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Local Women in Ag Conference set for Jan.25

By ROBERT PIERCE

• Leader & Times

Throughout the years, the woman's role in agriculture, specifically the family farm, has been an evolving position.

According to 2007 Ag Census data, Seward County has 20 to 24 percent of farms principally owned by women, higher than the national average of 13.9 percent.

On a national average, 30 percent of farms have a woman operator, and in Kansas alone, 26,794 farms have a woman operator, with 7,943 of those having a woman as the primary operator.

Seward County K-State Extension Ag Agent Kylee Harrison said these statistics represent a long-term trend of more women becoming major agricultural decision makers and being involved in family farm operations.

Seward's Extension office, along with those in Haskell and Meade counties, will be hosting a Women in Agriculture conference on Saturday, Jan. 25, at the Seward County Activity Center.

The conference, which will start at 9 a.m., will feature four speakers from the local agriculture industry and the keynote speaker, Gregg Hadley, the K-State Extension assistant director of agriculture, natural resources and community development, who will speak about farm transition planning.

"Gregg will empower you to evolve, grow and realize your potential for excellence," Harrison said.

Conference attendees will also be able to hear about a variety of topics from local Natural Resource Conservation Services and Farm Service Agency programs to tax preparation and crop insurance.

Harrison said a break will take place between each speaker, and those on hand will have a chance to walk through a "mini-mall" of various vendors.

"There's going to be different vendors out there where they can do a little shopping and relax and go back in and listen to the next speaker," she said.

Lunch will be provided by Great Western Dining, and there will also be door prizes given away.

Harrison said as America transitions to the next generation of women farm managers and owners, the need to provide education to women on farm business practices has never been greater.

“This is just a chance for women to feel comfortable and be able to come and listen to some of these speakers and hopefully learn something,” she said.

Harrison said over the years, there has been a growing interest of women in direct relationship to the daily operation of farm and ranch operations.

“There is a definite growing number of women as primary operators of a farm and ranch,” she said. “That number is definitely climbing, but even if they’re not the primary operator, they may be a absentee land owner.”

Harrison said women are running more farms and ranches, operating more land and producing a greater value of agricultural products than they were in the past.

“Statistics also show that there is an overall decline in the number of family farms, and the number of acres per farm is rising,” she said. “This proves an overall shift in the type and scope of farms in Seward County.”

Harrison said from this, a conclusion can be made that there is a need for farm family planning, focusing on women’s role in the operation.

The ag agent said depending on how this year’s conference goes, Women in Agriculture may be an annual event, with a changing list of topics, but she said this year’s will focus more on the business side of running a farm and ranch.

Harrison said the Women in Agriculture conference is not the same as those hosted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in other Kansas communities.

“What they’ve done before is called Annie’s Project, and it was actually a series of six or seven different meetings or different days they would come to and focus on a different topic every time,” she said. “That’s where I got the idea from to have it. It was something I wanted to bring into Liberal and give opportunity for people to go to, and I am hosting in conjunction with Haskell and Meade counties.”

To register for the Women in Agriculture conference, contact the Haskell County Extension office at (620) 675-2261 or the Seward County office at (620) 624-5604, or e-mail lnote@ksu.edu or kharrison@ksu.edu.

“If anybody sells something and they would like to be a vendor, they can also contact me,” Harrison said. “It’s going to be free to have a booth. The conference itself is free. We’ll have lots of great door prizes.”

Topics and presenters

Conservation practices

Leslie Spikes, Seward County NRCS

Farm Service Agency programs

Ashley Heatherman, Haskell County FSA

Tax preparation

Stephanie Urban, Byron Bird and Associates

Crop insurance

Kim Rinehart, Ag First Insurance Agency

Farm transition planning

Gregg Hadley, K-State Research and Extension

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