

<b>Title:</b>	<b>Growing New Women Farmers in Iowa and Nebraska Through Networking, Mentorships, and Business Planning</b>		
<b>Sponsoring Agency</b>	NIFA	<b>Project Status</b>	COMPLETE
<b>Funding Source</b>	Non Formula	<b>Reporting Frequency</b>	Annual
<b>Accession No.</b>	229307	<b>Grants.gov No.</b>	GRANT11010184
<b>Project No.</b>	IOWW-2012-00663	<b>Proposal No.</b>	2012-00663
<b>Project Start Date</b>	09/01/2012	<b>Project End Date</b>	08/31/2015
<b>Reporting Period Start Date</b>	09/01/2012	<b>Reporting Period End Date</b>	08/31/2015
<b>Submitted By</b>	Bridget Holcomb	<b>Date Submitted to NIFA</b>	12/31/2015

**Program Code:** BFRDP

**Program Name:** Beginning Farmer and Rancher

**Project Director**

Bridget Holcomb  
515-460-2477  
info@wfan.org

**Recipient Organization**

WOMEN, FOOD AND AGRICULTURE NETWORK  
510 PENNSYLVANIA AVE  
Story City, IA 502481240  
DUNS No. 832929041

**Performing Department**

{NO DATA ENTERED}

**Co-Project Directors**

{NO DATA ENTERED}

**Departments**

{NO DATA ENTERED}

**Non-Technical Summary**

Women are increasingly vital to U.S. farming and food security. Of the 3.3 million U.S. farm operators counted in the 2007 USDA Census of Agriculture, 30.2 percent (more than 1 million) were women. The total number of women operators increased 19 percent from 2002, significantly outpacing the 7 percent increase in the number of farmers overall. The number of women principal operators of a U.S. farm or ranch increased by almost 30 percent, to 306,209. Women are now the principal operators of 14 percent of the nation's 2.2 million farms, a dramatic change from 1978, when the figure was 5 percent. On organic farms, according to the Organic Farming Research Foundation, the number of women principal operators is 22 percent of the total. The states with the lowest percentages of women principal operators are in the Midwest. Women make up less than 10 percent of all farm operators in four Midwestern states: South Dakota (7.7 percent), Nebraska (8.4 percent), Minnesota (9.1 percent) and Iowa (9.1 percent). Clearly, aspiring and beginning women farmers in the Midwest face special challenges, resulting from the predominance of large-scale commodity agriculture in the Corn Belt, an industry that has long been the domain of men. Despite the barriers, the number of women principal operators in Iowa increased by 60% in the decade between 1997 and 2007 (from 5,101 to 8,452). In Nebraska, the figure was 4,025 in 2007, up from 2,652 in 1997, a 66% jump. (Some of this increase may be due to improvements in census survey techniques since 2002, but the concurrent leap in membership in women's agricultural organizations indicates that the increase is real and significant.) Based on our analysis of trends in agriculture, reinforced by survey results from our membership, WFAN and our partners (the Center for Rural Affairs, Iowa State University, and others) propose to grow the number and viability of aspiring and beginning female small-scale diversified farmers in Iowa and Nebraska by working together to provide: structured networking opportunities, on- and off-farm mentorships, and business planning training delivered in the peer-to-peer, facilitated learning format that women consistently report they prefer. Methods will combine on- and off-farm mentorships, classroom instruction and in-person networking opportunities, as well as multi-platform virtual networking. The outcomes will include more women engaged in farming and economically viable farm operations in Iowa and Nebraska. Benefits and impacts include a stronger and more diverse agriculture, more locally grown, healthy food available to communities, rural economic development, and the transition of farmland from an aging farm population to a new generation of enthusiastic, energetic producers of food and fiber.

**Accomplishments**

**Major goals of the project**

WFAN and our partners will grow the number and viability of aspiring and beginning female small-scale diversified farmers in Iowa and Nebraska by providing networking, mentorships, and business planning training. 1. Over the three-year grant period, Women, Food and Agriculture Network and our partners will accomplish the following key objectives: 2. Ten aspiring women farmers each year in Iowa, and 4 in Nebraska, will take part in a 10-week on-farm mentoring program on a woman-owned

farm. 3.A separate cohort of five women farmer mentors in Iowa and 2 in Nebraska will receive mentor training each winter. 4.The curriculum guide created for training farmer mentors will be made available to other beginning farmer service providers across the Midwest. 5.Five beginning women farmers in Iowa and 2 in Nebraska will be paired with an experienced woman farmer for a one-year, off-farm mentorship each year. 6.All beginning-farmer-related service providers in Iowa and Nebraska will receive information about the farmer-mentor training program and resources developed for women farmers. 7.Ten aspiring and beginning farmers in Iowa and 4 in Nebraska will receive full scholarships to attend at least one regional networking and learning event each year of the project. 8.Ten aspiring women farmers in Iowa and 4 in Nebraska will receive a one-day business-planning workshop presented by and for women each year of the project. 9.Five beginning women farmers in Iowa and 2 in Nebraska will take part in an intensive business planning course. 10.Beginning in year 1, all women who have participated in the program will be assisted in creating and maintaining a peer network. We expect to achieve the following outcomes: 1.A total of 30 aspiring women farmers in Iowa and 12 in Nebraska will receive crucial career training through a 10-week on-farm work experience. 2.A total of 30 aspiring women farmers in Iowa and 12 in Nebraska will begin the process of introductory business planning for their potential farm business through participation in a one-day workshop. 3.A total of 15 existing beginning women farmers in Iowa and 6 in Nebraska will report that they improved the viability of their farm businesses through a one-year off-farm mentorship with an experienced female farmer in a similar business. 4.A total of 15 existing beginning farmers in Iowa and 6 in Nebraska will report that they improved the viability of their farm businesses through completion of an intensive one-year business-planning course. 5.A total of 15 experienced women farmers in Iowa and 6 in Nebraska will receive formal training as on- and off-farm mentors during the three-year project, enhancing their ability to provide successful mentorship experiences for the future. 6.All women in Iowa and Nebraska who participate in any aspect of the program will report that they are more familiar with the technical services provided by other beginning farmer service providers in the region than they were before participating. 7.A total of 15 new farm startups will result from the project within 1 year of its completion.

### What was accomplished under these goals?

Over the 3 years of this project, we accomplished the following:

- Provided on-farm experience for aspiring women farmers, with 27 women in Iowa and 5 women in Nebraska participating in on-farm mentorships on women-owned farms.
- A total of 20 successful women farmers were trained as mentors, based on the training program we adapted to fit the specific needs of beginning women farmers. This curriculum is available for free on our website and we encourage other women beginning farmer programs to take advantage of it.
- For women who had already begun farming but wanted connections to experienced women farmers, we paired 20 women for off-farm mentorships. Based on feedback we then changed this approach and instead developed learning circles and focused on other networking opportunities. In the third year of the project 60 women attended our two pilot learning circles, and all but one participant reported that the learning circle met or exceeded her expectations.
- We engaged beginning farmer service providers in Iowa and Nebraska through our Advisory Council and used them to provide outreach about opportunities with our program.
- 46 women attended 1-day business training workshops. Based on feedback we shifted our focus entirely to longer, more in-depth business training by partnering with Grow Your Small Market Farm, The Farming Institute, and Annie's Project. 24 women beginning farmers took part in these trainings when we provided them in the later part of the grant.
- We provided 40 scholarships to program participants to further their education within agriculture.
- We helped participants create a supportive network through providing numerous networking opportunities including special gatherings, events on mentors' farms, learning circles, opportunities at our annual conference, and ways to connect through social media and a newsletter specifically sharing their stories.

Based on our evaluations, roughly 70 percent of the aspiring women farmers in our program said they were more likely to pursue farming as a career because of their participation. We remain in contact with our participants and expect within the year to report on the number of successful farm enterprises due to this program. However, we also count the roughly 30 percent of participants who are no longer interested in pursuing farming as successes as well. As this program is a starting point for women and highly successful in providing women with the information and experience they need, some will also realize that farming is not a good fit for them before they invest more financially. We are both helping women get into the pipeline as well as helping women self-identify if they should not be in the pipeline.

For the women we are getting into the pipeline, we hear excellent feedback. Here are a few excerpts:

"This program was amazing and totally changed the direction of my life. I knew I loved farming but being able to work and live with such an inspiring woman and working around so many other farmers in such a beautiful place made me realize that I do want to farm for the rest of my life."

"As the mentorship continued, I began to realize the importance of relationship building. Now that I have a relationship with Ruth, she will continue to mentor me even after the program has finished."

"This could be a life-changer."

**What opportunities for training and professional development has the project provided?**

As described above, aspiring and beginning women farmers received professional development through on-farm mentorships, business training classes, and conference scholarships. Successful women farmers who served as our mentors received professional development through our mentor training that included financial, legal, and insurance aspects of having staff.

**How have the results been disseminated to communities of interest?**

As described above, we have an excellent network of beginning farmer programs in Iowa and Nebraska and shared information with them about opportunities to participate in our program. We provided many opportunities for aspiring and beginning women farmers to network, and profiled many of our participants through our newsletters and social media. We created a short documentary on the program featuring our beginning women farmers and their mentors to further advertise the program, and we have also had several print and radio stories on our women farmer training program and featuring the women entering farming.

**What do you plan to do during the next reporting period to accomplish the goals?**

{Nothing to report}

**Participants****Actual FTE's for this Reporting Period**

Role	Non-Students or faculty	Students with Staffing Roles			Computed Total by Role
		Undergraduate	Graduate	Post-Doctorate	
Scientist	0.2	0	0.2	0	0.4
Professional	0.5	0	0	0	0.5
Technical	0	0	0	0	0
Administrative	0.2	0	0	0	0.2
Other	0	0	0	0	0
Computed Total	0.9	0	0.2	0	1.1

**Student Count by Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code**

Undergraduate	Graduate	Post-Doctorate	CIP Code
0	1	0	01.99 Agriculture, Agriculture Operations, and Related Sciences,

**Target Audience**

- Women who are aspiring to become farmers and need on-farm experience and business training to increase the likelihood of success
- Women who are beginning farmers and would benefit from a supportive network to increase their likelihood of success
- Established women farmers, many who have been farming fewer than 10 years, who would benefit from training on how to be effective mentors and employers as their farm businesses grow
- Women who have dreams to become farmers but have not received any support or validation that they can make their dreams happen

**Products**

Type	Status	Year Published	NIFA Support Acknowledged
Other	Published	2013	YES

**Citation**

Harvesting Our Potential(SM) Farmer Mentor Handbook, 2013 Edition

**Other Products**

{Nothing to report}

**Changes/Problems**

We did not choose an easy task. While many beginning farmer training projects focus on those already interested in farming as a career, we are much more interested in truly creating new farmers. Finding people to explore careers in farming who would otherwise not consider farming a viable career is difficult, and there is an additional barrier when working with women. It took us two years to hone our outreach efforts, and by year three we had met our annual goal for the number of participants in our program. We did this through incorporating aspiring farmer learning circles, adapting our outreach methods, and sharing success stories from participants. We can now confidently say that our program is not just training new women farmers, but creating new farmers -- and changing many women's lives for the better in the process.