

Women, Land, and LegacySM: Change Agents and Agency Change in Iowa

Evaluation Results

November 2010

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, the authors wish to thank the women and men we contacted for taking time to reflect on and share with us WLL'ssm impact on their work or professional lives, their respective organizations/businesses/agencies, their social and family lives, and the natural landscapes.

We also want to express our deep appreciation to members of the WLLsm State Team (Tanya Meyer-Dideriksen with the Iowa Valley Resource Conservation and Development District [Natural Resources Conservation Service], Beth Grabau with the Farm Service Agency, and Carol Richardson Smith) for making this evaluation possible. They facilitated contacts with local NRCS and FSA partners and the women landowners they serve, reviewed the survey instruments, reviewed the report of results, and have tirelessly worked after hours and on a volunteer basis to serve the women involved in WLLsm.

In addition, the authors would like to thank Cornelia Flora, former Director of the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development (NCRCRD) at Iowa State University, for supporting our involvement in this work, and Pam Cooper for her help in managing the data.

Finally, the authors would like to express our gratitude to colleagues at the Leopold Center who were willing to embrace this project when Corry joined the Leopold Center staff in 2009. Former Director Jerry DeWitt, interim Director Lois Wright-Morton, Associate Director Rich Pirog, and Communications Specialist Laura Miller all dedicated time and resources to supporting the WLLsm website and disseminating the evaluation results. Thank you.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WLLsm is a locally-led, interagency collaboration between FSA, NRCS, ISU Extension and other key non-profits designed to provide Iowa's farm women a risk management tool that brings them together at the local level to empower them to act on their landscapes and within their communities. The collaboration has emphasized two primary processes to accomplish this goal: the first is to listen and learn from Iowa's women farmland owners about their vision and goals for the land in facilitated **Listening Sessions** at the county or county cluster level. The second is to use information from the Listening Sessions to create opportunities through facilitated **Learning Sessions**. In accordance with women's values, the local Learning Sessions address topics local women identify as important, and address topics in ways that improve women's abilities to make decisions about their land.

This report documents the effect of the WLLsm Learning Sessions on the women who attended these events, local teams who planned them, and the speakers and their businesses/agencies who served as resources at those events. More than 300 women and men across the state of Iowa participated in the surveys or interviews we designed and administered for this evaluation; this report is a compilation of their thoughts and feedback collected in 2009.

The voices of the women and men actively involved in Women, Land, Legacy provide clear evidence that the program is changing the social and natural landscape of Iowa. Three key findings of the evaluation are:

- Social support is fundamental to social risk management strategies that women use to act in the best interest of themselves, their families, their communities, and their land.
- Empowering agricultural women financially, socially, and politically is important for conserving Iowa's land and water; and
- Growing the leadership capacity of women in agriculture benefits the communities in which they live.

WLLsm has empowered women to become more aware and educated about their farm operations and/or more aware and educated about the management of operations on their land in the case of land lease arrangements. Where women are farm operators, they are taking a more active role in farm operations. Where women are landowners but not necessarily farming themselves, women are raising land rents. WLLsm also has played a role in helping women landowners implement conservation practices aligned with the long-term goals they have for their land, families, and communities. These results suggest that as more women landowners become more financially secure, they find themselves in a better position to achieve conservation goals. For conservation agencies and advocates, effectively reaching out to women landowners is likely to bring more continuity to conservation practices and long-term change to the agricultural landscape and surrounding waterways.

WLLsm integrates structured learning sessions with informal networking opportunities to maximize outcomes for women. Content from the learning sessions and exchanging information through networking with peers is prompting women to initiate new conversations with families and consulting attorneys and financial planners to establish or update estate plans, draft or revise

land contracts, create trusts and prepare wills and farm plans. In the process, WLLsm women are gaining confidence about their ability to make good decisions and are navigating the local social landscape to muster resources to help them in these efforts.

A rise in confidence among WLLsm participants in making sound land management decisions is providing secondary benefits to their local communities. There is convincing evidence that WLLsm is helping build leadership opportunities for women both on the farm and within their communities. WLLsm women are taking on new leadership roles by serving on community-based committees, boards, civic organizations, producer associations, and other assorted groups. Women also report there is a local change in attitudes—specifically, a new respect for their involvement in community affairs and farming.

Based on the surveys and interviews conducted for this evaluation, a monumental change has occurred in the attitudes of women participating in WLLsm and the providers who serve them. Many of the women who participated in the Learning Sessions said they began to view service providers with less hostility when they were able to establish trust and relationships with them. While participating women reported they are now more comfortable with service providers, service providers—particularly male providers—reported they are *also* more comfortable and open to serving women. Male providers are learning the best way to do that by incorporating small group interaction into their outreach efforts. Agency respondents report seeing more office contacts with women associated with farming, more involvement of young women in food production, and a greater overall local interest among women in agriculture. WLLsm is therefore credited by some respondents for increasing local interest in agriculture and strengthening the role of agriculture in the respective region.

Agency respondents say they have multiple opportunities to change the way they serve women landowners based on what they learned from WLLsm. Based on the feedback, both agencies and private sector farm service providers have an opportunity to:

- Become more intentional about reaching women clients;
- Be more aware of women's unique perspectives and experiences when dealing with women clients;
- Better understand the key role social support networks play in providing women landowners professional growth and development opportunities;
- Incorporate the small group, participatory learning model employed by WLLsm into outreach work with women;
- Develop closer working relationships with other agencies and organizations who also serve women (agricultural or otherwise) to draw from their experiences and connections; and
- Create new, innovative programs for women that combine lessons learned from the work of WLLsm as well as other agricultural women-serving programs, projects, and organizations across the state.

In closing, WLLsm teaches us that social support is an essential part of women's risk management strategies for their land and farm operations, but is chronically overlooked by traditional state and federal farm programs seeking to serve women. Social support is fundamental to social risk

management strategies that women use to understand and validate their experiences, gather information from a variety of resources, and gain confidence to act in the best interest of themselves, their families, their communities, and their land. Future outreach to women landowners must therefore focus on ways to strengthen the connections women have to each other, the land, their families, and agency and private sector resources within their communities. These connections will enable them to become even better landowners, farmers, and stewards of the land—more so than they already are.

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INTRODUCTION

"The women of the county [now] have a venue for participating in meetings that make them feel valued, important, and heard."

Women, Land, and Legacy is a truly interorganizational, interagency collaboration designed to provide Iowa's farm women a risk management tool that brings them together at the local level to empower them to act on their landscapes and within their communities. The collaboration has emphasized two primary processes to accomplish this goal: The first is to listen and learn from Iowa's women farmland owners about their vision and goals for the land in facilitated Listening Sessions. Results from Listening Sessions held through December 2006 are documented in a 2007 report titled *Women, Land, and Legacy: Results from the Listening Sessions* available online at www.womenlandandlegacy.com.

The second critical process in WLLsm is to use information gleaned from the Listening Sessions to create opportunities through workshops and projects that are in accordance with women's values, address topics local women identify as important, and address topics in ways that improve women's abilities to make good decisions about their land. These opportunities constitute the Level II Learning Sessions held across the state in participating WLLsm counties or county clusters.

This report documents the effect of the WLLsm Learning Sessions on the local teams who planned those events, the women who attended the events, and the speakers who were resources at those events. This report is an evaluation of the impact WLLsm has had on the people and organizations/agencies involved. However, it is also a story about WLLsm told from three different perspectives: 1) Women landowners, 2) Local planning team members, and 3) Event speakers. Collective wisdom and insights, collected from 323 people (98% of whom are women; 2% men), give us a glimpse into how Women, Land, and Legacy in its nearly six years of life has provided women landowners, their families, and the farm service agencies who serve them a joint platform to mark the beginnings of social, landscape, and community change.

WOMEN LANDOWNERS: CHANGE AGENTS

The first goal of WLLsm is to provide a risk management tool for Iowa farm women that brings them together at the local level to empower them to act on their landscapes and in their communities. The second goal is to form local and regional networks of women to provide resources, information, and education to assist with risk management, which leads to changes on the landscapes and within their communities. To evaluate the extent to which WLLsm achieved these goals, we first needed to hear from women landowners participating in WLLsm.

Methods

In the spring/summer of 2009, FSA and/or NRCS contacts for each WLLsm county or cluster of counties cooperated with the evaluator (Corry Bregendahl) and the WLLsm State Team to administer a paper survey to participants who attended at least one Learning Session. These surveys were distributed to counties holding a Learning Session *more than* six months prior to the survey distribution. The purpose of the survey was to measure long-term effects of women's participation in WLLsm Learning Sessions on their land management decisions, families, and communities.

FSA and/or NRCS contacts in several counties either did not respond or refused to cooperate with the WLLsm State Team and evaluator to distribute the survey to WLLsm participants. Without their cooperation, we were unable to contact women in those areas in accordance with the WLLsm mailing list policy, which protects the privacy of participating women by not permitting the release of their names and addresses outside the local team. As a result, women participating in five WLLsm counties or cluster of counties did not have a chance to participate.

The following table shows the WLLsm counties and county clusters who cooperated with the WLLsm State Team to distribute surveys to women attending Learning Sessions held in their area at least six months prior. Table 1 also includes the number of responses we received from each county, the estimated response rate for each county (based on attendance figures supplied by local teams), and the representation or "weight" each county carries in terms of the percent of all analyzed responses:

Table 1. Participating Counties and Response Rates

County/County Cluster	Number of usable surveys received*	Estimated number of surveys sent**	Estimated response rates	Percent of all responses
Black Hawk	7	27	30% 3%	
Cerro Gordo	27	75	36% 11%	
Chickasaw	16	42	38% 6%	
Clay, Emmet, Kossuth, Palo Alto 14		100	14%	6%
Clayton	23	125	18% 9%	
Howard	11	22	50% 4%	
Humboldt and Pocahontas	10	46	22% 4%	
Jackson	15	90	17% 6%	
Jones	3	12	25% 1%	
Lucas, Clarke, Warren	6	35	17% 2%	
Mills	15	60	25% 6%	
Mitchell	21	80	26% 8%	
Ringgold and Taylor	10	25	40% 4%	
Audubon, Harrison, Shelby, West Pottawattamie	20	85	24% 8%	
Tama	18	70	26% 7%	
Winneshiek	9	16	56% 4%	
Worth and Winnebago	31	109	28% 12%	
Total	252	1019	25%	101%***

*The total number of useable responses we received was 252. Twelve respondents mentioned attending WLLsm sessions in more than one county or cluster while six provided incomplete responses or no response at all to this question. Thus the total of the each county/county cluster will not add up to 252.

**The estimated number of surveys sent is based on e-mail correspondence with almost all FSA and NRCS contacts or staff who mailed them out. If we did not receive this information, we assumed that all the surveys we sent them were mailed (a figure they tallied based on the total number of different participants attending Learning Sessions in their county/county cluster).

***Note that this figure will not total 100 percent due to rounding.

A total of 28 counties are represented in the survey of women landowners participating in a WLLsm Learning Session at least six months prior. The overall response rate was 25% ranging from 14% to 56% in each county/county cluster. While this may be considered low for a mail survey, we are pleased with this figure, in part because of the distribution challenges associated with a locally based project like this one. To elaborate, in alignment with the WLLsm mailing list policy that requires original mailing lists of women landowners to remain confidential, neither the evaluator nor the State Team had access to the mailing lists of women participating in WLLsm Learning Sessions. We therefore needed to cooperate with members of the local planning teams to ensure that surveys were mailed to participants. At the same time, we had to rely on members of local planning teams with pressed schedules to do the actual mailing and labeling of the surveys without placing an undue burden or cost on them to perform this work. We sent each cooperating FSA or NRCS contact a packet for their county containing the number of surveys they needed (one for each person attending at least one WLLsm Learning Session), a contact letter for each WLLsm participant, and a self-addressed stamped envelope. We asked the FSA or NRCS contact (see Appendix 1 for the letter we sent them) to:

- Select at least one or several local women from their local planning team to sign one introduction letter (to put a local "face" on the evaluation);
- Make the appropriate number of copies of the signed letter to accompany each survey and self addressed stamped envelope once the letter was signed;
- Place one letter, one survey, and one self-addressed stamped envelope in an envelope from their agency. Print out and affix mailing labels of names and addresses of women attending Learning Session events on each agency envelope;
- Apply the appropriate postage and mail out the surveys; and
- Send the evaluator a brief notification e-mail indicating that the surveys had been sent for that particular county/county cluster.

All of the local planning team contacts who agreed to participate graciously complied. Because we were asking for the local planning teams to absorb the postage and administration costs of administering the survey, we decided not to follow the standard protocol of re-contacting potential respondents a second, third, and fourth time as is standard procedure (according to the Dillman Total Survey Design method) because of the undue burden this would place on them. In the letter to women landowners, we notified them that they would be contacted only once because of the burden additional contacts would place on their local planning. Thus, we are satisfied with a response rate of 25% given that we had no control over the contact process and could not, in good conscience, ask our partners to spend the time and money for multiple re-contacts.

In the contact letter to the women participants, we also provided a link to an electronic version of the survey if they preferred to complete it that way. Only 2 of the 252 usable respondents completed the survey online. In addition to the 252 usable surveys, we received an additional nine which were not usable for the following reasons: 1) The respondent had registered but ultimately was unable to attend a session or 2) the respondent did not complete more than a handful of questions. These surveys were therefore incomplete and eliminated from the dataset.

Of final note in regard to responding counties, the Worth and Winnebago cluster returned the most surveys (31) of the total, followed by Cerro Gordo (27). Counties with the highest response rate were Winneshiek (56%) and Howard (50%) counties.

Results

The survey was comprised of both close- and open-ended questions. For the most part, close-ended questions asked respondents to indicate "yes" or "no" whether they had experienced a specific impact or made a particular decision as a result of their participation in WLLsm. If they indicated yes, they were asked to describe that impact or decision. If they indicated no, they were not usually asked a follow-up question. Respondents were also asked to provide basic demographic data.

Learning Session Attendance

Respondents attended an average of three Learning Sessions, ranging from one (34%) to twelve (2%). Half of participants attended two or fewer meetings while half attended three or more. The majority of respondents (66%) attended more than one meeting and therefore had the experience of taking part in multiple Learning Sessions on which to base their answers to the questions we posed.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Although we did not ask the question, we expect the majority, if not all of the respondents, are women. The average age of respondents is 62 years, ranging from 23 to 88. Figure 1, using Census age categories, shows that very few respondents are younger than 35 years old (4%). More than half (52%) are 35 to 64 years old and 44 percent are 65 years or older. This age distribution of respondents suggests we need to interpret these data with caution, especially in reference to younger women landowners and agricultural operators (those younger than 35 years), given that so very few responded to this survey. We do not have demographic information about WLLsm attendees other than that collected for this survey; therefore, we cannot say with any certainty whether those who responded to the survey are representative of those who attended WLLsm Learning Sessions. However, we do know based on facilitator observations that few of the women participating in WLLsm were young women (less than 35).

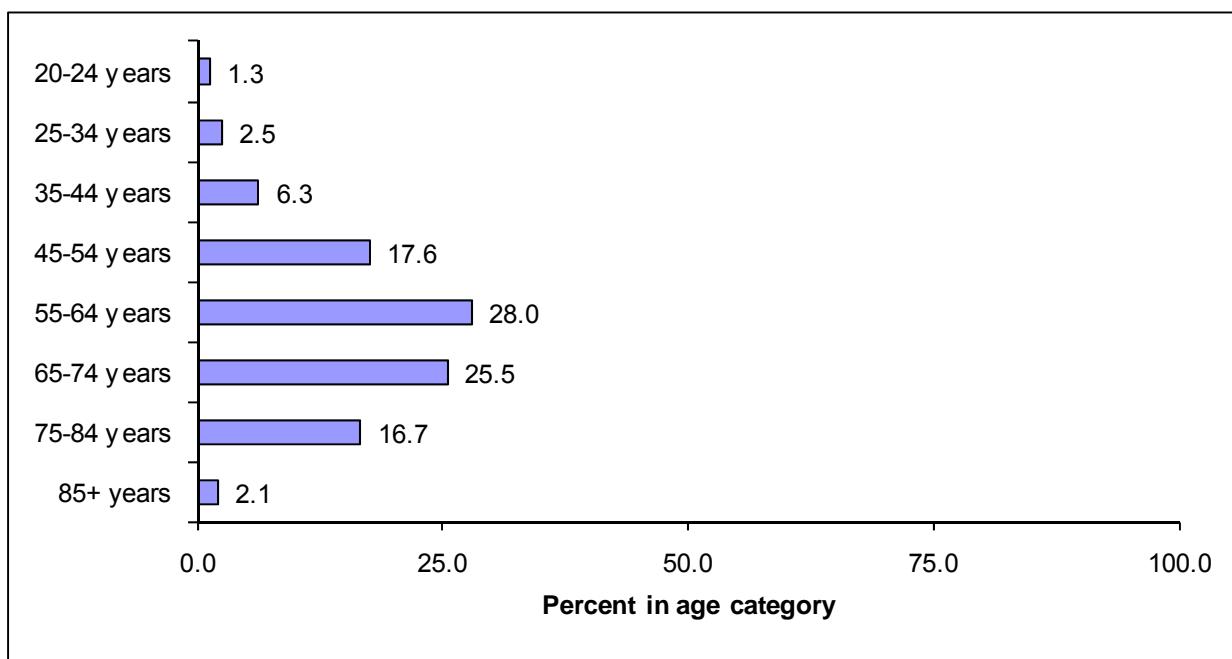


Figure 1. Age of Respondents

Nearly all of the respondents (93%) say they are farmland owners or co-owners. The remaining 7% are expected to be aspiring farmland owners. Of those who own or co-own farmland, the majority (68%) rent out some farmland (Figure 2).

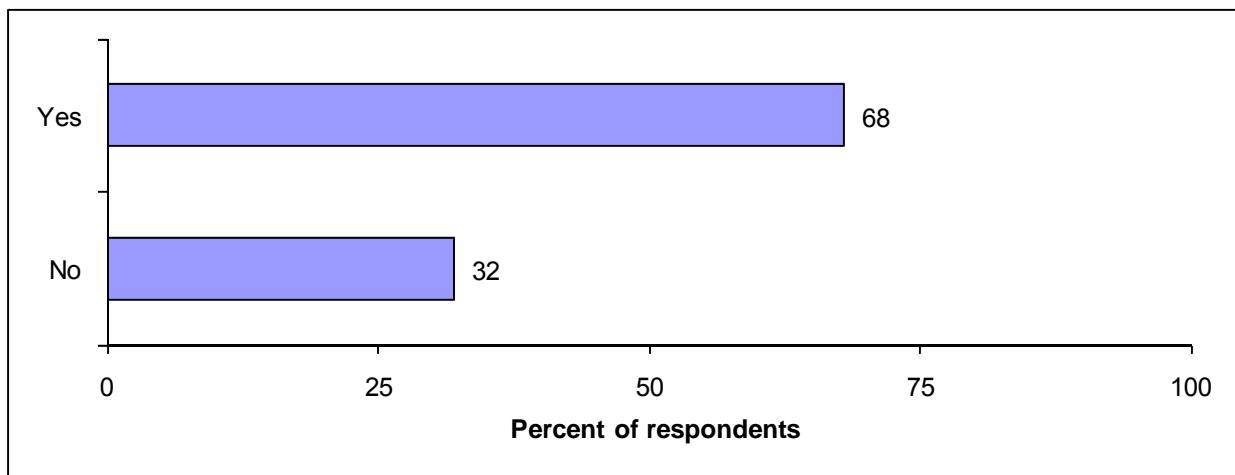


Figure 2. Do you rent out any farmland?

A mere 10% of respondents farm alone while 90% have a farm partner. Seventy percent of respondents who farm together with someone else farm with a family member (most often a husband although frequently with children, siblings, grandparents, or in-laws). Nearly one in three (29%) farm with a tenant and only one respondent partners with a farm management company (Figure 3).

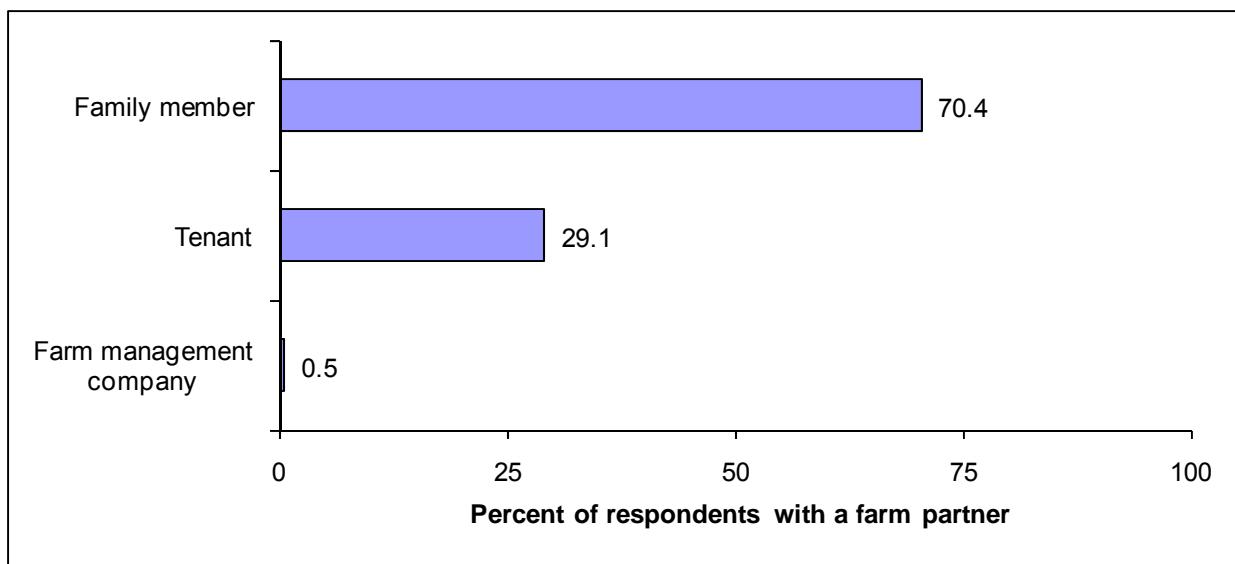


Figure 3. Type of farm partner

Figure 4 shows the type of farm operations respondents represent. Of those responding (those who only rent out land were not asked to respond), more than half (52.7%) raise row crops only while 40 percent raise both row crops and livestock. Seven percent raise only livestock. None indicated they raise anything else that might fall in an "other" category such as vegetables or specialty crops, suggesting that most respondents represent largely traditional row crop operations and not alternative or agri-tourism operations that have been represented at many of the WLLsm Learning Sessions.

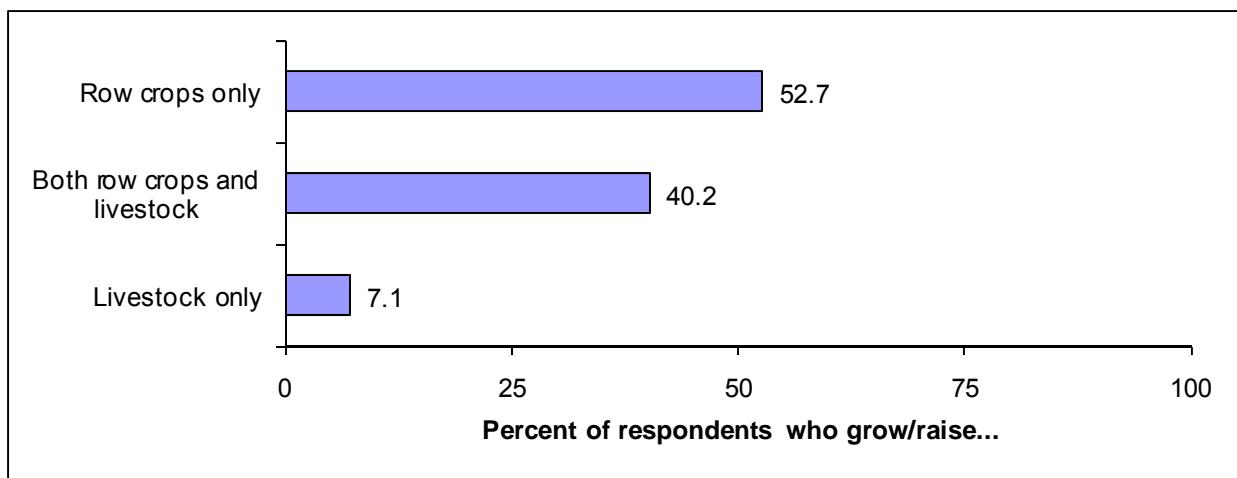


Figure 4. Percent of respondents growing row crops or raising livestock

Decision Making Resources

Since a fundamental objective of WLLsm is to help women acquire tools they can use to make knowledgeable decisions about their land, we constructed basic questions that measure whether WLLsm has done this as it relates to human, social, and information resources.

Important Non-Family Resources

We first asked participants a question about their knowledge of available human resources: *As a result of your participation in WLLsm Learning Sessions, are you more informed about people and organizations available to you as resources to help you make decisions about your land, household or farm operation?* 94 percent responded "yes." We then asked participants whether they had contacted for assistance outside of WLLsm events any of the people, organizations, or agencies to whom they had been exposed through WLLsm. Two-thirds (64%) said they had, suggesting that the relationships and information in WLLsm are prompting further contact and interaction beyond formal WLLsm events.

Who are WLLsm participants contacting beyond the WLLsm Learning Sessions (Figure 5)? Nearly one in three women (29%) who initiated a follow up contact after the Learning Sessions contacted Cooperative Extension. One in five (21%) contacted a lawyer, 15 percent contacted the FSA, and 14 percent contacted the NRCS. These results show that having key agency partners from Extension, FSA, and NRCS involved in WLLsm increased the frequency and comfort level women have in terms of interacting with personnel from these agencies, as well as staff from private law firms. Fewer women contacted the Soil Conservation Service, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, financial planners, insurance agents, Farm Bureau, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, farm management companies, boards of supervisors, and other women-serving groups such as Iowa Women in Agriculture.

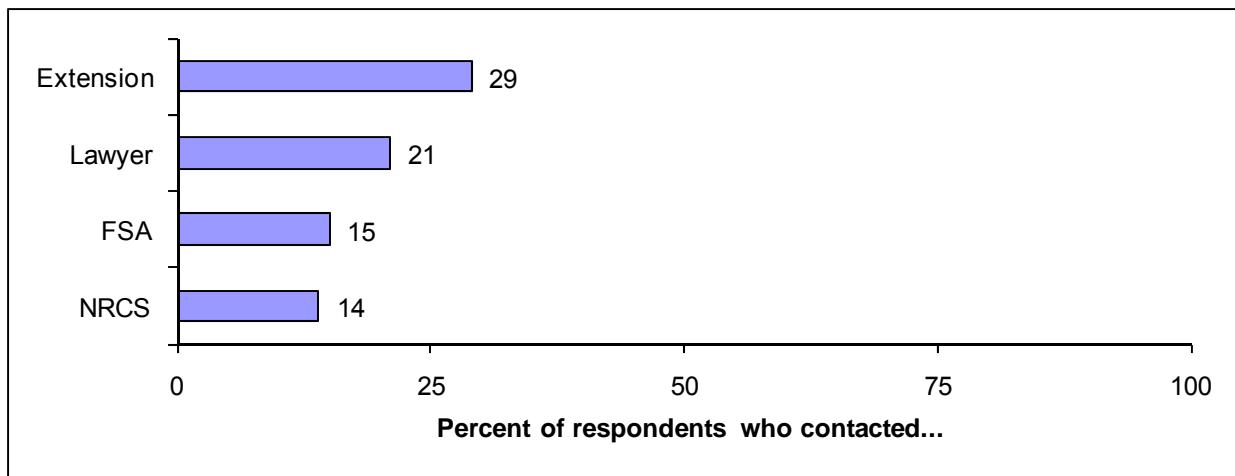


Figure 5. Organizations/Agencies Contacted outside of WLLSM Learning Sessions as a result of WLLSM

Primary outcomes of these contacts include financial benefits to women, improved legal protection and estate plans, and improved land conservation. The following quotes illustrate specific benefits according to each category.

Financial Benefits. Women landowners are using the contacts and information to ask for higher and more competitive rents, reducing their tax burden, and pursuing alternative sources of farm income.

- "We raised our rent [on the land we rent out]."
- "It helped me follow through on a longstanding plan to manage timber and get income from timber."
- "I revamped my investments."
- "I removed untilled acres from the tax rolls and my taxes were adjusted."
- "I used cash rent studies to negotiate [a better price] for our land lease."

Improved Legal Protection and Estate Plans. Women landowners are doing a better job of protecting themselves legally by instituting written agreements, updating legal documents, and developing long-term farm plans.

- "I made more informed agreements on rents and changed to written instead of verbal agreements."
- "I updated my will and trust."
- "It reminded me to use [land] contracts."
- "We updated our will and formed a revocable trust."
- "We developed a long-term farm plan."
- "We are better communicating with the renter."

Land Conservation. Some women are using information to implement conservation practices on their land.

- "I learned how to lay out waterways and terraces."
- "We created waterways."

The Role of Family in Decision Making

Recognizing that women's families are instrumental and influential on decisions they make about land they own or co-own, we included a question about the impact of WLLsm on prompting new conversations women have within their family to help them make decisions about land, their household, or farm operation. The majority of women (73%) responding (n=239) said they had initiated new conversations within their families as a result of their involvement in WLLsm.

The top three reasons why women initiated conversations with their families was to:

- 1) Discuss estate planning (50%)
- 2) Address land lease agreements and arrangements (33%)
- 3) Discuss farm management and marketing (10%)

When these same women were asked in an open-ended question about the actual, tangible results of these family discussions, participants identified five primary beneficial action-oriented results (Figure 6). The overall result has been greater engagement of women in making decisions that affect their land.

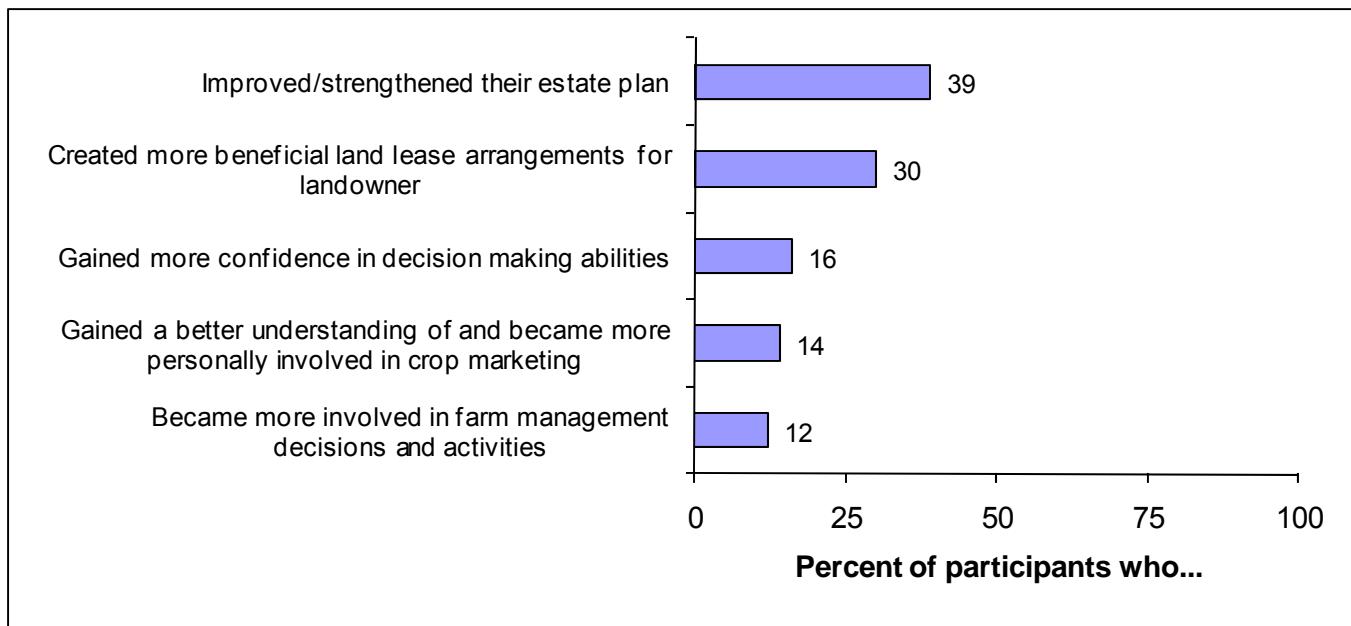


Figure 6. Results of family conversations initiated by WLLsm participants as a result of WLLsm

Importance of WLLsm Learning Session Design Elements

The last kind of information we wanted to know about decision making resources was the extent to which specific design elements of the WLLsm process did or did not contribute to participant learning and empowerment. Figure 7 shows a list of questions we asked to determine the impact of each design feature on participant learning and decision making.

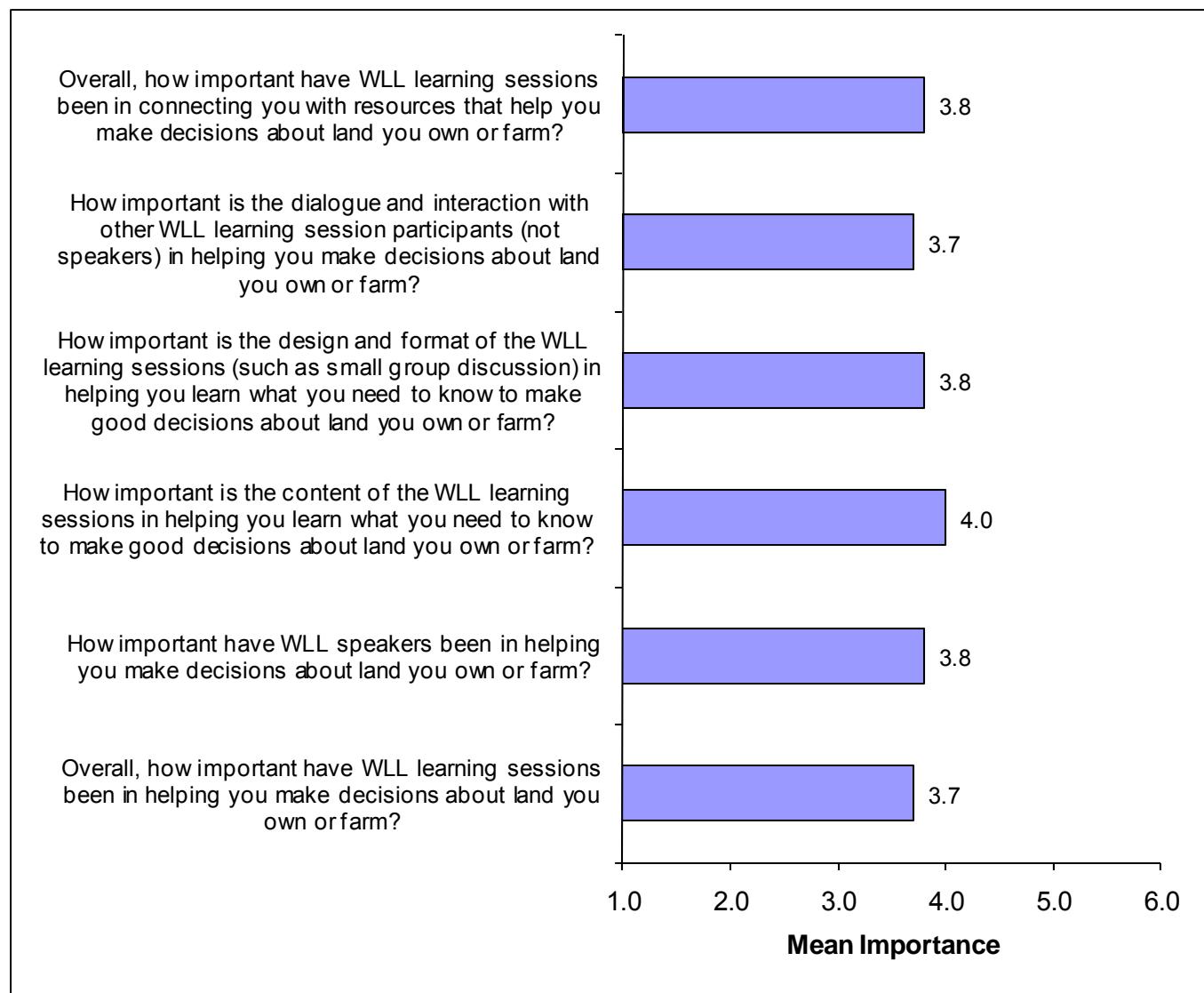


Figure 7. Importance of WLLsm process design features on learning and decision making

Results show very little variation in the level of importance participants place on each design feature. On a five-point scale where 1=not at all important and 5=very important, content was rated most important (4.0).

Networking

Personal and professional networks are both a source of information and a social support system. They also build the confidence of women in agriculture by giving them a better sense of the social, political, and cultural landscape they face when making decisions about their land. Meeting evaluations already show women value the networking opportunities they find through WLLsm. While it is important for us to know that women find networking valuable, we want to know specifically *what* makes it valuable. We therefore asked respondents what benefits (if any) interaction and conversations with other WLLsm Learning Session attendees provided. Two in

three mentioned the opportunities to develop social relationships with people interested in the same topics; two in three also mentioned the educational benefits of learning and sharing information during these exchanges. Nearly one in ten (9%) mentioned that the interactions help build confidence in themselves but also confidence they have in their knowledge about agriculture and their operation/land. More than one in three (37%) pursued relationships they developed in WLLsm beyond WLLsm events. Of those, 65% wanted to strengthen their networks, 61% wanted to get more information (including referrals) and 9% wanted to encourage each other to take leadership positions in the community.

Changes in Farming Practices and Decision Making

We asked WLLsm participants what changes they had made to their farm, land, or within their household as a result of attending WLLsm Learning Sessions. Figure 8 shows the changes they implemented. One in three WLLsm participants (35%) raised the rent on her land. Nearly one in three became more aware, skilled, and educated about her operation and position as a landowner.

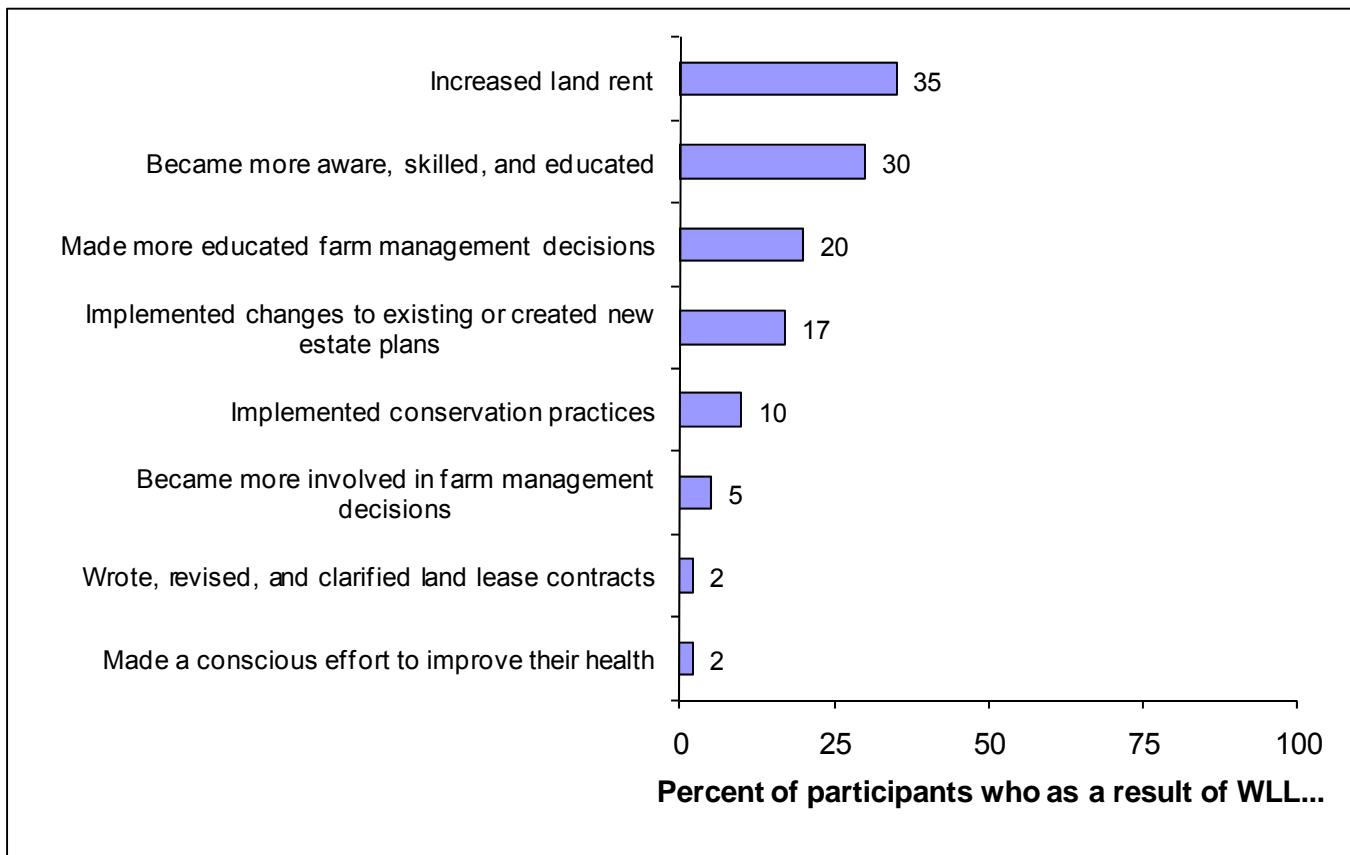


Figure 8. On farm changes implemented as a result of women's participation in WLLsm

Figure 8 also shows that one in five made better farm management decisions, by improving recordkeeping, limiting liability, selling crops, writing goals, and exploring other feasible farming options. Nearly two in ten implemented changes to existing estate plans or established new plans and one in ten implemented conservation practices on the land. These are all

significant impacts of Women, Land, and Legacy. The fact that WLLsm women are becoming more educated and actively involved in how their land is farmed has positive implications in terms of women's agricultural income, knowledge, and influence and the way farmland owned by women is managed by them and by others.

We also asked respondents to comment on changes they planned for their farm, land, or within their household that they had not yet implemented. The top three responses listed in order of the percent of respondents reporting plans were:

- 1) Work on estate planning (e.g., create trusts, write wills, transfer ownership, work with an attorney, etc.) (32% of respondents)
- 2) Make some major farm management decisions (e.g., sell or acquire land) (24%)
- 3) Implement specific conservation practices (add more waterways and wetlands, build terraces, enroll in conservation programs, more actively manage the landscape) (15%)

Private attorneys and farm service agencies such as NRCS will need to play a key role in helping women implement these plans in the future.

Community Change

Finally, we asked WLLsm participants to comment on changes WLLsm has brought their communities in terms of changed attitudes, relationships, awareness about specific issues, ways of doing business, program development, community projects, organizing, leadership, or voices heard in the community. Nearly one in four (24%) confirmed that changes had indeed occurred in their communities as a result of WLLsm. When we coded their responses, we found that one in four (27%) agreed there was a greater awareness and confidence among local women in agriculture and more women's involvement in community affairs (27%). More than one in ten (13%) also reported more new friendships had developed locally and general attitudes had changed (13%).

There is also convincing evidence that WLLsm is helping build leadership among participating women. When we asked women whether they themselves had become more involved in community affairs by taking on new roles within the community, more than one in ten women (12%) reported they had. With few exceptions, such new roles almost invariably included serving on community-based committees and boards including Soil and Water Conservation District boards, Resource Conservation and Development Boards, Extension councils, Farm Bureau boards, commodity producers' associations, civic groups, FSA county boards, assorted agricultural women's groups, school boards, and church groups. Less formal action taken by women participating in WLLsm within their communities included creating a local buzz around agricultural programming and outreach, specifically by recruiting women to participate in organized agricultural events, exchanging agriculture-related information with other women, advocating for local agriculture-based programming, and contacting federal support agencies.

Regarding the latter, does this mean that WLLsm women experienced any changes in the way farm service providers deliver farm services to women landowners as a result of WLLsm? One in

five (20%) said "yes." Sixteen of these respondents said farm service providers have better respect for women in agriculture and women are now being taken more seriously by lenders, seed dealers, realtors, and male agronomists. Seven respondents asked to describe their "no" response said despite the efforts of local WLLsm teams, some service providers still consider women landowners to be "inferior." These results suggest that farm service agencies still have more work to do in addressing the perception some women landowners have that the agencies disrespect them. Thirteen respondents said there was no change in the way farm service providers deliver farm services to women because there was no need for change.

On the flip side, we also wanted to measure attitude changes among WLLsm participants toward farm service providers. Specifically, did their attitudes change about farm service providing agencies, organizations, or businesses represented by speakers invited to participate in WLLsm? An impressive 56 percent of respondents answering this question (178) said, "yes." Respondents said their attitudes transformed essentially because they began to view the farm service providers with less hostility when the women learned these representatives were a valuable source of information, established a relationship with them, and as a result became more comfortable approaching them about issues related to their land or farm. Fourteen respondents were favorably impressed with the helpfulness of participating government agency staff and personnel from other organizations. Agency outreach to women should therefore include strategies to cultivate more face-to-face relationships with women landowners, with the agencies serving as initiators.

In closing, we asked women to provide any other unsolicited comments they had. Here is a cross section of feedback we received:

- [WLL] is an excellent program to encourage women to be knowledgeable about farming so that, if needed, they know where to get information and assistance in farm management. Thank you so much for this program. I am in a much better position to manage and make farm decisions and am encouraged to do more.
- I am glad they have the sessions, but not all are relevant to me. I attend when the subject is of interest and the date works out.
- I have found all of the sessions to be very informative. We are semi-retired and row crop 50-50. I feel the information I have received will help me if it is necessary to make decisions on my own in the future.
- I enjoyed all of the sessions I attended. The sessions were well organized and the speakers were great. I used the information I learn to have better conversations about our farm with my husband. My husband is a good farmer and I'm thankful I can help him on the farm.
- These meetings cover things that we all know in the back of our minds that we should be doing things about, but either have put them off or don't know where to start. This is truly a good opportunity for women to accomplish the education to make good choices for our land's future.
- Why are there getting to be so many men at these events? At the last one I attended, there were at least 10 men besides the instructors. What happened to the women in WLL?!
- I would like to request more and regularly scheduled meetings so we could get the participants more involved in making changes in our community. Our voices aren't heard at this point.

- These sessions have been very beneficial to me, not only the area of business but the opportunity to hear input from people in the community with a mutual concern.
- I am truly amazed at the response from other attendees at these meetings. A new source of confidence and pride is emerging in our county. Ladies of all ages and financial situations are attending meetings that have been planned for a broad spectrum of ages and circumstances.
- Several events relating to women in ag have included "how to dress." That is hum-bug. Our goal is not to "gussy" up for the city folks but to be productive and appreciate and enjoy our work.
- I have enjoyed the sessions I have attended but wish there were more participants in the 30-50 year range.
- It's fun to get together with other farm women. I've always lived on a farm until lately so I miss this rural connection. I feel this is important to continue.

LOCAL PLANNING TEAMS: SOCIAL RISK MANAGERS

As part of our evaluation efforts, we solicited feedback from members of the local planning teams about the benefits and challenges of doing WLLsm work in their county or county cluster. This is one of the three discrete target populations involved in the project that we surveyed to get feedback on how the project is affecting participating women, agencies, and counties in Iowa.

Methods

In early 2009, to minimize costs, we developed an electronic survey administered via Survey Monkey, an online survey tool. WLLsm State Team member Tanya Meyer-Dideriksen contacted the local FSA or NRCS representative in participating counties requesting them to e-mail her e-mail addresses of the local planning team members. Of 34 individual counties contacted, 8 did not respond. Thus, we were able to collect contact information for 173 local planning team members in the remaining 26 participating WLLsm counties, who were subsequently invited to participate. Despite this, respondents claimed they actually served as local planning team members from 31 different counties, meaning they served on several established planning teams, some of whom did not get a chance to participate in the survey if their FSA or NRCS contact did not provide e-mails to the WLLsm State Team for the survey. We received responses from all but one of the 26 counties invited to participate (in addition to other counties for whom members said they served as a planning team member). Respondents self identified through an open-ended question their representation of the following counties (in alphabetical order):

Table 2. Local Planning Team Responses, by County and County Cluster

County/County Cluster	Number of responses received	Percent of all responses
Black Hawk		3.6%
Cerro Gordo		5.9%
Chickasaw		2.4%
Clay, Emmet, Kossuth, Palo Alto		5.9%
Clayton		1.2%
Howard		1.2%
Humboldt and Pocahontas		2.4%
Jackson		7.13%
Jones		0.0%
Lucas, Clarke, Warren		2.4%
Mills*		[1] 2%
Mitchell		4.8%
Ringgold and Taylor		5.9%
Audubon, Harrison, Shelby, West Pottawattamie		8.15%
Tama		4.8%
Winneshiek		3.6%
Worth and Winnebago		1.2%
Total	53	101%**

*The respondent identifying representation from Mills County also identified herself as a member of another county planning team. Therefore, this figure is a duplicate count and was therefore not included in the totals.

**The total will not equal 100% due to rounding.

We contacted 166 local planning team members via e-mail and 7 via snail mail for whom we had no e-mail addresses for a total of 173 contacts. We contacted those with e-mail twice and those with a mailing address only once. Fifty three men and women planning team members responded, for a 31 percent response rate. This response rate is encouraging given that the survey was largely comprised of open-ended questions which do not lend themselves well to electronic surveys. We opted for this method only because it was practical. We needed to collect input as quickly and inexpensively as possible knowing that people are typically more responsive and forthcoming when surveyed verbally with open-ended responses as opposed to asking them for written responses.

Of those responding, 72 percent were "agency" people representing FSA, NRCS, and Cooperative Extension—anchor partners at the local level. More than one in four (28%) identified themselves as other than agency people, meaning they were community members, farmers, or represented other occupations.

Results

From the local planning teams, we set out to establish the context by which they were able to accomplish their goals and stories of change, as well as conditions they identified as essential to group success. Questions were also designed to measure community change and agency change linked to WLLsm programming and the impact of making new connections through WLLsm. Finally, planning team members provided input on their goals for the coming year, the role they envisioned for the WLLsm State Team to support them, advice for upstart local planning teams, and ways to develop the leadership capacity of local leadership teams.

Most Significant Achievement of Local Planning Teams

We asked planning team members to identify the most significant achievement of their local planning teams and to state the conditions or factors that contributed to their success. The following are major themes respondents articulated in response to this question.

- **Achievement #1. Engagement of local women indicated by strong meeting attendance and interest from a wide range of local women, including previously "invisible" women and women of all ages.** "We put together a series of seminars that brought out a whole group of people we hadn't seen before." "We had strong participation in meetings by women of all ages from throughout the county." "The overwhelming attendance and enthusiasm of attendees is what keeps it going."
- **Achievement #2. Development of an effective, local leadership team.** "[We now have] the ability to plan and deliver programs to the women of our community."
- **Achievement #3. The increase in networking and educational opportunities available to local women involved in agriculture.** "[Our most significant achievement] is networking opportunities for rural women." "[Women] are becoming aware of information available to them."

- **Achievement #4. Deconstruction of boundaries between women landowners and USDA agencies serving them.** "It has increased the comfort level with accessing USDA agencies for those women who have attended the meetings. I think that is significant because the women are no longer apprehensive about talking with us when they need to."

Respondents identified the following conditions as factors contributing to their most significant achievement:

- **Articulation of common goals.** "The planning committee works well together as each agency and volunteer is willing to work towards one common goal." "We had a common goal of bringing women in agriculture together to determine their needs and interests. There was good collaboration and our...meetings were well attended and we had a very strong committee made up of local agricultural agencies and community members—all women. The meetings were fun, educational, and very well attended."
- **Creativity, knowledge, and involvement of local women landowners.** "One contributing factor [to our success] is the creativity of our planning committee, especially the countywide farm women involved. They, more than anyone else on the committee, know the current atmosphere of the family farm and the local, statewide, national and global agriculture community. They are also the most aware of what the contemporary farm women's needs are."
- **Strong local leadership.** "We have very active, respected committee members."
- **Strong commitment to philosophy and ideals of the project.** "Women on the planning committee spent time talking to other women and garnering interest."
- **Strong local partnerships among non agency leaders.** "The cohesive team we have established has led to its self-sustaining operation even if the agency staff ceased their assistance." "Planning and follow through coordinated with other surrounding counties."
- **Interagency cooperation.** "Working together with other government agencies produced a learning environment that is conducive to positive change and long-term use of information." "Partnering with Extension helped make this program possible."
- **Joint celebration of success.** "We celebrate getting an active WLLsm group organized in our county and have now had a year plus of successful programming!"
- **Support network functions of WLLsm.** "Women like having their own support group and because of their support and word of mouth, we are growing in numbers."
- **Relevant speakers.** "We bring in speakers to talk about legal and financial management issues unique to women and agriculture."
- **Creation of pertinent and timely learning opportunities.** "We are creating an opportunity for women to gain knowledge within agriculture." "The attendance the meetings have generated [is the most significant achievement] on topics the participants have helped to choose!"
- **Framing programming in language and ways that appeal to women.** "Getting information out to local women in a way they understand."

WLLsm Stories: Empowering Local Agricultural Women

In our survey of local planning team members, we asked them for specific stories about a time when their local planning committee was successful in helping empower local agricultural women. This question was asked in accordance with the principles of Appreciative Inquiry. Appreciative Inquiry or AI is a way of framing the world by learning more about what is working in order to build on those strengths to make things work better. Appreciative Inquiry invites us to tell stories of successes and to discover from those stories the positive core of what is working, what it would look like if it worked even better, what would have to change in our organization/community for it to work even better, and how best to implement those changes. While many respondents related general ways in which WLLsm is helping empower women, several related stories about how WLLsm has helped draw in women who are vulnerable or marginalized and even helped them gain the courage to seek out leadership roles in their communities. The following are some of their stories, in their own words:

- "[We helped] encourage someone to submit their name for an FSA County Committee nomination/election."
- "The [Listening Session] meeting served to empower many of the younger farm women to just find out that each other was out there and being able to network and share how they were supporting their spouses and/or making it work on their own."
- "There are widows and daughters who now have [farm] management responsibility and they feel very unprepared and vulnerable. I have met some of these women at our meetings and [we provide] this kind of support and education."
- "Women in our planning committee tell their personal stories at meetings of losing their husbands and how they learned to be assertive for meeting their personal challenges of continuing to farm themselves."
- "We've provided them with information regarding leasing and estate planning that prompted many of them to take ownership of their operations."
- "We helped a woman whose husband died recently to gain confidence about being in a farming relationship with her son."
- "Several women commented on being able to make better informed decisions and to deal with tenants more effectively."
- "We are helping them learn USDA programs and then we are seeing some of the women coming into the office because they are more comfortable."
- "One woman, I would guess at approximately 80 years old, is retired from farming but still so incredibly thirsty for agricultural knowledge that she has attended every WLLsm meeting we've offered. I was amazed that she attended our "online agency" meeting (with IWA's [Iowa Women in Agriculture] mobile computer lab) despite not owning a computer and never having worked on one. She wanted to know what's available for the younger generations of farm families."
- "Several women reported that they became more knowledgeable about topics like estate planning, terms used by FSA and conservation programs. They said they felt more comfortable initiating conversations around these issues and seeking out more information from agencies. We were also able to initiate off-shoot programs like Annie's Project and a regional Women Adding Value to Agriculture (WAVA) conference that

has been well attended for the past two years. These programs were planned outside the WLLsm meetings, but involve many of the same people."

These responses, along with results from women landowners who attend WLLsm Learning Sessions, suggest that WLLsm is helping women take more social risks in their communities, a category of risks not addressed in traditional farm service programs. Federal and state agencies would be wise to acknowledge social risks and ways women are overcoming them with the help of programs like WLLsm because of the role this plays in helping women gain confidence. In the case of WLLsm, a confidence boost gained through social networking with other women leads to decision making and actions that reduce other kinds of risk. As we've learned from WLLsm, helping women address social risks often leads to better management of the more conventional types of farm risk, such as financial, legal, and environmental risk.

Conditions for Group Success

We asked members of the local planning teams to share their knowledge about what makes their local WLLsm teams successful. Their responses offer us a list of "best practices" others can use to institute their own local planning teams, whether they are working on behalf of women landowners or other groups seeking to become more empowered in creating a shared future. Below are key elements reported by the 53 planning team members who responded to this question. Conditions they identified as critical to success relate to shared commitment, leadership and control, collaboration, committee composition and assets, and particular outreach strategies.

Shared Commitment. Nearly one in four (23%) emphasized the need for shared vision/goals, including shared commitment to and passion for helping women in agriculture by providing learning opportunities relevant to women.

Leadership and Control. Several respondents mentioned that it is important for these teams to be locally led and controlled and one went even further, claiming that women need to "run the show." Respondents closely aligned control issues with leadership of the local planning team. While they generally agreed that good leadership was necessary (defined mostly by the presence of skilled leaders, people willing to take the lead, and low leadership turnover), there was some disagreement about who should do most of the leading. Nine percent said local landowning agricultural women should lead the effort, as opposed to government agencies.

What made the group successful in the early phase was that there was agency collaboration but also equal or greater input from local women in agriculture that varied in the type of agriculture they were involved in. The voices of the women landowners/renters were very strong and enthusiastic versus the agency women. It kept the group focused on meeting the needs of the women attending versus the needs or vested interests of the agencies.

Several mentioned that their success was tied to putting local agricultural women's needs first before agency needs. However, 9 percent also felt that agency participation and leadership was critical to their success. And then there were those who thought that the participation and collaboration of both groups was essential (8%) as well as additional others who felt a general commitment to collaboration among multiple partners (9%) is necessary. These responses show

a general propensity to favor agency involvement but a more backseat style of support rather than leadership control. Recall that 72 percent of local planning team survey respondents represent one of the agencies (NRCS, FSA, and Extension).

Committee Composition and Assets. Many references were made among respondents to the composition of the local planning committee and assets those individuals bring with them to that role. Four respondents (8 percent) mentioned that diversity in the planning team brought complementary skills to the planning process that was considered an asset to the work. Another asset identified by three respondents was committee members' connections with other women in the community (their social capital) and their ability to draw other women into the process. Nineteen percent of respondents also said it was important for the planning teams to *listen to* local women *and* respond to their requests, to evenly divide work responsibilities among team members, to communicate openly within the group, to be open to new ideas, and recognize and respect the knowledge of the local planning team members.

Outreach Strategies. Other conditions noted for group success include outreach strategies the groups have employed through WLLsm. These respondents recognize the contributions of women and community members *not* on the local planning team who are responsible for the success of their local WLLsm effort. Five respondents noted that it has been important to appeal to the local thirst for knowledge on topics addressed through WLLsm, to maintain the continuity of meeting attendees, to initiate an open and creative dialogue with agricultural women, and to solicit local business support. These respondents recognize that the local planning teams, while largely responsible for facilitation, planning, and action, are not working alone. The teams require a whole host of others from the broader community area to help them, including women who attend the meetings and a range of support providers.

WLLsm and Community Change

What changes have taken place within counties or clusters of counties as a result of the work of the local planning teams? Of the 41 planning team members who chose to respond to this question, 29 or 71% were agency staff. Thus, there was no tendency for agency staff to respond more so than non agency respondents. Despite this, a clear trend emerged between the types of responses we received from agency staff and non agency respondents. Agency staff were more likely to report observable change within their office in terms of behavioral change in women, while non agency affiliated respondents were more likely to report more general, less evidence-based kinds of changes. The following discussion, which separates the analysis by type of respondent, illustrates these points.

Change from the Agency Perspective

According to respondents representing USDA agencies, significant change has come in the form of opening doors between agencies and women landowners. WLLsm is helping build knowledge and confidence of women so they are more comfortable approaching agencies for help. "[We are] seeing more office contacts from participants that has empowered them to be more proactive in their business dealings." "Women tell us they are better informed and do not feel intimidated

by asking questions." Another said, "Women have come out more by initiating contacts with USDA offices with questions pertaining to farm programs. Some now feel more comfortable contacting a county office where before they did not know who to talk to." "More women are coming into the offices and calling." Respondents attributed these changes to increasing awareness about resources available to women, a sense of comfort that comes with knowing they are connected and part of a support network, and finding their voice. "Attendees are more aware of professionals, both agency and private, that they can go to for help and information. I also believe they are less timid about seeking out that assistance." "More older women are asking questions about leases and estate planning."

Another agency respondent said that in combination with other efforts to support women in agriculture, WLLsm is helping young women in the area get more involved in production agriculture. "Some of the younger women were involved in the WLLsm meetings in the early phases... Many of these women are now active producers for food production in our region."

Other agency personnel say WLLsm is helping generations of women jointly make better decisions about their farms. "Women are bringing their daughters along to meetings so they have the chance to learn along with mother and grandmother."

Ultimately, as one agency respondent put it, "The women of the county [now] have a venue for participating in meetings that make them feel valued, important, and heard."

Change from the Local Women/Non Agency Perspective

Many of the themes discussed above were validated by non agency planning team members who agree that WLLsm is "making many women confident in making hard decisions" and increasing their confidence about "approaching a professional planner with an idea. They are asking questions of their financial people they weren't doing before," meaning they are making better use of existing resources than they did before, as well as seeking out new resources from the agencies. While a couple non agency respondents were not sure about changes WLLsm was helping bring, others thought it was stimulating more interest in agricultural issues among women landowners. "More women are attending area agricultural conferences to get more information." This remark echoes the sentiment of the agency person above who mentioned that WLLsm is complementing other efforts to increase interest and strengthen agriculture in the region.

Changing Perceptions about USDA Agencies

Groups that bring agency staff and community members such as women landowners together to work toward a common cause can sometimes change attitudes or preconceptions people have about represented agencies, offices, and occupations. We examined the extent to which this happened among local planning team members working with WLLsm. Of the 14 non agency members responding, 71 percent said participating in WLLsm changed their perceptions about USDA, FSA, NRCS, Extension, or agricultural service providers in their area. "I learned about

what services each office offers and their willingness to reach out to people." One non agency respondent said s/he has "gotten to know the people that are running these agencies. Once you get to know them, it is much easier to go in and talk with them, ask questions and get the right answer." Familiarity with the staff often translates into more familiarity with resources and programming the agencies offer. "[My attitudes changed] especially about the Extension Office—I did not know how many resources there were—not just for agriculture but for finances, cooking, gardening, ecology, etc." Other non agency respondents agreed. "We have had such good support from the agencies." Another had the impression that not only had WLLsm changed women's perceptions of the agencies, but also the way the agencies regard women landowners. "[WLL] has helped make the offices more approachable, friendlier, and willing to REACH OUT TO WOMEN!"

The same question (how have your attitudes of agency agricultural provides changed) was asked of planning team members representing the agencies, for the simple reason that their perceptions about their own agency or other agencies could have changed by participating in WLLsm. Of the 36 agency people answering this question, 42 percent said their attitudes had changed. For the most part, those members claiming their attitudes had not changed explained that they have always had a high regard for government agencies and that the project has not changed those perceptions.

However, other agency respondents used this question as an opportunity to articulate what they've learned about partner agencies and how it has changed the way they regard and work with them. "In working with the [partnering] County Extension office, I realize how much work [an Extension staff member] does and how involved Extension is with all programs in the County. Kudos to Worth Extension!" Others mentioned they had discovered new agency partners through WLLsm, providing promising opportunities to work together in the future. "I found that these agencies can become excellent partners in providing information to our clients."

Another group of respondents reflected on their own agencies, and what they had learned as a result of WLLsm and how they were already responding and would in the future. "There are a lot more female landowners out there, and we need to consolidate our efforts a little better."

We are all trying to reach an audience that has increased significantly during the last 10 years. Providing a united effort helps the agencies to communicate better among themselves and deliver unified information to our audience (i.e., where to obtain farm rent information, who to contact to discuss the CRP program, what is required of my tenant while farming the land).

Yet agency cooperation was not always seamless and can impact participation and progress. As one respondent lamented, without strong leadership, the agenda can be hijacked and people don't always agree on the best way to do the work.

Good, strong collaboration is possible and necessary among various agriculture supporting agencies. We saw that happen in [our region]. However, one strong personality (with vested interests in their agency) can diminish the enthusiasm of the volunteers and other agency people by not following the lead of the local women when planning. We saw this happen and as it did, the [planning] committee lost community women as volunteers and attendance dropped significantly. The WLL workshops started to focus on the work of this person's agency. New leadership needs to be established, but the one strong personality from this partnering agency refuses to relinquish

control of the planning. Thus, I anticipate attendance at the WLLsm workshops will continue to remain low, as does attendance at the planning meetings.

Planning for unwanted change and developing exit strategies might therefore need to be discussed early on within local planning teams before issues arise to address obstacles they may encounter moving forward. Despite this significant challenge, several agency respondents mentioned involvement in WLLsm has changed the way they serve women and the way they will operate in the future. "We are more open." "It has brought about an awareness that there is a huge need to provide specific help to women landowners." "It has changed my perceptions about the need for programming that encourages networking and camaraderie for rural women."

The Impact of Making New Connections

WLLsm is playing a connective role for local planning team members in Iowa. Nearly all (94%) of the local planning team members responded affirmatively they have made new contacts or friends in the process of planning for WLLsm. While connections are important, what difference are these contacts making? Their mere present doesn't necessarily mean anything has changed. According to planning team members, we cannot underestimate the significance of new social connections in helping women gather the resources they need to make good decisions about their land. To understand the process through which this happens, we must understand the social elements that women gain from these connections to become empowered. The local WLLsm support network

- Encourages women to "step out and do new things."
- Connects women with people "I may be referring someone to in the future."
- Expands "networking capacity and capacity for leadership."
- Provides "access to knowledge resources."
- Provides participants access to a network of "good professionals" as well as "ones that are *not* open to planning for women."
- Offers participants a new appreciation for others, particularly widows, and "the decisions they have to make on their own to keep their love for the land and their spouse's legacy alive."
- Expands friendship networks, "ones that I can count on."
- Exposes participants to leadership strategies and qualities of women in adjoining counties, particularly those in county cluster arrangements.
- Helps women know they are not alone by encouraging them to share space and ideas, and reduce isolation.
- Helps participants better know people in their community.
- Contributes to understanding about the diversity and breadth of local women landowners and farm operations.
- Illustrates that women are demanding more information than has previously been available.
- Provides names and faces which "makes accessing one another less daunting." "I am more comfortable in making contact or asking questions of the new people I have met."

- Demonstrates that cooperation is possible despite variations in backgrounds and experience.
- Provides networks that can be tapped for other issues/avenues.
- Provides more opportunities to "collaborate on other programming topics/issues."
- Offers agency participants access to landowners and community leaders.
- Prompts "better programming in our agency as we have been able to utilize others' talents and programs."
- Helps agency staff do their jobs better. "With WLL, I have met a lot of the wives and the landowners that do not come into the office. I have also met a lot of speakers and other FSA/NRCS members which gives me more of a network when I have questions."

According to the data, social support is a critical element overlooked by traditional state and federal farm programs. Social support is fundamental for building the confidence of women landowners to act in the best interest of themselves, their families, their communities, and their land. Outreach to women landowners needs to focus on these kinds of support systems to be meaningful and effective.

Planning Team Goals for the Coming Year

We asked members of the local planning teams to articulate what they hope to accomplish in the coming year to gauge interest in continuing the program and understand ways the WLLsm State Team could best provide support. Seventy percent of those responding to the question said more learning workshops, meetings, and events were planned to connect women with people and knowledge to help their farm operations thrive. Several mentioned continued attention to what women want to learn, and letting "our women decide the topics of discussion and try to get the best possible speakers available to meet their needs." Nine percent of planning team members also emphasized the need to either strengthen, rejuvenate, or reorganize their local planning team. "Our workshops and planning meetings have been very poorly attended this year. It would be great to reorganize...again bringing in new community women in agriculture onto the planning committee and rotating the leadership." Another respondent was less hopeful about the future of WLLsm in her county. "It looks to me like we are starting over as no one from the lead agency is taking a leadership role." Several others want to increase the number of women attending the Learning Sessions. These comments suggest that strong, responsive leadership will be critical for helping the local planning teams meet their future goals.

The Role of the WLLsm State Team

As part of determining the future of WLLsm in Iowa, the State Team was interested in asking local planning team members what kind of support or assistance they would find most helpful for the local planning teams and what they wanted to see the State Team accomplish in the next year on their behalf. Much of what local planning teams want is beyond the current capacity of the Iowa WLLsm State Team given limited funding and staff time. However, it is encouraging to know that despite the low supply of time and money, demand is high for WLLsm State Team services and support. Planning team members would like to see the State Team

- Provide "a summary of what is working well in other parts of the state."
- Assemble "cliff notes" of materials presented across the state.
- Fund a forum so WLLsm participants can communicate with each other statewide.
- Continue providing assistance to help local teams plan and conduct meetings. "[Tanya Meyer Dideriksen] is a great asset to us." "The unbiased way the WLLsm State Team works with us is so good and positive." "The State Team was great help for the one meeting I worked on."
- Partner with prominent FSA and Extension administrators or directors to address planning groups to emphasize how important they are to the work.
- Provide funding for county meetings for facilities, speakers, etc.
- Require FSA staff to help start and facilitate WLLsm work in the counties. "I am aware of several CEDs [County Executive Director] in the area that refuse their staff to help local committees at all. I think that is why women do not feel comfortable going into FSA offices to visit with staff."
- Provide "more information about speakers that are available and more topics to discuss."
- Guidance on what local planning teams "should be accomplishing. We are holding quarterly meetings and have good attendance but have no idea beyond that if we are being successful."
- Share stories of success and failure from other groups.
- "Training for a "core team" in our region. It would be great to connect with other county teams in [our region of] Iowa to see what they are doing and continue to build on the [work of others serving women in agriculture]."
- Training and a reminder "that we need to let local women do more."
- More support from the FSA State Office. "It seems like Beth Grabau is fighting the battle alone for FSA State Office support."
- Organize a state conference.
- Bring statewide exposure to the work local planning teams are doing.
- Create WLLsm programs in all of Iowa's counties.
- Conduct a training session on how to put together a local planning team, with input from existing planning teams.
- Host a statewide conference of other groups serving women landowners.
- Educate agencies and organizations on the need for programming that encourages "rural women to gather, share, learn, grow, and support each other."
- Provide updates on hot topics in agriculture to keep women informed.
- Train a cadre of leaders from local groups who can provide support for local planning teams.
- Take WLLsm to other states.
- Provide opportunities for women to have "a voice in farming and agriculture. It seems to be a man's world that doesn't let women in."

Future Goals

The WLLsm State Team has been contacted on numerous occasions by planning team members seeking advice on leadership issues that surface in the process of implementing WLLsm in their county or cluster of counties. In response to their leadership questions and concerns (e.g., Do we need to organize formally and have officers? What happens to local WLLsm efforts when an important leader leaves?), we included some questions in the survey of planning team members about their use of leadership materials the State Team provided in the Development Guide, and opportunities for local teams to build their leadership capacity.

When asked whether their local planning team reviewed the materials on local leadership and development in Section 8 of the WLLsm Development Guide, 40 percent confirmed they had. However, 46 percent said they had not and a further 13 percent did not know if they had. Only 6 percent had conducted the Discovering Leadership Skills and Roles exercise on page 8.7, which is designed to help women share ideas about what leadership is and means, how different leadership roles fit individual aptitudes, and how it can strengthen the team's work. So while building leadership capacity is clearly needed in the future, writing solutions or strategies down in a guidebook or evaluation report may be helpful, but in and of itself will be insufficient for adequately addressing the leadership promise and opportunities present in this group.

When we asked local planning team members about the kinds of resources or training they would find useful for helping their local planning team build its leadership capacity, we learned that many opportunities abound well beyond guidelines and self-study suggested by the Development Guide. The following is a list of suggestions local planning team members have for building the capacity of their local planning teams, most of which focus on training:

Building Leadership Capacity through Training

- Explore leadership training programs offered by ISU Extension and local Chambers of Commerce.
- Provide training that utilizes the expertise and resources of existing WLLsm local planning teams. "[We] could probably provide advice to others."
- Provide statewide training opportunities for planning committee leaders/members to network and learn from each other.
- Provide geographically based team training. While some felt training could be topic-based and/or statewide, others thought training might be geographically based with a particular focus on local non agency women. "I think it would be critical to have "teams" receive the training so they can plan and support each other in future programming. The teams need to include varied agency representatives (ISUE, FSA, NRCS, RC&D, Community Colleges, Banks, etc.). However, the majority of those receiving training should be women in agriculture that are not tied closely to an institution and they need to represent the diversity in agriculture from the community they represent. This will help keep the future planning needs targeted toward the needs of the women in agriculture versus the agricultural agencies."
- Provide topic-based training on meeting facilitation, time management and meeting efficiency, learning how to speak up about the positive side of agriculture, improving

access to elected officials, specific communication techniques and how to provide inspiration and encouragement, team skill building, and training on regulations that govern what agency employees are allowed to do for WLLsm such as fundraising or working on WLLsm during business hours.

Building Leadership Capacity through Funding

- Pay for a local WLLsm coordinator.
- Secure funding to pay for speakers. "A lot of times we are limited in getting speakers because they expect payment." "It is extremely hard to have other topics to talk about and find speakers that are willing to donate their time to speak."

Building Leadership Capacity through Statewide Information Management

- Create a list of speakers available to talk about agriculture (either for free or fee).
- Create an information listserv for WLLsm planning team members and/or attendees about current farm issues.
- Provide continued support and information from the State WLLsm Team. "State assistance has been tremendous. Tanya Meyer has been most helpful. We just need five more Tanyas."
- Produce a summary of best programs "so groups can benefit from others' successes."
- Provide an updated list of WLLsm and other agricultural women-serving events around the state on the WLLsm website. "I would certainly travel to a surrounding county for a program that I was interested in if I knew about it."

Advice for Starting a New WLLsm Planning Team

As part of the WLLsm State Team's efforts to understand the experience and expertise local planning team members are developing in the process of creating and maintaining a local planning team, we posed a question about advice they would give to others about starting their own planning team. Asking this question encourages respondents to celebrate what has gone right in their planning process and gives us and other teams insights into best practices that work to address these issues in their communities/counties. This can serve as a resource across the state as new teams begin to navigate local and agency waters to bring local women landowners together.

The most dominant theme emerging from their responses concerns leadership of the local planning team. Many were strongly opinionated on this issue. However, there was some disagreement about who should be the most influential leaders. Some respondents were convinced that local agricultural women should be taking the reins. "Have the local women lead the planning team, NOT the agency personnel." "Get more community women involved right away. Sometimes when it is FSA, NRCS, and Extension, you have a lot of strong people that don't want to let go of control." Another planning member agreed local women should be in control, but explained why this tactic would be more beneficial for local agricultural women. "Encourage locals to step up and not rely on the USDA employees. A few of the women stated in

their comments that they were a little uncomfortable having men from the USDA in attendance. It was a little intimidating to a few of the participants and may prevent them from opening up."

Others were more convinced that the local planning team should be inclusive of local women and a wide variety of agency and other formal representation. It makes sense from a practical standpoint according to one member: "Get as many members as possible from FSA, the Soil and Water Conservation District, NRCS, Extension, RC&D, plus women landowners, since not everyone can make every planning meeting and there are more ideas." Another practically minded respondent recommended getting "as many outside organizations involved in your meetings as possible: ISU Extension, banks, agronomists, local elevators, hospitals, public service reps, local newspapers, 4-H, FFA, ANY one that will come. The more minds, the more ideas, the more interest you can spur." Another respondent pointed out that these groups have experience working with groups outside the county and will therefore provide access to new resources.

In summary, the issue of leadership and control was closely associated with diversity. One planning team member respondent put it best by articulating the need for "great diversity in agencies that support agriculture, but even greater diversity and representation from community women in agriculture." Ever aware of the power and control issues at stake, she recommended "rotating planning roles so that no one person [can] dominate the process for more than a year and [to] have rotating terms so that new people with new ideas and energy continue to keep the WLLsm planning strong and vibrant." Having a diverse group of people working together to plan the meetings has practical applications as well, aside from overcoming some of the power issues several counties experienced. "Get a diverse group together to plan the meetings so you do not think alike." Respondents alluded to diversity in terms of different agency and farm representation, as well as including women from different age groups and women living in different parts of the county or county cluster to ensure that the greatest range of women in agriculture are represented.

Other key tips included:

- Celebrate small successes. "Don't always expect the actual WLL meetings to be the focus of success as many of the smaller things are important also."
- Be patient. "Stay with the program and give it time to develop."
- Value the planning process. "Take time for planning. It pays off in the end."
- Take social and intellectual risks. "Don't be afraid to brainstorm—put all the possibilities on the table and then shape a program that will be relevant and useful to most people."
- Assemble a group that can work together. "Be sure your planning group is compatible. If you have someone too dominant, it won't be easy."
- Be educational and creative. "Make the events fun and informative at the same time."
- Spread the workload. "Try to get more people involved so it's not the same members having to contribute. Avoid burnout."
- Keep good records (to ensure leadership transitions are relatively painless).
- Look beyond the local area for resources. "Connect with other women's groups in the state for ideas." "Visit other counties to see how they do it."

- Expect to work hard and long on developing shared goals to ensure agricultural women are served. "Let the participants prioritize their needs, and [develop] programs to follow (the "grassroots" approach)." And although one agency respondent wrote, "Don't lose sight of your agency's mission," this controversial comment is important for demonstrating the challenges local planning teams have in defining common goals and whose needs they are serving.

SPEAKERS: AMBASSADORS OF AGENCY CHANGE

The mission of WLLsm is to offer Iowa agricultural women the opportunity to connect with and inform agencies and organizations about their strengths and needs and provide insights into specific outreach strategies that will best serve participating women. An evaluation of the project therefore would be remiss if it did not explore the ways WLLsm has helped change the way contributing agencies, organizations and businesses provide outreach to women landowners. We therefore conducted interviews with WLLsm speakers (otherwise known as farm service providers) to measure the extent to which WLLsm has impacted the way they provide risk management tools to Iowa farm women.

Methods

A purposive sample comprised of 19 speakers was selected to participate in telephone interviews, conducted in early 2009. These 19 were selected from a list of 46, each of whom had presented at least once for WLLsm within the past two years at the time of selection. Of the 19 speakers chosen, 18 responded for a 95% response rate. The first criterion for selection included diverse agency/organizational/business affiliation: Those we selected represented a wide range of affiliations from government agencies to Extension to Farm Bureau to small business owners. The second criterion for selection included gender. Within each employment category, we carefully selected both men and women to survey, which reflects the gender balance of the speaker population overall. More than half (56%) of the speakers we interviewed are women; 44% are men.

In terms of agency and business representation, eleven of the eighteen (61%) represent federal and state supported agricultural services including USDA Farm Service Agency, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, ISU Cooperative Extension, and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. Seven (39%) are employed in the private sector. Private sector affiliations included agritourism, the insurance industry, Iowa Farm Bureau, law firms, meat processing, and health and wellness enterprises.

The average interview lasted a brief ten minutes. The male co-author of this report conducted the interviews. Speakers were asked a series of questions about the role WLLsm has played in helping them and their representative agencies or businesses become more effective in serving Iowa's women farmland owners. Questions were e-mailed in advance. Detailed and often verbatim notes were taken during the interviews.

Results

Speakers are consulted for the special knowledge they have on a topic. Yet in the process of serving as an "expert," speakers learn just as much about the WLLsm and their audience as their audience does about the topic they are addressing. The evaluation therefore aimed to document changes speakers experienced as a result of their participation in WLLsm and the subsequent impact this may have had on their work and/or the agency or business they represented.

WLLsm Impacts on Speakers and the Agencies and Businesses They Represent

Interviews show that farm service providers have learned to better serve Iowa's women farmland owners through WLLsm participation and are adapting their work accordingly. Figure 9 shows the extent to which speakers agree (based on yes/no responses) that WLLsm has impacted them/their agency as a percent of the 18 respondents. More than three in four (78%) say they developed new relationships in WLLsm, 22% of whom say it changed the work they do and changed the way their broader organization does its work. Sixty-one percent say WLLsm has helped their office, agency, institution, organization or business become more effective at serving women farmland owners. At least one in three agency staff say their participation in WLLsm has changed some practices, customs, programs, or policies within their office/agency and has also changed the way they do their work. Agency people were more likely to report more impacts of participation than were speakers from the private sector.

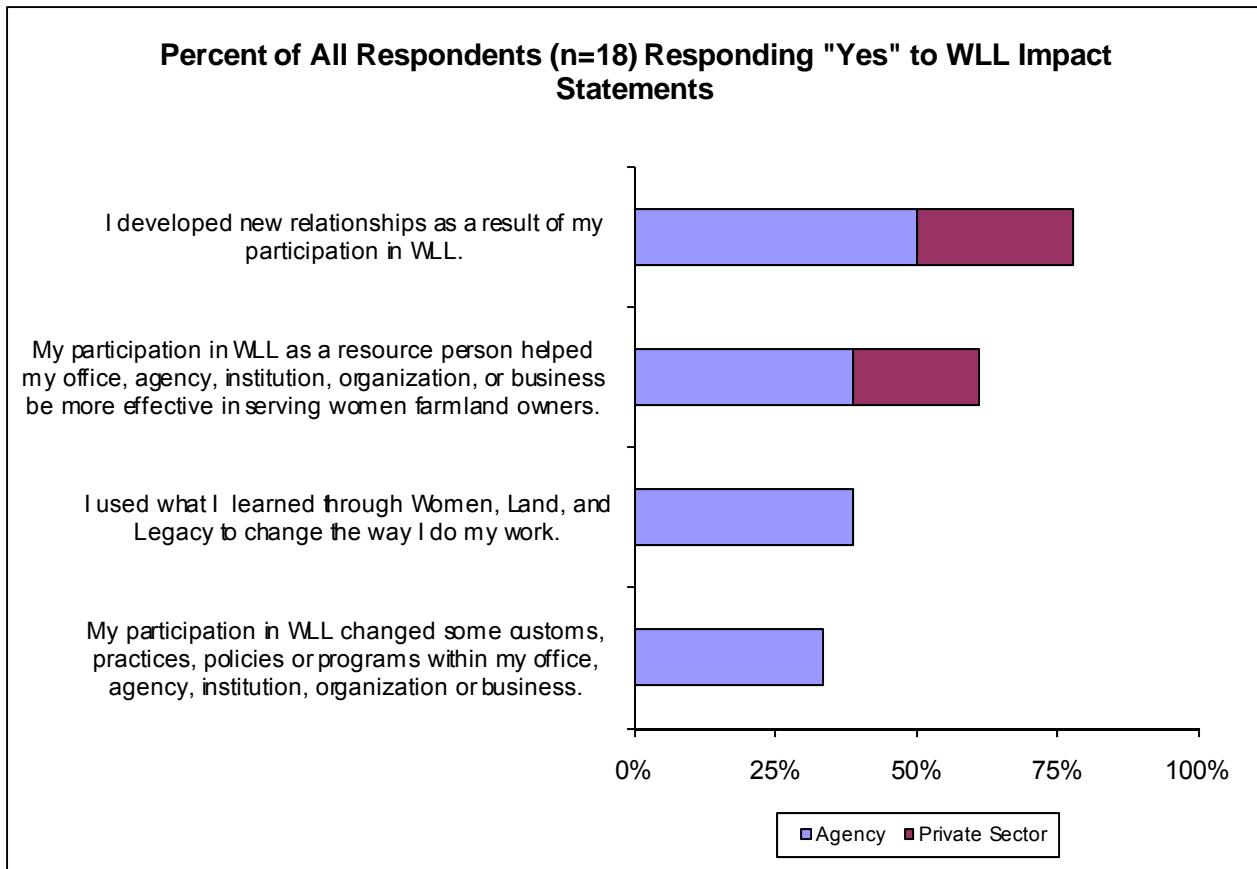


Figure 9. WLLsm Impact on Speakers

Figure 10 breaks down affirmative responses of agency respondents to the impact statements among agency people surveyed, and excludes the private sector respondents. More than half of agency respondents said their participation in WLLsm changed practices within their agency. Furthermore, nearly two-thirds report WLLsm helped their office/agency be more effective in serving women farmland owners and that they used what they learned through WLLsm to change the way they do their work. Of the 82% who said they developed new relationships as a result of WLLsm, 36% said these new relationships were changing the way they and their broader agency do work.

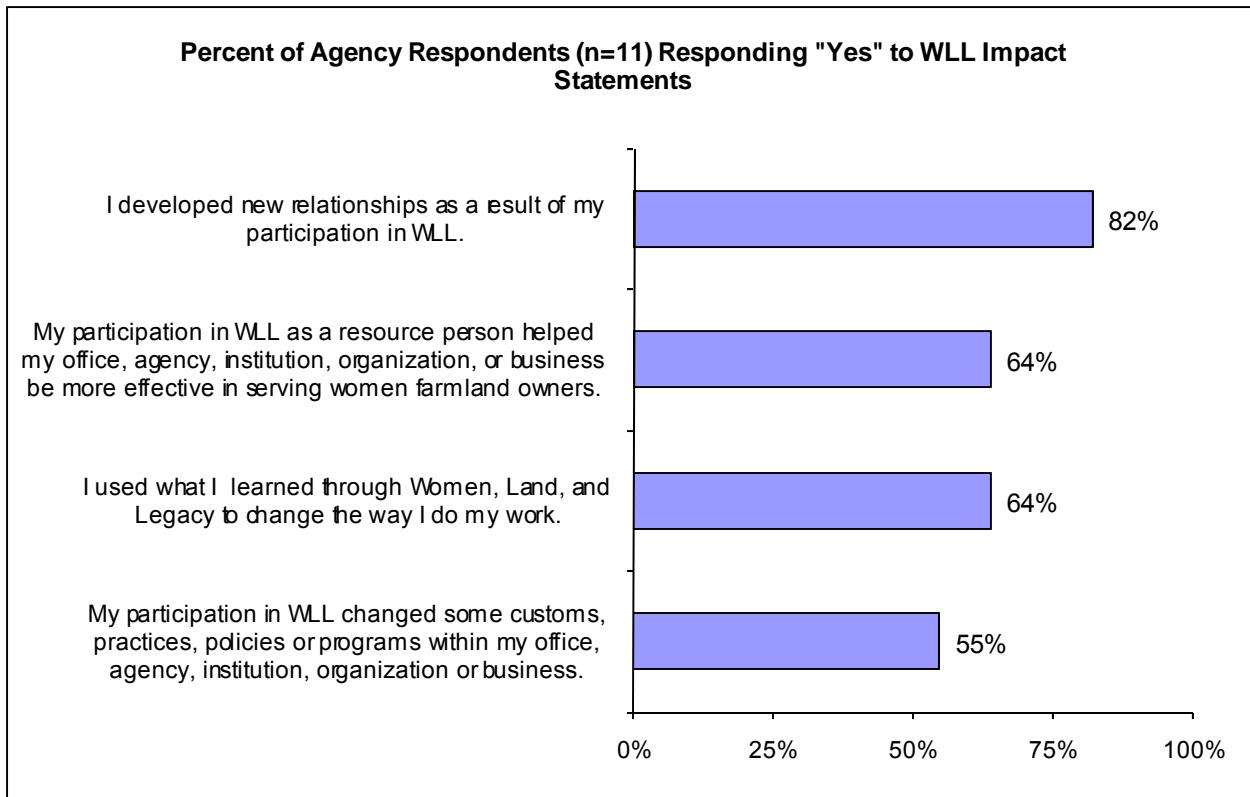


Figure 10. WLLsm Impact on Agency Speakers

Figure 11 shows a breakdown of WLLsm impacts reported by private sector speakers. More than half (57%) say that the speaking experience helped their business be more effective in serving women farmland owners; however none report it had an impact on changing the way they or their business does its work.

Percent of Private Sector Respondents (n=7) Responding "Yes" to WLL Impact Statements

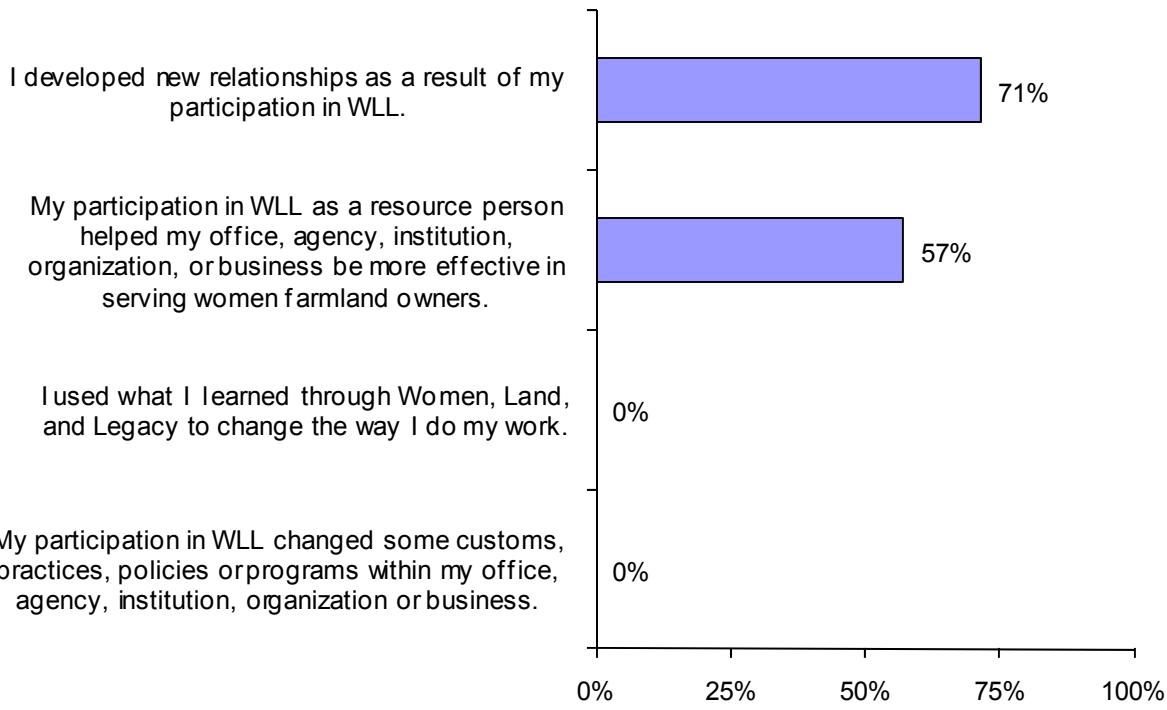


Figure 11. WLLsm Impact on Private Sector Speakers

The figures presented in the above tables give an overview of the impact of WLLsm on speaker participants. However, detailed analysis of the verbal responses to followup questions provides more information about why WLLsm is having an impact on agencies and businesses. Three broad categories emerged from this analysis.

1. **Increasing awareness of challenges.** Participating in WLLsm has strengthened both agency and private sector resource awareness that women farmland owners have unique, legitimate, and often unmet farmland ownership needs.
2. **Adoption of participatory, small group approaches.** Agency resource people recognize the benefits of the small group, participatory, and women-focused learning model employed by WLLsm. Furthermore, they have embraced this learning model in their own work outside of WLLsm.
3. **Active participation in social and information support networks.** Finally, both agency and private sector speaker participation in WLLsm has served to create new, and reinforce existing relationships through a network of people with common demographic characteristics and interests. Through this network, women farmland owners are more able to access relevant farmland ownership information and assistance.

The remainder of this report elaborates on these three themes, and describes how participation in WLLsm has helped agency and private sector speakers serve Iowa's women farmland owners better.

Increased Awareness of Challenges Facing Women Farmland Owners

In Figure 9, 39 percent of WLLsm speakers interviewed agreed that their participation in WLLsm has led to changes in customs, practices, or programs within their office, agency, institution, organization, or business. None of these responses came from the private sector. More than half (55%) of agency speakers say WLLsm has helped changed customs, practices, or programs within their agency (Figure 10). Follow up questions allowed us to ask them about those changes and what it means for them and the women they serve.

The major changes have come in the form of an increased awareness of agency staff to better serve women farmland owners, and an increased regard for women landowners' unique situations. For some speakers, however, this was neither surprising nor new, and their participation in WLLsm only reinforced what they already knew. For others, however, such interactive exposure to the unique challenges of women in agriculture was a new learning experience. These respondents noted that agriculture in the U.S. is highly gendered (dominated by men), and women have historically found it difficult to access. Women are therefore not well positioned to participate in farm decision-making and are typically excluded from the social networks that promote agricultural learning, such as the typical cluster of men at coffee shops across rural Iowa who meet to ponder the day's weather, crop prices, and harvest prospects.

When women are marginalized from agricultural information and social networks *and* they outlive their husbands, women find themselves unprepared to manage the land. Because of this, women farmland owners eventually find themselves as the sole decision-maker, and often without adequate experience, skills, or access to social networks that can provide them with the knowledge they need to take over their late husband's duties. As one resource person put it, "Husbands used to take care of everything happening on the farm, and the women did not have to be involved—the role was already filled. Now their husbands are gone and they have to learn. WLL has brought attention to this problem."

Increase in Awareness about the Exploitation of Women Farmland Owners

WLLsm speakers also report that they are more aware of the need to effectively serve Iowa's women farmland owners as a result of their participation in WLLsm. Some resource people were stunned at how serious and urgent the problem is.

I was surprised to hear about how women landowners are taken advantage of by tenants. I remember one case where the woman had been renting her land to a tenant for seventeen years for the same amount of cash rent. The crop price had gone up but not the rent. Because the woman was not comfortable, or did not know how to make the decisions, the tenant called the shots.

Another resource person provided yet another unfortunate example of how women farmland owners lack awareness and knowledge on the topic of farmland ownership which can negatively affect their economic well-being.

One lady did not realize her land qualified for CRP [Conservation Resource Protection]. Had she known this, she would have enrolled because this was what she preferred. The tenant did not want the land to be in CRP, because more money was to be made from keeping it in production. After her husband passed away, the tenant was making all the land decisions and thus, decided to keep the land in production. [The landowner] was unaware of the options.

Increasing Awareness among Male Agency Staff

Male respondents expressed that because of their participation in WLLsm, they are now more receptive to women's unique agricultural needs. As one male respondent put it, "Being male, it has broadened my perspective." Another male agency person made a powerful argument for how his participation in WLLsm is helping women landowners:

It has helped me be more effective in serving [women landowners] because it helped me realize and remember that women are involved in this too. They tend to be overlooked. It has increased my awareness of this issue. For example, a short time after I presented on estate planning at the WLL meeting, I received a call from a woman. She had a question regarding estate planning and her farm. Because I had been involved in WLL, this made me aware—it made me think—and I took her more seriously. I treated her questions with more attention. I treated it as if it was a man who called me. It is important to treat women's issues with estate planning the same as you would a man's. Their concerns are just as legitimate.

Increasing Organizational Awareness

The examples presented above demonstrate shifts in awareness and perspectives of speakers on an individual level, but similar shifts at the organizational level of agricultural agencies were also evident in the interviews. One agency person phrased it very simply, "We now understand what [women landowners] need—it's as simple as that." However, some resource people disagree whether or not WLLsm has had a direct influence on agencies' receptiveness to women-specific issues at an organizational level. Some state it has, while others claim it has not which may vary depending on the agency. Nevertheless, agency resource people agree that WLLsm, in tandem with other efforts, has brought needed attention to women in agriculture. "I don't think WLL has directly influenced how our organization operates, but I see that WLL and the broader changes USDA has made over time in regard to social justice and women are both results of the same issues." An Extension representative agreed that WLLsm is one of many influences helping generate more attention on women-specific programming:

WLL has definitely had an influence on Extension, but it is one of several efforts which have brought to Extension's attention the specific needs of women landowners. WLL has helped, but in combination with other programs. There is a more powerful influence. [Extension's] Annie's [Project] is one. With more than one group [involved] the issue has more of a voice and more influence.

Agency resource people report that complementary and sometimes overlapping programs for agricultural women spawn new efforts that further protect and serve the goals of women farmland owners.

Several other women-specific projects have, in part, come about through relationships and social networks either created or reinforced by WLL participation. There are overlapping social and working relationships among Extension and other agriculture groups and WLL. The sum of these has resulted in the establishment of women and agriculture projects beyond WLL: Overall Women in Cedar Rapids, Women Around Agriculture, and Women Adding Value to Agriculture in Decorah, to name a few.

Furthermore, WLLsm has been credited with strengthening the leadership skills of women. According to one speaker, "WLL leaders and participants were key in creating Annie's Project in Mitchell County." Based on these perspectives, it would be worthwhile to explore opportunities that combine multiple programs and projects that focus on agricultural women in Iowa.

Applying Newfound Awareness

The awareness of Iowa's women farmland owners' information needs has inspired WLLsm speakers to adapt their work accordingly. In combination with the social networks established by WLLsm, speakers are better able to provide women with relevant knowledge. WLLsm, in combination with other women-oriented groups, has opened our eyes to how to effectively reach this audience. We now have programs for women which we did not have before.

WLLsm has also served to directly connect agencies with one of the populations they serve, which leads to greater understanding.

On a broader organizational level, we as agency leaders were able to connect with farm women and understand women's needs more clearly. WLL gave us access to these women; thus, we have access to understanding what they need and how we might be able to provide assistance to them.

Other speakers state that they have not changed how they do their job or the services they provide, but are now more intentional about reaching women, an audience they did not focus on before their participation in WLLsm. "I still do the same job, but I try to reach a broader audience, meaning I now include women. We did not have the opportunity to reach women before."

In summary, WLLsm speakers from agencies have gained strong awareness that Iowa's women farmland owners are an underserved population when it comes to farmland ownership education. WLLsm has helped increase agency awareness about the challenges and even hazards women landowners face when accessing agricultural information and other resources, which appears to be contributing to changes of customs and practices within organizations, at least at the local level. According to respondents, WLLsm is also establishing local social networks and helping leaders in partner agencies (some with their own programs for women) access and serve women farmland owners.

Adoption of Participatory, Small Group Approaches

Seven (39%) of the speakers interviewed report that they have used what they have learned in WLLsm to change how they personally do their work. All of these respondents were agency people; thus, 64% of agency people interviewed report that they have used what they have learned through WLLsm to change how they do their work. What has changed are agencies' learning models. Agricultural agencies serve agricultural practitioners by disseminating useful information regarding various aspects of farm enterprise, and play a key role in supporting the viability of agriculture in Iowa. According to respondents, agencies are beginning to see the value of participatory, small group learning models when serving women, which is a marked shift from traditional practices of using public meetings to lecture large audiences, who have few, if any, opportunities to interact with each other within scheduled meeting times. WLL'ssm focus on an interactive, small group format encourages networking, discourse, and inquiry. As one resource person put it, "The small group format WLL uses is much better than the lecture format. Women are more interactive when it comes to learning. They want workshops, not lectures." Another stated,

Because the WLL meetings are non-threatening, relaxed, and fun, women open up and are comfortable expressing their thoughts and needs. The nonthreatening tone of the meetings is important. As far as I know, WLL is the only organization which [uses this tool] for women.

Indeed this is one of the factors that distinguishes WLLsm from other programs that serve Iowa's agricultural women. According to these participants, WLLsm is effectively meeting its mission because it uses small group dialogue and focused conversation processes to give Iowa agricultural women the opportunity to inform agencies and organizations of their strengths and needs.

Women Learning with Women

In the Development Guide for WLLsm (which details how to establish and maintain a local planning team), local planning teams are asked to advertise that WLLsm is an outreach project that targets agricultural women, but does not exclude others from attending. As a result, all WLLsm events are open to the public, including men. While men are not excluded, women make up the majority of the audience. Agency resource people say they have observed that women engage in learning activities differently than men do. Men are willing to listen to a lecturer speak and wait to "talk shop" among one another later at the local coffee shop, while women learn better among other women and want to process information more immediately with their peers. These respondents also observed that women are more comfortable asking questions when among other women. "There is a difference in how the women and men act in the group. At FSA meetings, the women do not usually speak up or ask questions. They have excellent insight and ask great questions, but they seem hesitant for some reason, since it is a male-dominated meeting." Another resource person echoed this sentiment.

I have... learned that, when women are among other women, there is an increased willingness to engage. It has to do with the group dynamics. Women ask more questions than men do. There is more give and take. It is important to have mostly women groups because when the groups are men-dominated, the women's give and take is stifled.

The process design of WLLsm takes this into account and deliberately sets aside time for small group dialogue and questioning to create a place where women can listen and learn from each other.

Age and Differences in Information Interests

Speakers interviewed recognize that women of different ages may be interested in different kinds of information. One speaker we interviewed made a general comment that "Older women want... specific programs for women of older age. They have different needs and learn differently." Two resource people we interviewed were younger women and also farmers; they agreed with the claim that different information is appealing to different age groups, and emphasized that different farmers need different information. They expressed some dissatisfaction with the type of information disseminated through WLLsm such as farm succession education since they were more concerned about information related to agricultural production.

WLL is a good idea, but I think it needed more substance. The [local] meetings are about transitioning land and this is important for elderly or older women, but I don't think this information is relevant to younger women like me. I'm a producer and am interested in information on how to work the land better. Perhaps what would be more relevant for women like me would be information on farm accounting software, NRCS programs, fine tuning farming practices, and small business and entrepreneurialism.

However, a counterpoint can be made that farm succession topics are important to young women too since some stand to inherit a farm from a grandparent.

Adopting Small Group Participatory Format

Participation in WLLsm has led to the adoption of the women-specific small group participatory format in other venues. One agency respondent said s/he is

more in tune to the issues and challenges facing women in agriculture, and I have incorporated this knowledge into other programs I am involved with such as Women Around Agriculture, which is an Extension program. I make sure there is a question and answer period during presentations. I also try to make the settings more comfortable so that women are encouraged to ask questions.

Other agency respondents are doing the same.

Whereas we did not before, we now use the small group breakouts a lot in RC&D meetings. One benefit to this format is that it tempers the dominant voices, and allows for everyone, even timid speakers, to contribute to the conversation.

Another said,

I have changed how I present information to women, particularly when I present on the topic of land leasing. There are a lot of women who attend programs on land leasing. I use the small group

workshop approach in these cases. I would have not thought to do this prior to my involvement in WLL.

WLLsm speakers have also applied this concept to their work outside of WLLsm.

How we present programs and how we reach out to women in particular has changed. We address how women learn information—through discussion and asking questions. We want women to feel more comfortable in discussions and be comfortable asking questions. To accomplish this, we have women-specific meetings—not mixed (men and women) groups.

As a result of their participation in WLLsm, speakers agree that women learn best among other women with similar interests, where listening is not the only activity on the agenda and inquiry and dialogue are encouraged. Additionally, speakers have also come to realize that not all women in agriculture are interested in the same topics. Educational programming on farmland succession may be of interest to some, while others may be more concerned with information related to agricultural production. Some agency resource people have embraced a women-specific design format, and applied it to their work outside of WLLsm.

Active Participation in Social and Information-based Support Networks

Through participation in WLLsm, speakers have established new, and strengthened existing relationships with other resource people and with women farmland owners. Recall that more than three in four speakers stated they have developed new relationships as a result of participation. Of these, nine were agency resource people, and five were from the private sector. For agency speakers, new relationships were developed mostly with other agency representatives. Such networks have allowed agency people to become more familiar with each other's area of specialization, allowing them to refer women farmland owners to appropriate information resources. Agency speakers also stated that new relationships between them and women farmland owners opened up channels for mutual learning. For private sector respondents, new relationships sometimes come in the form of new business clients, and create new opportunities for providing their services to women farmland owners.

Strengthening Relationships among Agency Resource People

Agency speaker participation in WLLsm has led to new and strengthened relationships among agency leaders, who claim that the social networking leads to more effective services for women farmland owners. Some agency speakers state that they have not made new relationships, but have strengthened existing ones. New or existing, these social networks among agency resource people have led to heightened familiarity with their specializations. "I have closer working relationships with FSA personnel. I have also worked more closely with ISU colleagues since we have become more familiar with each other through WLLsm participation." These social networks enable agency leaders to collaborate more effectively.

My relationships and familiarity with other USDA officers is now stronger... I now know what their talents and limitations are. Knowing this helps me be more productive and effective. One of

us is a better organizer, one is better at publicity, another is a great behind-the scenes person, and another is better at grant writing.

Increased agency effectiveness has positive implications for women farmland owners. In cases where agency resource people are contacted for assistance but are unable to assist, they can be referred to the appropriate person or agency. "The list of other [WLL] resource people has given me names in Iowa that I can contact for needed information. I was recently working on helping a client develop a dairy and used the list."

Strengthening Agency and Landowner Relationships

WLLsm has helped establish channels of learning between agency resource people and women farmland owners. At WLLsm meetings speakers address an audience of women, interact with them through question-and-answer sessions, and engage in further conversation after the meeting. Through this interaction, women are introduced to agricultural agency speakers, their agencies, and the services they provide. Speakers report that as a result of participation in WLLsm, women are now more familiar with the agricultural services the agencies can provide them. Both women and the agencies benefit from increased levels of trust that emerge as a result. "Women farmland owners are now more aware of us and what we can offer them. This has opened up channels of information for them, and some contact us when they need help." These interactions between speakers from the agencies and women farmland owners create "familiar faces." Speakers become acquainted with the women, and according to speakers from the agencies, this facilitates women's access to information because they are more comfortable seeking assistance from a familiar face. One speaker aptly captured the need for developing both a professional and friendly personal relationship with women s/he serves.

The women are more comfortable with me because we know each other. I am more comfortable working with them too. They are social relationships. When they come into the office they are a familiar face, and I recognize them too.

These new social channels have provided clear economic benefit for some women farmland owners. As one agency respondent said,

I have gained clients through WLL. I would have ladies call me with specific information and questions after I spoke at the WLL meeting. I would direct them to get the information I could not help them with, and work with them to figure out the questions they had that I was able to assist with. In two cases, this led to significant improvements in their cash rent situations. I was able to increase their incomes.

Strengthening Private Sector Relationships

WLLsm has fostered new relationships between private sector resources and women farmland owners, leading to working relationships between some women landowners and private sector farm service providers. However, it should be noted that local planning teams are very careful about ensuring that private sector resources do not "prey" on WLLsm women at the Learning Sessions. Local planning teams' primary responsibility is the group of women attending WLLsm

events. The planning teams are encouraged to create safe environments for participating women by a) inviting competing businesses to speak at one session and/or b) eliminating businesses' advertising and marketing at the sessions. Thus, speakers from the private sector understand they are not allowed to promote their businesses in any way at the meetings. The reason for inviting private sector speakers is to provide women access to their knowledge and experience on mostly legal and financial issues. Evaluation results show that WLLsm Learning Sessions are increasing women's access to private sector partners while some women are choosing to seek out these partners outside of WLLsm for fee-based services. For example, five speakers from the private sector stated that they have established new relationships through their participation in WLLsm. These relationships are primarily in the form of new business clients. For those private sector speakers who provide services such as lawyers and estate planners, their expanded clientele has allowed them to serve to more women farmland owners. One speaker described how referrals have come about through WLLsm. "I gained a client. She and her son had heard me speak to the WLLsm group. When her husband died, they contacted me. Her son is also friends with my husband, who is my law partner." A second remark reiterates the connections between private sector speakers and women farmland owners established through WLLsm.

I found a new client through my participation. This person called one of the other presenters at the WLL meeting where I presented. The person had questions and needed assistance in estate planning, and the other presenter referred them to me. I have been working with this client ever since.

These new clients have benefited private sector businesses, but have also benefited women farmland owners. One private sector speaker described the mutual gain experienced by both parties.

I have met new people and gained new clients. I am a member of the estate planning committee and have presented to this group on the topic. Since these ladies now know me, I've been an estate planning information resource for them. I've answered questions and have been able to help some of them protect themselves from federal estate taxes and have helped others keep their farm in the family when the owners are moved into nursing homes.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The voices of over three hundred women and men actively involved in Women, Land, and Legacy provide clear evidence that the project is changing the agricultural horizon for women in Iowa. First and foremost, WLLsm has empowered women to become more aware and educated about their farm operation or management. As a result, women landowners are raising the rent on their land, which may not be good news for renters but certainly is for the long-term sustainability of women-owned or co-owned farm operations. The result is a more fair income for women landowners, some of whom were practically giving away the rights to farm their land over the years. As a result of WLLsm participation, women also report they are implementing conservation practices aligned with the long-term goals they have for their land, families, and communities. These results suggest that as more women landowners become more financially secure, they find themselves in a better position to achieve their conservation goals. For conservation agencies and advocates, effectively reaching out to women landowners is likely to bring more continuity to conservation practices and long-term change to the agricultural landscape and surrounding waterways.

Education and learning are key effective outreach strategies. We often think of education in a formal sense as something that takes place in schools, or workshops and conferences. However, education and learning also take place through networking, particularly for women. For results on the ground, effective farm outreach to women landowners therefore must also consciously include a network-building component. WLLsm integrates structured learning sessions with informal networking opportunities, with the combined outcome of prompting women to become more actively involved in farm management decisions and taking steps to do a better job of protecting themselves and their families financially and legally. Women are doing their own networking within their communities and families by initiating new conversations within their families and consulting attorneys and financial planners to establish or update estate plans, draft or revise land contracts, create trusts, and prepare wills and farm plans. In the process, they are gaining confidence about their ability to make good decisions and are navigating the local social landscape to muster resources to help them in these efforts. In the future, farm service providers should incorporate social networking into programs for women. One strategy might be to carve out room for innovative programming that works with farm families rather than primary operators/landowners alone, as well as programs that bring women landowners and tenants to the same table.

A rise in confidence among WLLsm participants making sound farm management, land management, and financial planning decisions is providing secondary benefits to local communities. There is convincing evidence that WLLsm is helping build leadership opportunities for women both on the farm and within their communities. WLLsm women are taking on new leadership roles by serving on community-based committees, boards, civic organizations, producer associations, and other assorted groups. WLLsm has also encouraged women to take a strong role in grassroots community organizing as they advocate for local agriculture-based programming, reach out to federal agencies, and enlist the support of other local women. Communities stand to benefit from the networking opportunities WLLsm offers women because women report these networks are helping them gain the confidence and support they need to take on new leadership roles. Women also report there is a local change in attitudes, specifically a

new respect for their involvement in community affairs and farming. This has important implications for community development in terms of recognizing the untapped leadership potential of women, but also how farm service agencies engage local people in program participation. Women are and will continue to be critical partners; deliberately making room for them in a variety of venues will be a smart tactic for ensuring future farm program success—particularly conservation program success.

Some of the attitude changes participants report occur within the women themselves, in the attitudes of female peers, within their families, and government and private sector farm service providers. There is clear evidence that through WLLsm, the attitudes of participating women changed toward service providers. The opportunity to meet face-to-face in a non threatening environment helps build relationships and trust, leading to a reduction in hostility and misunderstanding. Members of local planning teams (agency staff and local women alike) agree with this claim, particularly those relating to the deconstruction of boundaries between women landowners and the farm service providers who serve them. While participating women report they are more comfortable with service providers, service providers—particularly male ones—report they are also more comfortable and open to serving women and how to best do that (through small group interaction and learning). They report seeing more office contacts with women associated with farming, more involvement of young women in food production, and a greater overall local interest among women in agriculture. These results demonstrate that face-to-face interaction on neutral ground deconstructs boundaries between farm service providers and women landowners, leading to the desired effect of eventually increasing interest, if not participation, in agency programs.

In particular, two mechanisms have made this deconstruction of boundaries possible: The first is the contact and relationship building opportunities agencies get from interacting with women who attend WLLsm meetings. The second is the shared agency and non agency leadership of the local planning teams. Non agency women on the local planning team through their side-by-side interaction and shared leadership are changing perceptions about each other. Sharing leadership means non agency planning team members (usually women farmland owners) become more aware of the services agencies offer. Increased awareness then leads to development of stronger relationships with agency staff. Farm service providers would be wise to enlist the participation of local farm women in program planning and decision-making processes when designing and delivering any outreach programs for women.

Not only did agencies better connect with local women, but they were also better able to better connect with other fellow agencies. Agency staff changed their attitudes about staff at other agencies, many of whom are beginning to partner together on a deeper level to better serve women in the county/county cluster and their non agency peers on the local planning teams. Several agency planning team members are beginning to recognize the value of uniting agencies to deliver better programs to women although this is not without challenges. Agency control issues surfaced at the local level in WLLsm, emphasizing the need for targeted leadership support for women on the local planning teams (agency-based or otherwise). Planning team members want to build their leadership capacity through training opportunities, increased funding, and a statewide information management system but would also welcome invitations to build leadership in cooperation with local farm service agencies. Although not typically the focus of

these agencies, building the capacity of women to become local leaders in the farming arena is likely to bring more success to the programs of cooperating agencies.

We know from WLLsm that the project has helped change the way contributing agencies and organizations provide outreach to women landowners. Agency participants report WLLsm has strengthened both agency and private sector awareness that women farmland owners have unique, legitimate, and often unmet farmland ownership needs. Furthermore, many agency respondents acknowledge that agriculture in the U.S. is highly gendered, and women, at best, have historically found it difficult to access relevant information and services and, at worst, are downright exploited.

Agencies therefore have further opportunities to change the way they serve women farmland owners as a result of what we have learned through WLLsm. Agencies and private sector partners can:

- Become more intentional about reaching women clients;
- Be more aware of women's unique perspectives and experiences when dealing with women clients;
- Grasp the key role social support networks play in providing women landowners professional growth and development opportunities;
- Incorporate the small group, participatory learning model employed by WLLsm into outreach work with women *and* work outside of WLLsm;
- Develop closer working relationships with other agencies and organizations who also serve women (agricultural or otherwise) to draw from their experiences and connections; and
- Create new, innovative programs for women that combine lessons learned from the work of WLLsm as well as other agricultural women-serving programs, projects, and organizations across the state.

In closing, WLLsm teaches us that social support is an essential part of women's risk management strategies for their land and farm operations, but is chronically overlooked by traditional state and federal farm programs seeking to serve women. Social support is fundamental to social risk management strategies that women use to understand and validate their experiences, gather information from a variety of resources, and gain confidence to act in the best interest of themselves, their families, their communities, and their land. Future outreach to women landowners must therefore focus on ways to strengthen the connections women have to each other, the land, their families, and agency and private sector resources within their communities. These connections will enable them to become even better landowners, farmers, and stewards of the land—more so than they already are.

APPENDIX 1. LETTER TO LOCAL PLANNING TEAM CONTACTS

Dear ,

Thank you helping us gather information on the impact of WLLsm in Iowa. Enclosed are the surveys we would like you to distribute to women who participated in Level II events in your county or county cluster. Tanya Meyer-Dideriksen (NRCS) or Beth Grabau (FSA) already contacted you to let you know these materials were coming.

Included in this box/packet are:

- ✓ 2 copies of the introduction letter (one is a backup)
- ✓ _____ surveys to mail each Level II participant
- ✓ _____ self-addressed stamped envelopes (SASEs)

Please do the following as soon as possible:

- Select at least one or several local women from your local planning team to sign one introduction letter.
- Make the appropriate number of copies of the signed letter to accompany each survey and self addressed stamped envelope once the letter is signed.
- Place one letter, one survey, and one self-addressed stamped envelope in an envelope from your agency. Print out and affix mailing labels of names and addresses of women attending Level II events on each agency envelope.
- Apply the appropriate postage and mail.
- Please send me a brief e-mail at corry@iastate.edu notifying me that the surveys have been sent for your county/county cluster so I can track when the surveys go out across the state.

Thank you for your hard work and important contributions to this work!

Corry Bregendahl
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