

WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

A "Web" of Support: Online Directory to Women in Agriculture Organizations

By Susan Neal

For many of us, winter is that time of the year when life finally slows down for a little while, a time when we can engage in social activities, pursue educational goals, catch up on bookkeeping, or reacquaint ourselves with local and national issues. This past winter I finally found the time to do some surfing on the Internet. What was I searching for? Not a new tractor or a way to boost my hens' egg production. I was interested in organizations founded by, created for, and actively supporting agricultural women. I was pleasantly surprised to find a growing community of sites dedicated specifically to us and our ways of life. So I thought I would share some of this information. Whether your interests turn to women's health, farm economics, women's safety, food production, animals, or rural isolation, chances are you will find a number of valuable resources to help educate, entertain, and enlighten you. Happy surfing!

International Organizations:

Most international women's organizations are acutely concerned with the health, safety, empowerment, and political equality of rural and agricultural women. These organizations work to end violence and discrimination against women around the world, especially in developing nations, and to teaching and assist them in their agricultural pursuits. Membership fees and/or donation requests may vary. These organizations publish magazines, newsletters, reports, and studies; they help draft human rights legislation; maintain interactive websites; host conferences; and/or offer online meetings and discussions. They include:

WOCAN: Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management. This global network was established in 2004 to help transform agriculture and natural resource management programs by offering support and empowering professional and rural women to achieve gender equality around the world. The organization collaborates with universities, governments, NGO's, civic groups, and international organizations to empower women professionals in agriculture and NRM sectors. www.wocan.org

Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW): This group claims to be the largest organization dedicated to providing support, friendship and practical assistance to rural women around the world. The organization's charitable programs focus on the relief of poverty, the education of women, and improving women's health and economic opportunities. www.acww.org.uk/. (The US branch of the ACWW is the Country Women's Council of the USA (CWC). Its website is www.cwcusa.org)

National Organizations:

There are numerous women's farming and agricultural organizations across the country. Some focus on legislation, while others are concerned with safety, farm economics, or education. Many national organizations host meetings, workshops, or conferences; they often publish magazines or newsletters; and most require their members to register in order to receive full benefits.

Women, Food and Agriculture Network: The network was founded in 1997 to provide women with the information, connections, and empowerment they need to be effective practitioners and supporters of sustainable agriculture and healthy, local food systems. The majority of their work is performed in the Midwest. They offer annual educational events, lectures, and workshops, resource articles, studies, newsletters, and

an email list. www.wfan.org; 515-460-2477

WIFE-Women Involved in Farm Economics: This grassroots organization, founded in 1976, is open to anyone interested in agriculture. It is a non-partisan, policy-making organization that works to improve profitability in production agriculture through education, legislation, communication, and cooperation. WIFE produces monthly newsletters; hosts an annual conference, and the website provides important links to government agencies. www.wifeline.com

American Agri-Women: Founded in 1974, the AAW currently has 50 state and commodity-affiliated organizations throughout the country. The organization is active in legislative and regulatory matters at the local, state, and national level, as well as student and consumer ag education. The organization helped to initiate the Agriculture in the Classroom program at the national level. The website provides information and links to meetings and conferences, publications, mentoring services, scholarships, educational materials for students and educators, and a consumer information page featuring farm facts, food safety, and nutrition resources. www.americanagriwomen.org; 785-537-6171



International agriculture organizations support and empower rural women across the world

Woman's National Farm and Garden Association: This environmental group was founded in 1914 and is comprised of various garden clubs, local chapters, and other special interest organizations who share a passion for furthering their agricultural and horticultural interests. Focuses include civic service, education, horticultural therapy, gardening, floral arts, and numerous environmental concerns. The organization currently has four primary divisions (Michigan, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and New York), single branches in Massachusetts and New Jersey, and several specialized

branches including an herb group and a floral design group. The organization's Farm and Garden Magazine not only features informative articles and recipes, but also provides information about scholarships, meetings, and current members. The website features a new blog. <http://www.wnfga.org>

Conferences:

Women in Blue Jeans: Started in 2001 as an evening training session on grain marketing and crop insurance, this conference has since become a rousing annual event in Mitchell, SD. While the January 2010 conference was cancelled due to severe weather conditions, breakout sessions would have included: wind power, farm first aid, digital photography, growing container vegetables, cleaning without chemicals, women in government, niche marketing, breast health and screenings, long-term insurance, and composting. The goal of the three-day conference is for attendees to have fun and learn something new. Planning for the 2011 conference is already underway. www.womeninbluejeans.org; 605-996-9169

Women Managing the Farm: This project and its annual two-day conference was developed by Kansas State University to prepare women to participate in multiple farm roles by providing the training, risk management tools, and the professional resources they need. This year's breakout sessions included such topics as water rights, beef quality assurance, soil and crop rotation, mental health, insurance, and farm safety. On the conference website there is also a live chat feature called "Rural Route Women." www.women-managingthefarm.info; 866-327-6578

Websites:**Women's Agriculture**

Community: This website was designed by folks at Michigan State University as a resource for women farmers. The Resource link provides a list of useful websites as well as a "How to Start" section that includes information on starting community gardens, CSA's, farmer's markets, grassed-based agriculture, organic farming, and urban agriculture. <http://www.safs.msu.edu/womenag/>

Local Resources:

Farm Bureau: Contact your local Farm Bureau for information about getting involved with the American Farm Bureau Women's Leadership Committee. The four focus areas of this group include empowerment, grassroots revitalization, understanding the political process, and speaking up for agriculture. For more information: www.fb.org

Women's Agricultural Network

(WAgN): Originally started in 1995 as a collaboration between the University of Vermont and the US Dept of Agriculture, WAgN branches are beginning to pop up around

the country. Some state chapter are supported by their land grant universities, others are energetic grassroots networks of women with diverse agricultural backgrounds and interests. To locate a WAgN network near you log on to the University of Vermont's site (www.uvm.edu/wagn) or contact your state university's department of agriculture or cooperative extension.

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