Innovation for the Future! - 27th Annual Nebraska WIA Conference

Cheryl Griffith
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, cgriffith2@unl.edu

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Innovation for the Future! - 27th Annual Nebraska WIA Conference

Innovation for the Future was the theme of the 27th Nebraska Women in Agriculture (WIA) Conference, February 23-24, 2012 in Kearney, Nebraska. Nearly 400 women participated in the event, hosted by the Department of Agricultural Economics, University Extension and the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources (IANR) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Most attendees were from all corners of Nebraska, with others making the trip from Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming, South Dakota, Iowa and California. Of the respondents, 13.7 percent were under age 30, 20.8 percent age 30-39, 13.6 percent age 40-49, 23.1 percent age 50-59 and 28.6 percent were age 60 and over. The majority of attendees have attended at least three conferences, with one person having attended every conference since 1985. The College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources sponsored 14 students to attend the entire conference this year.

Other interesting statistics show that of those attending the 2012 conference 47.8 percent are employed off the farm themselves and 23 percent have a spouse working off the farm. Of those attending, they are responsible for 237,000 acres of cropland and 59,000 head of livestock.

The Women in Agriculture Program is committed to providing opportunities for all Nebraskans to develop management skills in every facet of agriculture by providing leadership, learning support and networking avenues. The main goal of the conference is to heighten participants’ skills and knowledge and provide them with information they will take back to their agricultural operation. Many women report that they take the information gained from networking (concurrent workshop sessions and the keynote speakers) back to their farm or ranch and review it with their partners. Together they evaluate and decide if they will implement any changes in their operation.
On a scale of 1 (little change) to 5 (substantial change), participants reported a 4.43 change in their knowledge on specific topics, a 4.27 change in enhancing their skills and abilities and an attitude change of 4.16. Attendees also reported their interest in various agricultural topics at 4.45, and they want to know much more. Their confidence level using this information and knowledge was reported at 4.35.

The success of the conference depends on continued funding from our sponsors. We were honored to have Dr. Ronnie Green, NU Vice President and IANR Harlan Vice Chancellor as our opening keynote speaker. Dr. Green was sponsored by Reinke Irrigation Company. Nebraska Farm Bureau sponsored one of their own, Tina Henderson, who spoke as our Friday morning keynote speaker. Tina is currently the Vice President of Communication Strategy for Nebraska Farm Bureau. Our capstone speaker was Juli Burney of Lincoln. Juli is a teacher, humorist and author, and was sponsored by Farm Credit Services of America.

Over 30 concurrent workshops were held during the conference. Workshop sessions dealt with grain marketing, cattle health, forage testing, generational business transitions, computer records, changing farm policies, financial planning, forestry, diabetic health, SMARTphone technology, crop insurance, SARE, family communications, crop disease management and detecting field problems, government programs, global marketing, pasture health, genetics and expected prodigy differences (EPD’s). As always, the most popular workshops were the ones on “Computerizing Your Life.” Participants can’t seem to get enough computer and technology education! But there was still time for a little fun and fitness. Some participants took part in a Zumba exercise class, while others looked at new cuts of beef and heard about the exciting things going on in the beef industry.

The Women in Agriculture program has had a profound impact on the lives of many women and agricultural operations in Nebraska over its 27 years. Many have commented that business and estate planning is an issue they must tackle with their partners and family members.

“I can now communicate better with my ENTIRE family and will be pursuing business and estate planning again.”

“We need to finish our transition plan and talk more to our kids about their dreams and goals.”

Younger farm families find themselves ahead of the curve when it comes to implementing computer technology in the business. Many are responsible for keeping the farm records computerized and the older generation is responsible for other things. Comments we heard about the computer sessions were:

“This will help me computerize my Dad’s farm records.”
“I need to keep my filing system current. There are so many different organizational programs out there to download.”

It has become vitally important that Nebraska producers tell their agricultural story to those who don’t understand our way of life and our concern for our livestock and the land we raise our families on. More and more consumer groups are challenging the dedication Nebraska producers have to the agriculture industry. The Nebraska Women in Agriculture program will continue to partner with Commonground, A-FAN and other commodity groups to encourage women to “Tell Their Own Story.”

Almost everyone said they hoped to be back next year! In upcoming months, focus groups will be held in each extension district with current and past participants and Extension Educators to establish priorities and topics for upcoming conferences. We will continue to work with Nebraska’s agricultural women and help them with their Innovation for the Future! Plans are already underway for the 2013 conference, which will again be held in Kearney, Nebraska, February 21-22, 2013. For more information on the recent conference and the Women in Agriculture program see our webpage, http://wia.unl.edu or like us on Facebook, www.facebook.com/NebraskaWIA.

Cheryl Griffith, (402) 472-0079
Women’s Programming Coordinator
Department of Agricultural Economics
University of Nebraska Extension
cgriffith2@unl.edu