

Women, Land & Legacy



Women, Land and Legacy News

June 2022

What is Women, Land and Legacy Anyway?

There are 39 counties in Iowa that are members of active Women, Land and Legacy (WLL) chapters, with several more counties currently forming chapters. Although WLL has been in existence for close to two decades, there are plenty of people who are not sure exactly what it is. This article will provide a brief description, which will hopefully spur new interest!

Planning for the WLL outreach effort started in 2003 by the WLL State Team. The initial Listening Session took place in Howard County in September 2004. The unique aspect of WLL is that, although a statewide project, it is locally led by a local team and women involved and interested in the land and agriculture. WLL is purposefully based on dialogue amongst women in small and large groups to enhance connections, learning and networking.

Each new WLL chapter (one or multiple counties) forms a local team of federal, state, and sometimes local government along with local agricultural businesses and organizations, and most importantly, local farm women. The team works with WLL Coordinator, Tanya Meyer-Dideriksen, to plan and implement the Listening Session. During the facilitated Listening Session, the local team learns about women's connections with the land, decisions they would like to make or dreams they have for the land and what resources have been useful to them.

Lastly, the local women share what additional resources and information or experiences they need to move forward with goals for **their** land or the land in their county.

The answers to this question guide the future of the local WLL project.

From there, the local team determines how often to conduct Learning Sessions, in which local women will gain information and resources based on the Listening Session input. The local team shares the workload of planning and implementing sessions amongst all team members. Topics may include conservation practices and NRCS programs, estate planning, farm leases, FSA programs, soil health, water quality, carbon markets and more.

Meyer-Dideriksen and the WLL State Team are a statewide resource of information and assistance for local teams and available to address questions and concerns. They are open to implementing changes that better meet the needs of local teams and women. Counties that are interested in becoming an active WLL chapter should contact Tanya Meyer-Dideriksen at tanya.meyer@usda.gov with questions and/or for assistance.



One of two well-attended Winneshiek WLL Chapter Listening Sessions in March 2022.

Empowering quotes about WLL:

- **“Women Land and Legacy is a program that welcomingly opens the door for women of all generations, walks of life, and careers, to be in the same room at the same time for the same reason – a passion for agriculture. It gives women a VOICE in building what they want, what they need. The opportunities to share, to learn, to grow, to connect are endless from there.”**
- **“The hope that they (women) feel empowered and more as equals in learning. These sessions are meant to be engaging and open to everyone, not just a speaker talking at them, but as peers sharing their experiences/expertise to help those become confident in their growth.”**

FY22 Women, Land and Legacy Events

Women, Land and Legacy (WLL) chapters across the state are getting back to their pre-COVID activities in fiscal year 2022. Local teams are coming back together and beginning to plan face to face sessions, following COVID precaution guidance. Local agricultural women are excited to be in the same room or on the same farm with their friends and peers, once again learning and rebuilding their local network.

From Oct. 1, 2021, through the end of May 2022, five WLL chapters, including 15 counties, held a total of 18 Learning Sessions. Topics included: Pollinators and Habitat; Native Wildflowers; Organic Farming and Gardening; Stress Management in Ag; a Spruce Tip Workshop; Conservation Reserve Program (CRP); Farm Inputs and Costs; Women Managing Farmland; Learning About a Local Co-op; Mental Health; Land Transition; Farm Accounting and Software; Hydroponics; Women Gaining Ground conference (multiple topics); a Succulent Workshop; Women Managing Woodlands; and Introduction to Gardening.

Participation in these events totaled 425, with 25-40 attendees being typical. The highest attendance was 88 women at the SW Iowa WLL Chapter conference, Women Gaining Ground in March.

Each of the five chapters held multiple events, with most offering two sessions during the 8 months. The Cedar, Johnson, Muscatine and Scott WLL Chapter held 7 sessions, including several monthly Lunch & Learn events plus two other larger sessions.

When asked how the SW Iowa WLL Chapter feels about their recent events, Mandy Maher, Fremont County Director with ISU Extension & Outreach said, “We are excited to be able to offer in-person events once again! There is such value in the relationships that are born through shared experiences and women, especially, love to network and make personal connections.”

“I’ve been able to attend several Learning Sessions and it has been wonderful to see women coming together to learn about a variety of topics from local resource people. It’s so apparent that they are happy to be in the same physical space again, with safety precautions, to share, network and learn,” said WLL Coordinator Tanya Meyer-Dideriksen.



Recent Tama County WLL Chapter Learning Session, featuring 6th generation farmer, Nancy Brannaman (formerly with ISU Extension Farm Management and currently with U.S. Department of State Foreign Service). The topic was farm finances and finance software.

Chapters that hosted in-person sessions in FY22: Buchanan; Buena Vista and Pocahontas; Cedar, Johnson, Muscatine, and Scott; Des Moines and Louisa; SW Iowa (includes Fremont, Mills, Montgomery, Page and Pottawattamie); and Tama. Additional chapters are beginning to plan Learning Sessions for later dates in 2022 (see Opportunities section of newsletter). Iowa’s farm women and those interested in caring for the land will once again have the opportunity to learn about a wide spectrum of topics and reconnect with the women in their counties and local resources such as agency staff, local agricultural businesses and organizations.

Study Shows What Draws Women to Farming

From March 2021 article “New study examines importance and unique characteristics of U.S. female farmers”, based on research conducted by Penn State

Nationally, the number of farms operated by women has risen over the past two decades, according to Claudia Schmidt, assistant professor of marketing and local/regional food systems at Penn State. This statistic is one that initiated the idea of Women Land and Legacy (WLL) planning back in 2003.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) changed the way it counts farm operators in the most recent Census of Agriculture, allowing up to four principal operators per farm. This inflated the number of female operators somewhat, although female participation in agriculture is at an all-time high, Schmidt says.

Researchers from Penn State’s College of Agricultural Sciences conducted a study to understand why women are drawn to farming. Schmidt shares, “This type of research is needed not just for reasons of equity, but also to support a more diverse and resilient agricultural sector in general. Without knowing more about female farm operators’ decision making, agricultural service providers have had to make assumptions about the type of information and products that are useful to them.”

She goes on to report, “Our analysis shows some of the ways in which female-owned farms are unique and it can offer important insights into how best to serve this population.”



Kate Edwards, farmer in Johnson County.

Stephen Goetz, professor of agricultural and regional economics and the director of the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development shares, “We wanted to understand why women are drawn to farming. Is it because they want to engage in this kind of work or is it

because they are pushed into farming due to lack of other economics locally? We also wanted to know how local agricultural conditions – what farming generally looks like in a given place – relate to women’s participation in agriculture.”

The researchers identified 10 economic variables hypothesized to matter, including unemployment, non-farm wages, availability of childcare, and the rate of female participation in the labor force.



Lydia Whitman, IDALS Conservation Assistant and farmer in Cedar County. She serves as the WLL local team contact for the Cedar, Johnson, Muscatine and Scott WLL Chapter.

The analysis, which was [published in Food Policy](#), shows that more female owned farms are found where average farm size is below 50 acres, where annual farm sales average less than \$10,000 per farm, where more farms specialize in grazing sheep and goats, in areas closer to urban markets, where agritourism activities – which attract visitors to farms – are more common, and in areas with greater access to childcare.

Goetz shares that they also found that direct-to-consumer sales are more prevalent in counties with more female-owned farms. The researchers also noted that the share of farms with female operators is higher in counties with a greater total number of farms, which could reflect increased opportunities for networking and learning through knowledge-sharing networks. This also aligns with the structure of WLL.

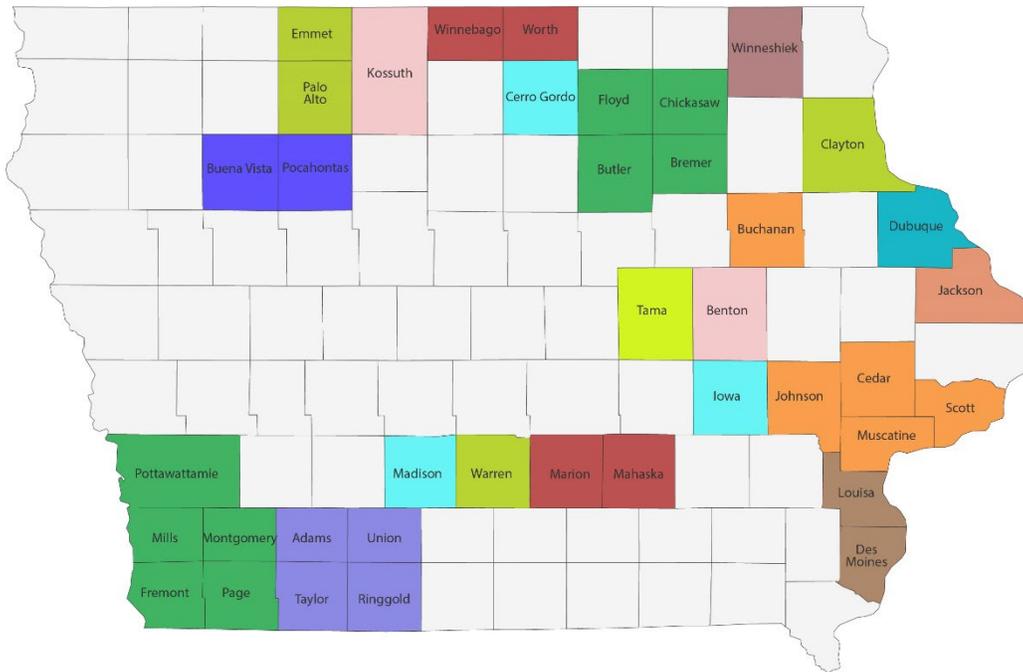
Schmidt adds, “Our research suggests that female-owned farms are more common in certain economic and agricultural ecosystems. Therefore, they likely have different needs in terms of education and support and this research is an important step in identifying these differences.”

OPPORTUNITIES

Winneshiek WLL Chapter “Estate& Transition Planning Workshop”: June 15 at Impact Coffee (101 W. Water St. in Decorah) from 9am – 12pm. Melissa O’Rourke, Farm & Agribusiness Management Specialist with ISU Extension. Register at 563-382-4352, X3, at Sophia.campbell@ia.nacdnet.net or on Facebook @winneshiekwll.

Mahaska-Marion WLL Chapter “Regeneration of the Family Farm”: June 25 at Knoxville Public Library (213 E. Montgomery St.) from 10am – 12pm. Martha McFarland, operator of Hawkeye Buffalo & Cattle Ranch, NE Iowa. RSVP to Nichole.baxter@usda.gov or 641-531-7090. Seating is limited.

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

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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.