested in this. Training on this subject will be available from Melody Bro, WLL Coordinator.

The RBEG was also used to support several WLL counties with learning sessions and other outreach efforts by reimbursing costs. WLL State Team members assisted the Meskwaki Nation by sharing the processes used by WLL with tribal staff members involved in developing the local food system and businesses within the tribe. The processes were used during community meetings to help the tribe meet some of the goals in their food sovereignty strategic plan.

A thorough evaluation of the grant activities, including how the expansion to small rural businesses has affected those businesses through jobs created and retained, was conducted. This information not only helps us understand the impact of the grant project but also helps provide guidance for future WLL efforts.

Returned surveys from 43 WLL pilot participants show that the RBEG WLL work helped women business owners, landowners, and farmers grow their businesses. One in three women reported her farm operation or business had grown in terms of net revenue by more than 10 percent. Two in three WLL women reported an improvement in developing business contacts. Ten new jobs were created. In addition, the project helped WLL women take on new roles and responsibilities in their businesses as a result of WLL activities. New roles included financial accounts management, marketing, improving conservation, and succession planning. Women are also taking on new roles in their communities by serving on local business and agricultural boards.

Finally, during the development phase of this project, WLL women in the pilot counties struggled to regard farming as a business. Instead, these women viewed farming as a lifestyle—one that happened to provide income through land rents or product sales—but whose financial outcomes were incidental to other, more highly valued goals held by women. Those other goals, such as land stewardship, conservation, family legacy, and social connections, surfaced to the top of an otherwise long list of benefits that involvement in agriculture and rural life brings to women who participate in WLL.
(SILT, continued from page 2...) loan at the Slow Money National Gathering in November. Since then, SILT leaders have been consulting with think tanks such as the E.F. Schumacher Institute for a New Economy, Equity Trust and RSF Social to build Iowa farmland protection opportunities for philanthropists and impact investors in the future.

The Iowans who started SILT hail from all backgrounds and regions of the state. The group’s advisory council and board include farmers, planners, Democratic and Republican leaders, health and local foods advocates and philanthropists in a rare blend of political and geographic diversity.

“In the face of food insecurity, commodity price fluctuations and climate change, growing more of our own food just makes sense,” said SILT President Suzan Erem, a farmland owner from Cedar County. “If we don’t start protecting land near our cities and towns, we can say goodbye to the whole notion of local.”

“We are paying high prices for lettuce from drought-stricken California when we could grow it here 10 months out of the year,” said Denise O’Brien, an Atlantic farmer and former candidate for Iowa secretary of agriculture. “And we could be bringing young people back to Iowa to grow that food.”

SILT is also bringing together unlikely partners: farmers and real estate developers. Through SILT, well-known family farm advocates like O’Brien, dairy farmer Francis Thicke and beginning farmer Jason Grimm are joining forces with real estate interests, such as People’s Company, the state’s largest land broker and Hubbell Homes, its largest developer.

Row crop farmer Harn Soper, founder of Sustainable Farm Partners LLP (SFP) in Emmetsburg, which owns 4,000 acres, says SILT would be the ideal solution for his investor group, as they actively transition their land to the next generation. “SILT provides the mechanism through which SFP can make sure that when its farmland ownership is passed along, that farmland will remain organic into the future,” Soper said. Other strong interest in SILT is coming from the Des Moines exurbs, Fairfield, Northeast Iowa and even farmland owners in far Western and Eastern Iowa.

The state’s largest developer also sees SILT’s potential.

“We are building developments right now that incorporate organic farms into them,” said Joe Pietruszynski, vice president of land development for Hubbell Homes in Des Moines. “This provides the farmer with buyers and our new homeowners a beautiful farm and fresh produce in their neighborhood. It’s a win-win.”

Hubbell Homes plans to partner with SILT on future projects to protect those farms forever. This new approach fundamentally redefines “community” to include food production alongside housing—two social and environmental ecosystems that sustain both community and farmer. Preserving healthy farms affects city residents as well, and could inspire urban farming practices to take hold.

“Treating our drinking water has become a major expense for our cities,” says Des Moines Waterworks CEO Bill Stowe, whose agency recently approved a plan to sue three counties in its watershed. “If SILT can protect farms all along our watershed, the cost of treating water in Des Moines and other cities would drop significantly.”

For more information and to learn how to donate, visit www.silt.org, like us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter.
WLL Coordinator, continued from page 1... Carol Smith, another member of the State Team, says, “We are looking forward to this opportunity to better support local teams, and involve more rural women in learning and action that they choose in their communities.”

Women, Land and Legacy, which held its first locally-based meeting in 2004, is currently active in 22 Iowa counties. For more information go to www.womenlandandlegacy.org.

This position is made possible through support from Iowa Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture.

Rural Legacy is a quarterly publication of Women, Land, & Legacy. Our vision is to help agricultural women come together to converse, listen, & become empowered to act on their landscape & in their community.

We invite newsletter suggestions & contributions from participants & readers.

The newsletter is published each February, May, August, & November & may be viewed at www.womenlandandlegacy.org.

Email submissions to stateteam@womenlandandlegacy.org, no later than the 15th of the prior month.

Visit us on our Facebook page www.facebook.com/womenlandandlegacy.

State Team
Corry Bregendahl, Leopold Center
Carol Richardson Smith, Consultant
Tanya Meyer Dideriksen, USDA NRCS
Kay Triplett, USDA NASS
Laura Crowell, USDA NRCS
Heather Honkomp, USDA RD -- Editor
Jackie Suckow, IDALS DSC
Wendi Denham, USDA FSA

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Soil Health & Conservation
Louisa & Des Moines Counties WLL

The Louisa / Des Moines County Women, Land and Legacy (WLL) Team is hosting their first learning session on March 10 from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. at the Mediapolis City Hall. The session is entitled Soil Health and Conservation and will highlight a presentation by Jason Steele, Area Resource Soil Scientist with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in southeast Iowa. Soil health is a hot topic in agriculture and is the connection to higher yields, soil conservation and water quality. More and more farmers are implementing practices such as cover crops to improve the soil health on their farms. Learn how important soil health is and what a tremendous difference it can make for you and your land in this session.

In addition to the soil health presentation, local NRCS and USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) staff will present information about conservation and farm programs. These programs provide tools and resources to implement conservation planning and soil health practices. Come meet your local USDA staff and hear about opportunities available to you.

The Louisa / Des Moines County WLL began with two listening sessions in October 2014. During these sessions, local women shared with the team topics of concern and interest for future learning sessions. The team will host 3 sessions, including the March event on Soil Health and Conservation, in 2015 that address and meet requests shared at the listening sessions. WLL is locally led and is based on the interest and requests of women in the two counties. Topics for learning sessions in 2015 and the future will be based on what the team has heard and will continue to hear from local women that participate in WLL.

The March 10 session is free to attend. Refreshments will be provided by Mediapolis Savings Bank. RSVPs are encouraged but not required. To RSVP, please email Jamie Grimes at Jamie.grimes@ia.nacdnet.net or call 319-523-6411 for Louisa County and 319-753-6221 for Des Moines County.

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