

FAMILY

By Cheryl Tevis, Risk Management Editor



AWE-INSPIRING AG WOMEN THEY HAVE PAVED THE WAY BY REFUSING TO TAKE A BACKSEAT TO MEN.

In the rush to reach our destination in life, we seldom pause, look back, and appreciate how far we've come. We assume that each mile marker was destined to be there for us.

American Agri-Women (AAW), a coalition of state and commodity affiliates, won't make that mistake. It's celebrating 40 years of ag advocacy by putting women in the driver's seat – literally – on a months-long educational and advocacy tour. The last stop is its November 5 convention in Portland, Maine.

In many ways, AAW's history reflects the journey of women on farms over these four decades. Now representing 40,000 women in the U.S. and Canada, AAW (americanagriwomen.org) was formed by four groups: Women for the Survival of Agriculture in Michigan, Oregon Women for Agriculture, Washington Women for the Survival of Agriculture, and Wisconsin Women for Agriculture.

Leaders of these groups were invited to the first National Farm Women's Forum in Milwaukee, hosted by *Farm Wife News* (FWN) in November 1974. AAW's charter meeting followed the 1975 forum. I was FWN's associate editor that year.

AAW's focus on legislative and regulatory policies at the local, state, and national levels was groundbreaking. It challenged the status quo. At that time, women weren't allowed individual memberships in farm organizations. Instead, they were assigned to auxiliaries to promote ag products and educational efforts.

CREDIT OVERDUE

Although women were assuming greater roles in the farm business by the 1970s, they had to prove their contributions, or pay estate tax on the entire farm value if it was in joint

tenancy when they were widowed. Wives went to ASCS offices to sign forms for government programs and were turned away. At implement dealerships, they often were treated rudely by male employees.

Their self-image suffered. "I'm just a farm wife," was a common disclaimer.

The experiences of women in ag were mirrored in society. The Equal Credit Opportunity Act was passed in 1975, with the aim of allowing women the option of having a separate credit file.

Yet, ag women didn't identify with women's libbers. Their focus was on ag policies and their farms.

PEDAL TO THE METAL

Other women also wanted to navigate their ag future. Women Involved in Farm Economics (WIFE) organized in 1976 at Sidney, ▶

LEADING THE WAY

Communicating effectively, establishing and achieving goals, and making a strategic plan rank at the top of a list of key leadership skills for women in agriculture to master, according to a recent Farm Bureau survey.

Nearly 2,000 women completed the informal online survey, which was conducted to determine the goals, aspirations, achievements, and needs of women in American agriculture today.

Most of the women surveyed report being comfortable advocating for agriculture, and most believe they have the necessary skills and knowledge to be successful. Social media is their preferred avenue.

"Farm and ranch women continue to be seen as credible sources of information on the production of food, fiber, and renewable fuels," says Sherry Saylor, an Arizona row-crop farmer and chair of the Farm Bureau Women's Leadership Committee.

"Working to develop connections with consumers and being transparent when responding to questions about how food is produced benefit all of us in agriculture," she says.

The survey was open to all women. Responses were received from women in 50 states and Puerto Rico. ■■

WOMEN IN AG

I found years ago that car trips give my husband and me time to talk and discuss things. He needed time away for a couple of hours, too.

– turkey feather

Join in the discussion at community.Agriculture.com.

Nebraska, with a goal of improving profitability in production agriculture. In 1977, WIFE organized an ethanol convoy from Montana to Washington, D.C. In 1980, an alcohol still (made from a pressure cooker) was featured at their convention in Lubbock, Texas. They experimented with recipes made from distillers' grain solids to demonstrate that gasohol wouldn't take food away from people (wifeline.com).

The 1980s farm crisis exacted a toll on farm women's activism, and the trend of off-farm jobs siphoned energy and time from pursuing leadership. Women in agribusiness, who contributed their talents and skills, were welcomed into ag groups.

By the mid-1990s, most ag women's auxiliaries were disbanded, and a few women began serving on major farm organization boards. Not enough, however, to satisfy the founders of the Women, Food & Agriculture Network (WFAN). They also advocated a new model of sustainable production and direct marketing (wfan.org).

The share of U.S. farms primarily operated by women had been growing, from 5% in 1978 to about 14% in 2012. Today,

In 1975, American Agri-Women participated in a USDA program in Washington, D.C., called Women in Agriculture and the Changing World.

WFAN has an on-farm apprenticeship program that includes women farmers. It's also working with the Rural Women's Project of the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES) on Plate to Politics, a project to strengthen women's leadership in the food system.

Women's ag promotion roles have been lifted up in blogs and other consumer-outreach initiatives, including Common

Ground. Earlier this year, Krysta Harden, deputy secretary of agriculture, launched the USDA's Women in Agriculture Mentoring Network (email: Agwomenlead@usda.gov). See more on page 00.

IT'S OK TO LOOK BACK, BUT DON'T STARE

Women have come a long way, baby – in society and in agriculture – and our daughters are the beneficiaries. Yet, these new opportunities need to go beyond window dressing.

Ag women still struggle to achieve the vision of the late Sister Thomas More Bertels, who urged them to overcome differences and to speak with one voice. She wrote, "The most important task facing farm entrepreneurs today is capturing a significant degree of influence over the policy-making function as it relates to food, feed, fiber . . ."

There's no road map. However, in 1980, Illinois Women in Agriculture held Getting to Know You meetings with the leaders of 25 ag groups. Their goals were to speak out for farmers and farm industry, to work together for effective legislation, to educate consumers about ag's economic importance, and to create greater public awareness of ag as a business. It's still a good starting point today. After all, a journey of 1,000 miles starts with one step.  



Cheryl Tevis



LOOK WHO'S HERE! TURN TO CAN THEIR PROBLEM BE SOLVED NEXT MONTH FOR STRAIGHT TALK FROM JOLENE BROWN.

During the past decade, an increasing number of young farmers have entered agriculture, encouraged by record profits and heady land values.

The current downturn in the farm economy isn't a crisis. The projected 2015 farm debt-to-asset ratio of 10.9% is far below the 22% ratio during the 1980s.

In 2012, about 4% of farmers held 68% of total U.S. farm debt. Today, fewer farm operations than in the 1980s have large debt loads. The farmers who do have large debt, however, have about the same level held by 30% of farmers in 1979.

Succession and transition are even more challenging to achieve in lean economic times. With lower profit margins, the younger generation will struggle to build enough net worth to buy out the owner generation.

Women are key members of the farm crew when it comes to keeping the books and navigating

the choppy waters of succession. That's one reason why Successful Farming magazine is pleased to welcome Jolene Brown as a new member of the "Can Their Problem Be Solved?" team. See page 00.

Brown is a professional speaker, author, and family business consultant who farms near West Branch, Iowa (jolene@jolenebrown.com). She's known for her unique style of straight talk.

"Farmers lie," she says. "Not intentionally, but they say the same thing over and over, and then they don't do it or it's not true."

Brown says these are the three biggest family farm business lies:

1. Work hard, someday this will all be yours. "A conversation is not a contract," she says. "If it's not in writing, it doesn't exist."

2. I'm going to retire. "Farmers are willing to transition the labor but not the management, the leadership, or ▶

the control of assets," she says.

3. Don't worry about your brothers and sisters. They have their own jobs, and they're not interested in the farm. "That may be true – until Dad dies. Then everyone's interested in the money," she says.

Farm business planning encompasses a daunting range of other management issues, Brown says.

"The challenge isn't just transitioning from one generation to another," she says. "It's making sure that you operate as a business and that you have the tools and processes in place when times are good so you can use them when times get tough."

Look for Brown's "Can Their Problem Be Solved?" column in the September issue.  

NEW CONNECTIONS

A series of three new free webinars have been archived on the new Women in Ag Learning Network.

- **Leading the Way: How Women are Changing Board Rooms and Rural Landscapes**
- **By the Numbers: What the Census of Ag Tells Us About Women Operators**
- **Heart of the Farm: Why Women's Unique Family and Farm Business Roles Matter**

The network is part of the national Extension initiative to connect farm and ranch women to one another and to Extension.

Krysta Harden, the USDA deputy secretary of agriculture, introduced the webinar series, which features national experts, as well as women in agriculture.

For instructions on how to watch the webinars, visit learn.extension.org.

Visit the Women in Ag Learning Network website at extension.org/womeninag.  



FRUITED TUNA SALAD VANILLA YOGURT, ORANGES, AND MELON TAKE EVERYDAY TUNA SALAD UP A NOTCH.

Prep: 35 minutes
Chill: Up to 4 hours

- 2 8-ounce cartons vanilla yogurt
- 2 teaspoons finely shredded orange peel
- 4 oranges, peeled and sectioned
- 3 cups cubed cantaloupe and/or honeydew melon
- 3 cups halved strawberries
- ¼ cup sliced green onions
- 3 9-ounce cans solid white tuna, drained and coarsely flaked
- Leaf lettuce (optional)
- ½ cup chopped pecans, toasted

1 In a large bowl stir together vanilla yogurt and orange peel. Add orange sections, cantaloupe, strawberries, and green onions. Toss gently to coat. Add tuna; toss gently. Cover and chill for up to 4 hours.

2 To serve, if desired, place a lettuce leaf on each salad plate. Spoon tuna mixture onto plates; sprinkle fruited tuna salads with pecans.

To tote: Transport salad and nuts in an insulated cooler with ice packs. Just before serving, sprinkle with nuts.

To save time: Omit the fresh orange sections and substitute one 11-ounce can mandarin orange sections, drained, for the 2 oranges. Buy a mixture of already cubed melon or melon balls from your supermarket deli or salad bar.

Number of servings: 8

Nutrition facts per serving: 272 calories, 9 g total fat (2 g saturated fat), 43 mg cholesterol, 405 mg sodium, 22 g carbohydrates, 12 g sugar, 3 g fiber, 27 g protein.

Daily values: 45% vitamin A, 126% vitamin C, 15% calcium, 9% iron

For more quick and delicious ways to use the season's fresh melon, visit the Recipe Center at bhg.com.  

For recipe questions, contact:
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