



Women, Land & Legacy



Women, Land & Legacy News

November 2021

Celebrating WLL Events in the Midst of the Pandemic

Everyone has experienced life alteration due to the pandemic since March 2020. Women Land and Legacy (WLL) is no different, there have been and still are struggles to providing the much-needed outreach to Iowa's farm women. WLL chapters saw their efforts come to a screeching halt, including well-planned events that had to be canceled in 2020.

There ARE options to continue WLL events. A few chapters held virtual Learning Sessions during the winter (2020) and early spring (2021). Some chapters have even taken the step to hold in-person events and they are very happy they moved forward.

In-person outreach events are more effective than virtual, although the virtual option is and has been a good and necessary alternative. The SW Iowa (Fremont, Mills, Montgomery, Page and E. Pottawattamie), Buchanan and Buena Vista/Pocahontas chapters all held virtual Learning Sessions with good attendance and interaction. Buchanan County held a series of "Lunch and Learns" over several months, which they are considering again for the upcoming winter since the sessions went so well!

It has been exciting to attend recent in-person Learning Sessions!! Several chapters held outdoor events in the summer, such as the Buena Vista/Pocahontas, Worth/Winnebago and Tama chapters. Holding an outdoor Learning Session is the easiest option for a safe event that meets COVID protocol. Melody Bro, Tama County chapter lead contact shared that she was nervous about holding an in-person session while the

pandemic is still such an issue, but she was relieved that it went so well and was a safe event. She says, "Full steam ahead for planning future in-person WLL events in a safe manner." The Louisa/Des Moines WLL chapter held an indoor event in early October with socially distanced tables, most attendees wearing masks, and limited attendance. Implementing these practices leads to a safe indoor event that meets most agency COVID requirements.

Upcoming in-person events this fall are planned by the following chapters: SW Iowa (native plant landscaping); Tama (organic farming/gardening); Buchanan (stress management in ag); and Kossuth (creating winter porch pots). Additional chapters are discussing plans for spring 2022 Learning Sessions. Contact Tanya Meyer-Dideriksen for ideas and guidance or with questions if your WLL chapter is considering an in-person event.



USDA-NRCS Resource Conservationist Tina Cibula (right) shares soil health information with two women at the August Tama WLL Learning Session.

Landowner Bootcamp Series a Success

The Landowner Bootcamp workshop series in August 2021, sponsored by Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI), Heartland Coop, People's Company, and Des Moines Water Works, was a great success and served an identified need. Roughly 55-60% of Iowa's landowners are non-operating landowners, with similar statistics whether they are men or women. This presents a tremendous need and opportunity for outreach and assistance.

The bootcamp was a 4-workshop series that offered knowledgeable presenters and valuable information. A total of 174 attendees participated over the course of four weeks (with some attendance overlap). One session was specifically for women and had 41 attendees, although it's important to note that all sessions were valuable for both women and men. Almost all the attendees were non-operating landowners and 35% had owned land for 5 years or less. Effectiveness of the workshops is shown by 76% stating that they were likely or very likely to start a conversation about stewardship with their farm operators or fellow landowners.

One attendee shared the most valuable aspect of the event series for her, "As a woman, learning to speak in a different way about my thoughts and ideas concerning the land. My husband and/or renter should not hear me as "wishy-washy", but as an intelligent partner and owner." Another attendee shared that they appreciated, "the chance to hear from and get helpful information from landowners who have some of the same problems/issues/challenges that I have – among them a lack of confidence in my own knowledge of farming that makes me reluctant to engage my renters, but also a belief that I need to take more responsibility for caring for the land my family owns."

The recordings of the workshops are available at www.practicalfarmers.org/2021/08/landowner-boot-camp/.

Thank you to PFI for providing this workshop information to share.

Rewards gained by Women, Land and Legacy Chapter Local Team Members:

- Seeing women feeling empowered in decision-making regarding their land.
- Meeting the women, hearing their stories and challenges, and being able to help them find answers.
- Working with the local team to develop a Learning Session that meets the needs of the women in our communities. We see friendships and confidence form with knowledge gained.
- Creating opportunity for continued gathering and sharing of stories and insight.



The October 7, 2021, Louisa/Des Moines Chapter WLL event included education about pollinators and habitat and a fun activity to create garden stones.

Eells Named 2021 Iowa Conservation Woman of the Year

By Jolene Bopp, NRCS Public Affairs Specialist

In the 1980s, Dr. Jean Eells was determined to find a way to make a living in rural Iowa as a woman interested in conservation. She became the first woman to serve as the Hamilton County Conservation Board Naturalist.

Forward to August 2021 and USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) named Eells the Iowa Conservation Woman of the Year thanks to nominations from the Women, Food, and Agriculture Network (WFAN) and Iowa State University. The award annually recognizes a woman who has made significant contributions to conservation and the improvement of Iowa's natural resources conservation through achievements on her own land, her career, or voluntary efforts.

"Jean has collaborated with the Women, Food & Agriculture Network for over 12 years, a role that has been crucial in advancing conservation outreach and implementation to women, empowering them to use their voices and their power in seeing the changes they want on their land," said Wren Almitra with WFAN. "She has been a Soil and Water District Commissioner for over 20 years and served on numerous committees related to soil health, pollinators, and more. She is an instructor for NRCS on how to do effective conservation outreach to women and has trained hundreds of NRCS and partner employees.

"That is just the tip of the iceberg regarding Jean's work and impact. She pushes the needle on conservation and outreach, from her farm to statewide and national scales, and our land is all the better for it."

A Path of Twists and Turns

Not only is Eells an educator, but she is also a landowner. She grew up on a family farm where her parents didn't treat her and her sisters differently because of their gender. They encouraged her to work hard and to continue her education. Her brother was incredibly influential in her decision to become involved with conservation. While he was working on his degree in wildlife conservation, he was able to bring Eells to a prairie burn, and her passion ignited.

Today, Eells and her family collaborate on conservation practices on their land. They started changing farming practices in 2015 and asked their tenant to plant oats as a cover crop and eliminate fall tillage. They currently have two small Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) plots, plant cover crops, and practice no-till.



Over the years, Eells has been an advocate and educator for conservation outreach for landowners, specifically women. However, owning her own successful business and earning a Ph.D. was never a part of her plan. There were not many opportunities for women with degrees when she began her career in conservation, so she paved her own way.

One important question arose in 2002, where are all the women landowners, and why are they getting left out? This question became an inspiration for her to earn her Ph.D. To her, one can make an impact and inspire change by solving an interesting problem.

"When I graduated, I was delighted that the Women, Food and Agriculture Network was in a good position to expand, experiment and take a risk," said Eells. "So, we launched some more aggressive programming to help women landowners get more involved in conservation."

Others have told her she started a movement by sharing what women landowners are capable of. She takes any opportunity she can to share her knowledge and experiences with other women. Her hope is women will be given the confidence and be inspired to make changes to their lands and start asking questions.

She continues to serve as a Hamilton Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Commissioner. She has served continuously since 1998. Eells also assists with grant writing and conference presentations for WFAN. She represents WFAN in Iowa on the NRCS State Technical Committee and the Iowa Monarch Consortium led by Iowa State University. Her future projects involve launching virtual workshops for women who own land but live out of state to learn where to start and build a cohort group. She also wants to continue helping female ambassadors share their stories.

Women Food and Agriculture Network Annual Conference

Landscapes of Resilience: Embracing the Power of Community is the theme of the 2021 virtual annual conference for the Women Food and Agriculture Network (WFAN). The conference takes place November 3-7, 2021. To see a full agenda and to register, go to www.wfan.org/2021-wfan-conference. The cost is \$40 for members and \$50 for non-members.

USDA-NASS Hiring to Collect Data from Farmers

USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) is the agency that conducts the Census of Ag.

The agency is seeking temporary employees to assist in gathering data from farmers in Iowa.

Intermittent, Part-time interviewer positions available with USDA-NASS (a Fair Opportunity Employer) to conduct interviews in person and by telephone. Positions available across the state of Iowa. Earn some extra money working from home, hours are flexible. Applicants must have a valid driver's license and access to a vehicle and telephone. Agriculture and computer background are helpful. People skills and attention to detail are a must. Competitive hourly starting wage paid, including paid training time plus 56 cents/mile for travel and stipend for cell phone usage. Please call Cindy Adamson at 515-450-8573 for more information.

OPPORTUNITIES

Tama County WLL: Organic Farming for Home Gardeners: 11/16/21 at the Kupka Cultural Center in the Traer Public Library. Registration at 6:30pm and program begins at 7pm. Register by 11/15/21 by calling 641-484-2702, x3 or emailing melody.bro@ianacdnet.net. Free event.

Buchanan County WLL: "Managing Stress in Ag": 11/18/21 at the Buchanan Co Fairgrounds 4-H Building. Meal at 6pm and program at 6:30pm. RSVP to Buchanan Extension at 319-334-7161 or wll.buchanan.women@gmail.com. Free event.

Kossuth County WLL: "Spruce Tip Workshop": 11/30/21 at Madsen's Greenhouse in West Bend from 6-7:30pm. Register by 11/24/21 to Kossuth Extension at 515-295-2469 or www.extension.iastate.edu/kossuth. \$45 cost for spruce tips and bow. Bring your own pot with soil.

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.

Iowa Counties with WLL Teams

