

ANNIE'S PROJECT – FARM MANAGEMENT FOR WOMEN

*Julia Nolan Woodruff, Doris Herringshaw, Chris Bruynis, F. John Barker
Ohio State University Extension*

Women in Agriculture programs have been well received and additional programming has been requested in recent years. The 2007 Census of Agriculture revealed almost 40% of the 75,861 Ohio farms have at least one woman operator and 12% of the principal operators of farms are women. These women play a major role in the farm economy and many times do so without any formal training or continuing education.

With the dramatic shifts in agricultural input costs and commodity prices over the past couple of years, the risk involved in the business of agriculture has increased. In addition to cost increases, farms have been affected by the high unemployment rates and stressed banking system. The need to obtain operating loans and tighter lending atmosphere has challenged farm record keepers to improve their skills. Many times the women involved in the farm operation are responsible for record keeping and financial analysis tasks and they are looking for additional information, resources and education in the area of financial risk management.

Annie's Project, a six-week agricultural risk management workshop has helped fulfill this need by providing women the opportunity to learn and practice skills to help them improve various farm management skills. This workshop is an introduction to many farm management skills. A second workshop is being developed to focus on financial risk management tools. Farm Finance for Women (Annie's Project - Phase II) is a four week workshop addressing financial risk and the need of farm women to gain more knowledge in the areas of record keeping, balance sheets, benchmarking, enterprise budgets, etc.

Annie's Project has a documented history throughout the United States of introducing farm management tools to women and helping them to understand how to utilize them. Follow-up surveys have been conducted for individual classes and a six month follow-up survey is utilized statewide. Many of the Ohio workshops have included classes discussing crop insurance, and women have stated after the class that they now understand the importance of crop insurance and will have a list of questions for their crop insurance agent when they meet to discuss the coming year's coverage. The Farm Service Agency and Farm Loan Program have also been a standard part of Annie's Project. Their explanation of the risk management programs offered through the federal government has been important to participants. Women have stated they gained a better understanding what programs were available, and their attitude toward the programs had also been changed.

Through Ohio's Annie's Project workshops conducted over the past few years, 282 women have completed the initial level of risk management education. These workshops have been focused on farm management tools and communication. Participants have reported on follow-up surveys that the workshops have made an impact on their farm businesses. Ninety percent of participants reported they planned to set goals for the 2009 production year, 67% became more involved in farm decision making processes, and 50% adopted at least one new risk management practice. Evaluation data is still being analyzed for 2010 workshops.

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