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Evaluating Women in Agriculture Training Programs in South Dakota



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Introduction

Women's involvement in agriculture and agribusiness is increasingly recognized as an important component of success in farm and ranch production and management. The South Dakota State University Cooperative Extension Service (SDSU-CES) has implemented projects and programs targeted for women in agriculture. The primary objectives were to empower farm and ranch women in the state and help prepare them for increased participation in agricultural decision-making and management. According to SDSU-CES, more than 200 women have participated in Annie's Project and its successor, Sustainable Annie's Systems in South Dakota for Years to Come (SASSY) training programs. Although there is anecdotal evidence that these programs have benefitted women in agriculture, a recent assessment and evaluation study of SASSY was conducted to provide empirical evidence as to the degree that this program had a positive impact.

Annie's Project and Sustainable Annie's Systems in South Dakota for Years to Come (SASSY)

Annie's Project is an agricultural business program for women based on the life of Annette Fleck, a farm woman from Illinois. Annie's Project's primary goal is to empower farm women to become better partners through networking, learning about management, and organization of important

information related to farm business and operations. Annie's Project started in Illinois in 2003 with a class of 10 women, and has grown to more than 2,000 women in 23 states. Annie's Project training was introduced to South Dakota in 2006 in Dewey and Harding Counties with collaboration between North Dakota State University and South Dakota State University Cooperative Extension Services.

In fall 2008, SDSU-CES developed a follow-up SASSY training program unique to South Dakota. This training was offered fall 2009 and spring 2010 with the primary goals of sustaining learning and promoting the best identified practices learned through Annie's Project. According to SDSU-CES, Annie's Project participants expressed the desire for more in-depth information on risk management, how to be more effective business partners and how to create sustainability in their operation. SASSY training was offered over six sessions in Aurora, Brookings, Corson, Haakon, Harding, McCook, Meade, Pennington, Perkins, and Sully counties.

Assessment and Evaluation of SASSY

Prior to the formal assessment of the SASSY program, evaluation of women in agriculture training programs in SD were limited to feedback notes and informal comments from end-of-class assignments and home assignments. A formal survey was developed and distributed in order to better understand what is important when designing and implementing training programs; identifying short term and long term program relevance, effectiveness, and compatibility; and providing feedback information to improve future training programs and increase participation of women in agriculture. The survey, developed by SDSU Economics Department researchers, was distributed to SASSY participants during the last session of

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training. Of 120 total participants, 60 returned surveys, representing a 50 percent response rate.

Survey Results

High interest in SASSY training was demonstrated in that eighty-one percent of the participants attended four or more of the six sessions. Over half of the participants were 45 years or older, and 88 percent were married. The participants consisted of 37 percent college graduates, 29 percent with some college level education, and 14 percent with post graduate education. Forty-six percent of the participants had been involved in agricultural operations for over 30 years, and 16 percent 20-29 years. Seventy-one percent of participants were able to attend a training center within 40 miles of their home. The most common form of ownership of the farming operation was sole proprietorship (56%), followed by partnership (24%). Fifty-six percent of the participants were involved in both livestock and crop production, with 30 percent involving 1,001-5,000 acres, and 37 percent 5,001-10,000 acres. Annual farm gross income for 43 percent of the participants was below \$100,000; followed by 26 percent between \$100,000 and \$200,000.

SASSY participants were asked to respond to questions based upon their experiences in the SASSY training program. Nine out of fourteen SASSY

training topics (see Table 1) had a mean average of four and above (somewhat to very important), and the remaining five topics had a mean average of at least three (somewhat important).

Learning how to balance farm and ranch life was a central subset of SASSY training. Table 2 indicates that getting organized, focusing on priorities, being flexible, living simply, and building networks and focusing on personal time all had high mean averages, indicating their importance to the survey respondents.

In relation to goal-setting, the highest percentage of goal setting occurred in relation to family/personal and financial goals, with the lowest percentage in relation to their communities (refer to Table 3). Nearly all the survey respondents (95%) said they will share their goals with their spouse and/or other and family members.

The survey also asked farm and ranch women to indicate what barriers they faced in relation to accomplishing their goals (refer to Table 4). Interestingly, although nearly all the respondents indicated that they would share their goals with their spouse and or other family members, the most frequently identified barrier to goal accomplishment was a complicated family situation.

Table 1. Importance of Topics Covered by SASSY Training in Percentage

Importance topics covered by SASSY training	Very	Somewhat	Least	Not	Didn't	Mean Average	
	Important	Important	Important	Important	receive information		
	5	4	3	2	1	0	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Financial records	66.7	19.3	10.5	1.7	-	1.7	4.46
Marketing strategies and plans	59.7	26.3	10.5	3.5	-	-	4.42
Production records	54.4	31.6	10.5	1.7	-	1.7	4.33
Other	66.7	-	33.3	-	-	-	4.33
Livestock production	58.9	25.0	3.6	5.3	5.3	1.8	4.21
Goal setting	46.6	31.0	15.5	5.2	1.7	-	4.16
Communication skills	52.6	21.1	19.3	3.5	-	3.5	4.12
Health and well being	41.4	32.7	19.0	5.2	-	1.7	4.05
Relationships	48.3	25.6	17.2	3.5	-	5.2	4.03
Natural resources	25.0	37.5	25.0	10.7	-	1.8	3.71
Crop insurance	26.8	32.1	19.6	12.5	-	8.9	3.46
Niche marketing	26.4	28.3	26.4	9.4	1.9	7.6	3.45
Crop production	26.8	26.8	26.8	5.4	7.1	7.1	3.39
Animal insurance	25.0	26.8	17.9	5.4	8.9	16.0	3.05

Source: SASSY training survey, 2010.

Table 2. Ways of Finding Balance for Farm and Ranch Life

	Very	Important	Somewhat	Least	Not	Mean
	Important		Important	Important	Important	
	5	4	3	2	1	Average
	%	%	%	%	%	
Getting organized	62.0	25.4	8.5	3.4	-	4.47
Focusing on priorities	50.9	28.1	15.8	5.2	-	4.25
Being flexibility	37.9	41.4	17.2	3.5	-	4.14
Simplifying life	40.4	31.6	26.3	1.7	-	4.11
Building networks	43.9	21.0	26.3	8.8	-	4.00
Personal time	39.0	27.1	25.4	5.1	3.4	3.93

Source: SASSY training survey, 2010.

Table 3. Goals and Time Frame

	Goals		Time Frame		
	Yes	No	Short-term	Mid-term	Long-term
	%	%	%	%	%
Family/personal	83	17	40	23	37
Finance	81	19	29	33	38
Operation	79	21	32	37	31
Production	77	23	41	40	19
Marketing	64	36	67	22	11
Community	48	52	53	30	17

Source: SASSY training survey, 2010.

Table 4. Barriers to Goal Accomplishment

Barriers	# of responses	% of total responses
Complicated family situation	36	33.0
Lack of funds to support plan	30	27.5
Too busy	22	20.2
Other	12	11.1
Hard to put ideas into words	9	8.2
Total	109	100

Source: SASSY training survey, 2010.

SASSY participants received training in recordkeeping and financial planning. Recordkeeping in relation to tax returns and financial statement preparation, monitoring agricultural production and business progress, tracking deductibles, identifying receipts, and a decision making tool for making production decisions were all discussed, with the respondents identifying all these areas as important to very important. Forty-two percent of the participants still had difficulty in calculating commodity prices and evaluating financial ratios post-training.

Finally, survey respondents were asked how quickly they would apply what they had learned from the SASSY sessions. Sixty-seven percent of the respondents indicated that they would try it out right away, with the remainder concluding that they would wait until an approach was proven or used by other farmers/ranchers first.

Conclusion

SASSY participants who responded to the survey agreed with the trainers regarding the importance of the topics covered. Record-keeping was considered most important in preparation of tax returns, financial statements, and monitoring business progress. Although the training increased confidence in making financial calculations, more training in this area would be helpful. Although most shared goals with their spouses and family members, a complicated family situation was considered the leading barrier to goal accomplishment. A session to address this might be warranted. Sixty-seven percent of respondents indicated that they would immediately use the skills and knowledge acquired in SASSY training. The respondents expressed increased confidence based on the topics covered in the program.

For further reading:

Annie's Project:

<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/annie>

North Central Risk Management Education Center:

http://www.ncrme.org/Grants/documents/SouthDakota_000.pdf

The Ag Risk Education Library. Annie's Project Summary:

<http://www.agrisk.umn.edu/verification/vrregister.dll/publicresults?ProjectNumber=RME-D4K02431>

The Ag Risk Education Library. SASSY Project Summary:

<http://www.agrisk.umn.edu/VerificationSearch/DisplayProposal.aspx?PN=RME-DF202638>

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