For Beginning Farmers, Iowa Networks Provide Huge Support

By Wren Almitra

Resources for beginning or aspiring farmers are increasingly abundant in Iowa and throughout the country. In an agricultural climate with an aging producer and landowner demographic, training, resources, and networks for new producers is crucial to the vitality of Iowa’s farmland and communities.

Much of the knowledge and skills that new farmers need to be successful are being provided through organizations, agencies and community networks right here in Iowa. These groups help cushion and prepare new farmers as well as help them to be more resilient in times of unpredictability. There is even assistance for barriers that can be more difficult to overcome, such as land access and start-up costs.

In short, from business planning, on-farm mentorships, agronomy training, financial assistance, producer and landowner networking, beginning farmers in Iowa can find well-needed support as they get started with their enterprises. Below is a list of just some of these supporting groups.

Iowa Finance Authority (IFA)
IFA’s Iowa Agricultural Development Division (IADD) provides loans for beginning farmers, as well as workshops for new farmers and landowners looking to transition their farms.

ISU Extension & Outreach
The Beginning Farmer Center lists five programs with services like networking, multi-week courses on farm management, and a web-based database matching landowners with beginning producers seeking land. ISU’s programming for women includes Annie’s Project, covering topics from business management, marketing, and more.
Women, Land & Legacy

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**Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI)**

PFI is a member based non-profit with numerous services for beginning farmers including on-farm mentorships; a savings program that also provides multiple years of training and support; a web-based service matching landowners with land-seeking producers; and retreats, with marketing training, business planning, and more. Additionally, PFI’s field days, on-line farminars, and an annual conference provide continued learning and networking year ‘round. More about their beginning farmer programs can be found [here](#).

**Sustainable Iowa Land Trust (SILT)**

SILT is a land trust specifically working to preserve farmland in the state to grow healthy food. It also works to match new farmers with landowners who are working to keep their land in production.

**Women, Food & Agriculture Network (WFAN)**

The Women, Food & Ag. Network provides support to women who are aspiring or beginning farmers through the [Harvesting Our Potential](#) program, which includes on-farm mentorships, business planning, and networking through learning circles and farm tours. WFAN also has an annual conference, which is rich with workshops for beginning farmers, as well as networking opportunities.

**United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)**

The USDA has numerous resources for beginning farmers and ranchers through the FSA, NRCS, and the [New Farmers website](#).

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) provides [beginning and farming rancher loans](#) for those farming less than 10 years and also administers the [Transition Incentive Program](#), which incentivizes landowners for renting or selling recently expired CRP land to a new producer.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides cost share and technical assistance to farmers, ranchers and landowners. Assistance to new producers who have been in operation for less than 10 years is one of the agency priorities.

This is of course not an exhaustive list of groups supporting new producers in the state. If you have others to recommend for a future article on this topic, please let us know!

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**Organic Ag. Grows in Iowa**

Organic surveys have tracked organic farming since 2008. The first surveys were initiated as part of the Census of Agriculture to support an emerging organic industry. These data collection efforts surveyed 518 farms, all known certified, exempt, and transitioning organic operations at that time.

The 2011 and 2015 organic surveys were conducted in cooperation with the USDA’s Risk Management Agency in an effort to expand the number and variety of premium price elections for certified organic crops. The survey in these years were restricted to only certified organic operations, 840 farms in Iowa in 2015.

The 2016 Organic Survey was mailed to only certified organic operators on January 30, 2017 and the results will be made available September 5, 2017 on NASS’ website at [www.nass.usda.gov](http://www.nass.usda.gov). For more information call the NASS Upper Midwest Regional Field Office at 800-772-0825 or click [here](#) to access Organic survey data:

Make sure you are counted! The next data collected for women farmers, organic agriculture, small farms, local foods, and specialty crops will be in the 2017 Census of Agriculture. To provide your contact information click [here](#).
Upcoming Women Caring for the Land Workshops Will Focus on the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

Two upcoming workshops by the Women Caring for the Land (WCL) program will provide women landowners a solid understanding of how to incorporate the Conservation Reserve Program, or CRP, practices on their farms (see event details below).

Maintaining healthy soil is the key to productivity and environmental health for our farmland. Women landowners who attend these meetings will learn to improve and protect their soils and water through the use of targeted CRP practices. Special maps will be used to show how protecting soil can be profitable and there will be an introduction to how variable rate technology can play a role. Local agency staff will help explain the CRP program and the application process. More on this program can be found on the WCL website or by calling Carol at 641-430-2540.

Tuesday, February 14th at the Lenox Community Center, 210 East Dallas Street, Lenox, IA.

Women who own or manage farmland in Taylor and surrounding counties are invited to participate. Registration, coffee, and resource sharing start at 8:30 a.m. with the meeting begging at 9 a.m. Lunch is provided. A field tour in the afternoon will highlight area CRP practices, with the meeting ending by 3 p.m. The program is sponsored by Women, Food and Agriculture Network and the Taylor County Water Quality Initiative Program. RSVP to Erin Ogle, 712-523-2118 or erin.ogle@ia.nacdnet.net.

Tuesday, April 11th at the Extension and Outreach Center, 212 North I Street, Oskaloosa, IA.

Women who own or manage farmland in Mahaska and surrounding counties are invited to participate. Registration, coffee, and resource sharing start at 8:30 a.m. with the meeting begging at 9 a.m. Lunch is provided. A field tour in the afternoon will highlight area CRP practices, with the meeting ending by 3 p.m. RSVP by 4 p.m. Friday, April 7 to Wendi at (641) 673-3476, wendi.denham@ia.usda.gov. The program is sponsored by FSA, Mahaska SWCD, NRCS, and Women, Food and Agriculture Network.
Conservation Corner

Protecting and Providing for Pollinators – Iowa Resources to Help You Get Started

Pollinators are an increasingly buzz-worthy conservation topic and for good reason. Pollinator populations of all types, not just monarchs and honeybees, are declining including native bees, wasps, butterflies, moths, birds, and bats, among others. Pollinators aren’t just important for human crops; they are integral to having healthy ecological communities. Some good news is that this extremely important issue is gaining more and more attention and inspiring action. Many organizations and agencies are working on gaining a better understanding of the threats to pollinators as well as providing landowners and urban residents with ways to help abate the continued decline of these needed species.

For example, there’s been a lot of encouragement for people to plant their own pollinator gardens as well as safely incorporating pollinator habitat back onto farmland. Just a few of the many resources available to Iowans are listed below.

Work with your community organization to plant pollinator habitat. **People for Pollinators** is a program of the Neal Smith Wildlife Refuge in Prairie City providing free native plants and seeds, as well as technical assistance and many other resources for pollinator gardens in central Iowa. They are especially interested in working with schools, organizations, cities or other public spaces. You can contact program coordinator Patrick Bryant at 515-994-3400 to find out how to become involved.

Get funding and technical support for planting pollinator habitat on your farm. USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is assisting the public with a variety of resources including cost assistance for planting pollinator habitat through the CRP (Conservation Reserve Program) and other cost share assistance practices. Find more information [here](#) or stop by your local NRCS office and talk with a staff member.

Become a citizen scientist by monitoring pollinators where you live. Many organizations promote citizen scientists through programs that ask people to observe and report certain species of animals and plants in their home area. The Xerces Society is a highly respected national organization working to research and protect invertebrate pollinator species. They educate and engage the public to get involved, including providing several citizen science monitoring opportunities. General information about the Xerces Society can be found on their [website](#).

Photo credit: ISU Extension and Outreach

Photo credit: The Sierra Club
WLL Updates and News Around the State

November 10th FarmHer Presentation Saw 200 Attendees

The Winnebego/Worth WLL team, as well as the counties of Cerro Gordo, Mitchell and Hancock counties partnered to sponsor Marji Guyler-Alaniz in November of 2016. Marji presented on FarmHer, her organization that documents women in agriculture through photography and film. She also discussed FarmHer’s programming for young aspiring farmers, called Grow. Nearly 200 participants were in attendance.

Dubuque Co. Brought Soil Health 101 to Local Women

During Dubuque County’s Listening Session in September, the local team received feedback from many farmers, landowners, and citizens that they wanted to learn more about soil and soil health. On January 10th the team put on a soil health/soil sampling Learning Session. Jennifer Filipiak from the American Farmland Trust give an amazing presentation about soil health and Laura Klavitter from ISU Extension brought some soil sampling tools to teach us how to take a soil sample. There were many questions asked by the 25 attendees as well as from eight of the local team members in attendance. You can read more about this event on the WLL state-wide blog.

Palo Alto and Emmet Counties Join Women, Land & Legacy

The Palo Alto/Emmet Women, Land & Legacy team kicked off with their first event on January 9th in Graettinger, Iowa with two Listening Sessions. 22 women attended and shared their interests and needs for education on their land. Some of the topics that the women would like to learn more about include estate and legacy planning, trusts, business management, farm finances, grain marketing, conservation practices and teaching younger generations the importance of farming. The 10 local team members include farmers and farmland owners and staff from NRCS, FSA, ISU Extension and Outreach, Farm Credit Services of America and the Farm Bureau. Four additional educational events are being planned for 2017. If you would like to be a part of the Palo Alto/Emmet WLL chapter or have questions, contact the team at paemmetwll@gmail.com.
Upcoming WLL Events

2017 Women, Land & Legacy Events

More details may be found on our on-line calendar, www.womenlandandlegacy.org.

Iowa Co. WLL Hosts Crop Insurance 101 Workshop
February 9th, Williamsburg
This event will be held at the Williamsburg Recreation Center from 2 to 4 p.m. Registration will begin at 1:30 p.m. with snacks and door prizes provided courtesy of Iowa County Women Land and Legacy. A variety of topics will be covered.

Dubuque Co. WLL Holds On-line Ag. Decision Maker Tool Workshop
March 7th, Epworth
The Dubuque Co. WLL team will host a workshop on the ISU Extension Ag. Decision Maker on-line resource, with Ann Johanns leading the session. Western Dubuque High School in Epworth, Iowa. Two sessions will be offered, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. and 1:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m. Reservations are required by March 1st to Colleen Siefken, colleen.siefken@ia.nacdnet.net or call 563-876-3418 x3.

SW Cluster WLL Hosts 3rd Annual Women Gaining Ground Conference
March 11th, Glenwood
The SW WLL team, made up of Fremont, Mills, Montgomery and Page are hosting their 3rd annual Women, Gaining Ground Conference at the Glenwood Community High School in Glenwood, IA. 504 East Sharp St. Stay tuned to the Women, Land & Legacy events calendar on the website for more details!

Pocahontas/Buena Vista WLL Brings in Presenter on Soil Data and Yields
March 20th, Pocahontas
Pocahontas and Buena Vista Counties, March 20th, 2017 at 10:00am. Peter Bixel from SciMax Solutions will present on using soil data to help yields. The program begins at 10:00 a.m. at the Pocahontas Co. Extension and Outreach Office, 305 North Main St., Pocahontas. Please register by calling 712-335-3103 or email hfrerk@iastate.edu.
Warren WLL Presents Greenhouses 101
March 30th, Indianola
The meeting starts at 6:30 p.m. with supper provided. The meeting will be followed with an activity TBD. More details to come! Questions can be directed to the Warren Co. WLL Facebook page or by calling 515-480-4737. Location is at the Warren County Conservation Board, 15565 118th Ave, Indianola.

Tama WLL Hosts a Presentation on Bees 101
April 6th, Gladbrook
The event will be held at Peace UCC in Gladbrook (201 Johnston St) on Thursday, April 6. Margaret Hala of rural Marshalltown will be the presenter for What’s the Buzz? Bees 101. She and her husband have had hives for over 30 years. Margaret has also held several officer roles in the Iowa Honey Producers Association and Central Iowa Beekeepers Association. She’s also currently Co-Manager and Secretary for the Marshalltown Farmers Market at the Cartwright Pavilion. Registration will begin at 6:30 p.m. with the event beginning at 7:00. Use the ground floor door on the church’s west side. RSVP to Melody Bro, 641-484-2702 ext. 3.

Women, Land & Legacy is on Facebook!

Have you checked out and "liked" any of the Women, Land and Legacy Facebook pages yet? If not, we highly recommend it!

Dubuque Co. www.facebook.com/DBQWLL/
Iowa Co. www.facebook.com/IowaCountyWomenLandandLegacy/
Johnson Co. www.facebook.com/womenlandandlegacyjohnson/
Palo Alto/Emmet Counties www.facebook.com/paloalto.emmetcountywomenlandlegacy/
Tama Co. www.facebook.com/womenlandandlegacytamacounty/
Warren Co. www.facebook.com/warrencountywomenlandandlegacy/
State www.facebook.com/womenlandandlegacy/

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