

Women Managing Dairy Cattle: Educating Dairy Women

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Summary and Implications

Women Managing Dairy Cattle (WMDC) was a pilot Annie's Project program. The course was developed to help educate dairy farm women on key issues they are facing, and to create a lasting impact on the operation through change in behavior via management decisions. Studies have shown that women have unique learning needs compared to their male counterparts; management meetings are predominately attended by men. Thus, the program was geared toward women designed based upon their learning and social needs.

Ag Industry professionals and dairy producers helped to identify and teach key topics for dairy producers. Program focused on nine business and production management topics over the three sessions. Three sessions were held weekly on Tuesdays in November from 11 to 2:30.

Fifteen women completed the WMDC course in Holy Cross, IA. These women represented over 2,000 cows in five counties. The women reported knowledge gain and intentions to change or update management practices on their dairy operation as a result of taking the course.

Introduction

Census of Ag data shows that there is a greater number of female operators on farms in northeast Iowa compared to other regions of the state. It is also known the dairy industry has a strong presence in northeast Iowa.

Annie's Project is a national program for farm women with the objective to empower farm women to manage information systems used in critical decision making processes and build networks through the state. This program has impacted many women in Iowa and across the nation. Annie's Project included multiple courses, ranging from general risk management to specific interest areas. A course that has had success is Women Managing Cattle (WMC) for women who manage beef cattle; this was the inspiration for WMDC. The WMDC course was modeled after the WMC course with modifications to fit the needs of dairy producers.

Materials and Methods

ISUEO organized a nine hour course for women involved or interested in dairy farming and risk management. The course was structured in three-three hour sessions; the sessions were held weekly on Tuesday's over

lunch. A steering committee met prior to the course to identify key risk management topics that are impacting dairy producers; the steering committee was comprised of female producers and ag professionals that are leaders in the industry. Production, financial, legal, and human resource were the four areas of risk management addressed during the course. Production topics covered included milk quality, technology, vaccination protocols, calf care, and feed rations. Business management topics covered included personality assessment, communication, employee management, farm succession planning, and financial analysis. Topics were taught by ISUEO specialists or industry professionals that specialize in the related topic. Each topic covered included example scenarios or activities to allow the women to apply the knowledge gained. All presenters encouraged questions and discussion as well.

Results and Discussion

Fifteen women completed the Women Managing Dairy Cattle course. The women represented hired management to owner/operator to interest in starting a dairy. The dairy operations represented were small to large operations in eastern Iowa. The participants were invited to complete a survey on the course following the completion of the course. The survey showed knowledge gain and behavior change through changing of management practices.

Survey Impacts and Results

Core Values with Annie's Project are guided intelligence, connection, discovery, and safe harbor. When the women were evaluated at the end of the class, on a scale of one to four, an average of 3.6 to 4 was reported for attaining the Annie's Project core values within the course.

Participants responded in a survey to report knowledge gain, change, and key items learned in the course. Regarding knowledge gain, survey respondents rated their knowledge before and after the program on a scale of 1 to 4 (no knowledge to know quite a bit). Across all topics knowledge gain was 0.4 to 1.2 points. Knowledge gain was high for awareness of where to gain information on employee management, succession planning strategies, and understanding milk quality test results.

Additionally, participants were asked about specific production management practices on the farm. Across the five practices surveyed, one-third to one-half of participants reported that due to knowledge gained in the class they were going to change a management practice on their farm.

Several women reported that the most important thing learned was maintaining or updating vaccination protocols and the importance of milk temperature when feeding calves. These two production practices can help to increase the level of management on dairy farms in northeast Iowa which further enhances the dairy industry.

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Participant's key issue with the program was time, either requesting a longer program or not enough time to go in-depth on topics covered. Either issue displays the desire for women to learn about business and production issues and topics.

Acknowledgements

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Speakers providing information and resources during the course included Jenn Bentley, ISUEO Field Specialist; Kristi Cooper, ISUEO Families Field Specialist; Jenn Hosch, Tri-Vet Associates; Carl and Gary Johnson, Iowa Farm Business Association; Ted Koehler, Landmark Services Cooperative; Todd McDonough, Land O'Lakes; Melissa O'Rourke, ISUEO Farm Business Management Field Specialist; Larry Tranel, ISUEO Dairy Field Specialist; and Leo Timms, ISUEO Dairy Specialist..

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