September 2005

Women in Agriculture: Making the Critical Difference

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Women in Agriculture: Making the Critical Difference

In 2002 the Census of Agriculture reported the total number of farm operators was 70,668. Nearly 16,000 of those operators were women, representing 22.5 percent of all operators. Over 3,000 women were designated as principal operators, representing over 6 percent of Nebraska’s 49,355 farms. Because women play a significant role in farm operation in the state, the Women in Agriculture program has grown and flourished over the past 21 years.

The 21st Annual Women in Agriculture: Making the Critical Difference Conference was held September 15 – 16, 2005 in Kearney, Nebraska. There were over 390 women from 5 states, Canada and Australia in attendance. Eighty-three Nebraska counties were represented, with lenders and agribusinesses playing an important part by sponsoring 223 women.

This year’s conference was kicked off by Dr. JoAnne Owen-Nausler. Dr. Jo is a health and fitness motivational speaker from Lincoln, Nebraska. As the Director of Corporate and Community Relations for Walk4Life Inc., Dr. Jo is spearheading Get Moving America, a nationwide initiative to promote movement-centered programs. Her keynote message “Secure Your Own Mask First” inspired the women to take better care of themselves while maintaining the busy pace of life.

The conference also offered twenty-five workshops focusing on a wide variety of topics including accounting, tax planning strategies, insurance, methamphetamine in rural Nebraska, FAST Tools, family business meetings, marketing, landscaping, nutrition, cattle price risk mitigation during legal litigation,
global warming and carbon sequestration, animal ID and computerized farming.

R.P. Smith, a rancher, humorist and cowboy poet from Custer County, Nebraska provided the entertainment for the Thursday evening banquet. R.P. has been entertaining people for over ten years. Much of his inspiration comes from his family and what’s going on at the family ranch. The crowd was captivated by his stories and poetry and loved the humorous, upbeat outlook he has on life.

Christine Burton from Saskatchewan, Canada started the day on Friday with a world-view of women’s contributions to agriculture. Christine comes from a family farm background and has made a career in public service. Blenda Keylon finished the conference on Friday with her presentation “Can You Hear Me Now.” Blenda is a licensed social worker and mother of five who actively participated with her husband in the operation of the family farm for twenty years. She stressed the importance of listening to those around you to really understand where they are coming from.

An added bonus to this year’s conference was a message on Friday morning from Alan Baquet, the new University of Nebraska Agricultural Economics Department Head. Dr. Baquet spoke of the importance of the Women in Agriculture Conference to the University and to the women of the state of Nebraska. Next year’s conference is scheduled for September 14-15, 2006 at the Kearney Holiday Inn.

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“This was an experience that opened my eyes to many resources that are available and also made me aware of how valuable I am as a woman to agriculture. Thank You!!”