

Educational effort empowers farmwives

By JERILYN JOHNSON

It all started with a farmwife's idea to teach farm women the skills they need to manage a successful family farm business. Today, Annie's Project is a farm management course taught in 18 states, with at least 10 more states expected to join soon. Advanced courses in marketing and finance are now offered in addition to the Basic Farm Management 101 course.

Annie was a woman who grew up in a small farm community in northern Illinois and married a farmer. She spent her lifetime learning how to be an involved business partner with her husband.

Unbeknownst to her family, Annie took her experiences and challenges and shared them with other farm women. Her daughter, Ruth Hambleton, discovered this after Annie's death and started Annie's Project to continue to help farm women.

In 2003, Ruth led the first courses as an Extension farm business management educator in Illinois. Ten women enrolled in that first course.

To date, more than 4,500

Key Points

- Annie's Project has grown into a nationwide program.
- Farm management course now offered in 18 states.
- Farm family finance is the newest course to be offered.

women have participated in the program nationwide. The Annie's Project National Leadership Team has trained instructors in 25 states.

The educational programs are offered in Arkansas, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, North Dakota, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Dakota and Wisconsin.

Annie's Project teaches farm women to manage information systems used in critical decision-making processes and to build local networks. The target audience is farm women with a passion for business and involvement in the family farm.

"The classes provide a comfortable, interactive environment for women," says Bob Wells, an instructor since 2004 and ag economist with Iowa

State University Extension.

Participants receive training over a six-class short course. The course covers the five areas of risk management: production, finances, marketing, legal issues and human resources. "No matter your ag interests — whether you grow corn, cotton, cattle, carrots or carnations — these risk-management areas need to be understood," Wells notes.

Higher level

"Annie's Project helps to empower women to manage the farm," adds Bob Kelly, University of Missouri Extension farm management specialist, St. Joseph, Mo. "It's for those women who would like to know how to build a balance sheet, understand farm property titles, decipher farm programs at the local Farm Service Agency office, and whether to co-sign a loan application for a new tractor or combine."

To continue to improve the program, Annie's Project participants fill out evaluations at the end of their course. After receiving requests for more in-depth information for selling crops, the futures market and



KNOWLEDGE SEEKERS: Last spring, Annie's Project offered farm women a session on farm and health insurance.

risk management, organizers implemented an Annie's Project Level II course on marketing a couple of years ago.

"We found that 80% of Annie's Project participants wanted more information on grain marketing and 70% asked for finance instruction," Well says.

The latest endeavor for the project is an advanced course called Intersection of Farm Family Finance. It will be offered in several states, starting this winter. For more information,

visit www.extension.iastate.edu/feci/annie/RD.html.

Annie's Project coordinators are working with USDA to develop the advanced course. "The goal is to have agricultural economics, farm management, and family and consumer science specialists work together on finance education. The program will use existing curriculum, and Annie's will be the backbone," says Mary Sobba, MU Extension agricultural business specialist.



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