A Needs Assessment Strategy for Women in Agriculture

INTRODUCTION

Extension conducts periodic needs assessments among typical historic audiences and among potentially new audiences for the purpose of setting programming priorities and allocating resources. An educational need is considered a discrepancy between an audience's current status and some desired result (Witkin and Altschuld, 1995), the working assumption being that education can bring about the desired result.

A needs assessment can help Extension educators to decide
- whether an extension program should be developed (or improved)
- the focus of the program
- how the program should be delivered

The Women's Agricultural Network (PA-WAgN) is currently conducting a needs assessment in Pennsylvania among women in agriculture including women
- on farms
- in agricultural businesses
- in education

for the purpose of making the three decisions above relative to this target audience. The Pennsylvania Women's Agricultural Network (PA-WAgN) supports women in agriculture by providing a positive learning environment, networking, leadership opportunities and skills, and empowerment. The needs assessment is included below.

STUDY TEAM

Mary Barbercheck, Kathryn J. Brasier, Jill L. Findeis, Nancy Ellen Kiernan, Linda Moist, Carolyn Sachs, Ann Stone, Amy Trauger

NEEDS ASSESSMENT STRATEGY

Sampling

At the current time, there is no list of women in agriculture in Pennsylvania and therefore, no way to systematically sample this group. The process used in this study is called purposive sampling. Women at field days, Ag Progress Days, Farm Show, workshops and other events will be asked to complete the needs assessment.

The assessment has several advantages. It asks both open-ended questions and close-ended questions. The open-ended questions will determine needs that the women identify, and is free of the programmer’s bias. The close-ended questions cover a range of needs already identified in the literature and research as important to women in agriculture outside of Pennsylvania. Closed-ended questions allow the women to respond to an array of needs that they might not have remembered to put down in the open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions also allow program planners to calculate the percent of women who identify each need.

RESOURCES

Tipsheet #77: Women in Production Agriculture: A Hidden Audience in your County?
Women's Agricultural Network (WAgN) http://wagn.cas.psu.edu/ Available November 1, 2005

For further information about the needs assessment, please contact Amy Trauger (akt122@psu.edu), Carolyn Sachs (xyl@psu.edu), or Mary Barbercheck (meb34@psu.edu). This Web site is copyrighted by the Pennsylvania State University. The information may be used for educational purposes but not sold for profit.
1. Think about the knowledge and skills required to run your farm. What are the 3 most crucial skills or pieces of knowledge you would like to acquire to run your farm?

1. ___________________________________________________________________________________
2. ___________________________________________________________________________________
3. ___________________________________________________________________________________

2. Below we have listed skills and pieces of knowledge that other farmers have mentioned as important for running their farms. On the left, please check the phrase that best represents your current skill level in each area. With this same list, on the right, please check whether or not your would attend a workshop, demonstration, or other educational event in the next 2 years concerning each skill or piece of knowledge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill/Topic</th>
<th>CURRENT SKILL LEVEL (check one)</th>
<th>WOULD YOU ATTEND AN EDUCATIONAL EVENT ON THIS TOPIC?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managing Finances</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Moderate Considerable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing Products</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Moderate Considerable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning for Retirement</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Moderate Considerable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor Management</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Moderate Considerable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling Pests (weeds, worms, weevils, etc.)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Moderate Considerable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining Environmental Health</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Moderate Considerable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing Productivity/Fertility (both livestock and crops)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Moderate Considerable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Infrastructure (such as irrigation, chicken tractors, etc.)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Moderate Considerable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping Workers and Family Safe</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Moderate Considerable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Running Equipment</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Moderate Considerable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining Equipment</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Moderate Considerable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Computers</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Moderate Considerable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating with Domestic Partner</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Moderate Considerable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating with Family Members (especially those involved with the farm)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Moderate Considerable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Moderate Considerable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating with Farm Workers</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Moderate Considerable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with Local Government</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Moderate Considerable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping up with Legislation</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Moderate Considerable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing and Running Meetings</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Moderate Considerable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3 Listed below are several options for the type of educational events just discussed. Which of these formats would be best for you within the next 2 years? *(Please check all that apply).*

- Seminars/workshops
- On-farm demonstrations at a local farm
- Presentations during regular meetings of organizations to which you belong
- Learn from home

If you prefer to learn from home, how would you like to receive the information?
- I prefer receiving written materials, such as newsletters, articles, or books
- I prefer getting information through the internet, such as web sites or emails
- Online courses

4 Which days and times for these events would best fit into your schedule over the next 2 years? *(Please check all that apply).*

- Weekdays
- Weekends
- NO PREFERENCE

- Morning (9:00 a.m. — 12:00 Noon)
- Mid-day (11:00 a.m.— 2:00 p.m.)
- Afternoon (1:00 p.m. — 4:00 p.m.)
- Evening (7:00 p.m. — 9:00 p.m.)
- NO PREFERENCE

5 Listed below are several sources of assistance for farmers. In the past 2 years, have you used these sources for making farm decisions? If you have used a source, please indicate how useful you found that contact to be in making your farm decisions. *(Check “yes” or “no.” If “yes,” evaluate the usefulness).*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HAVE YOU HAD CONTACT?</th>
<th>USEFULNESS OF THESE CONTACTS (check one)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extension or conservation district agents, government or university sources</td>
<td>☐ No ☐ Yes ☑ ☐ Not useful ☐ Limited usefulness ☐ Somewhat useful ☐ Very useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm &amp; Commodity Organizations (Farm Bureau, Fruit &amp; Vegetable Growers Assoc.)</td>
<td>☐ No ☐ Yes ☑ ☐ Not useful ☐ Limited usefulness ☐ Somewhat useful ☐ Very useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable Ag Organizations (PASA, PCO)</td>
<td>☐ No ☐ Yes ☑ ☐ Not useful ☐ Limited usefulness ☐ Somewhat useful ☐ Very useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania Women’s Agricultural Network (PA-WAgN)</td>
<td>☐ No ☐ Yes ☑ ☐ Not useful ☐ Limited usefulness ☐ Somewhat useful ☐ Very useful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6 To what extent would you be more comfortable attending educational events designed for women farmers (i.e., women teaching women, hands-on workshops, peer teaching, time for networking)?

- Somewhat more comfortable
- Much more comfortable
- Doesn’t matter to me

7 The Pennsylvania Women’s Agriculture Network (PA-WAgN) supports women in agriculture by providing a positive learning environment, networking, and empowerment. How valuable would an organization of women producers (like PA-WAgN) be in your region?

- Not at all valuable
- A little valuable
- Somewhat valuable
- Fairly valuable
- Greatly valuable

8 What benefits can you see an organization of women producers (like PA-WAgN) providing for you and other women farmers?

_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________
Here are a few problems that other women said they have faced while trying to run a successful farm business. During the past year, to what extent have these been problems for you in making your farm successful?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Extent of Problem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sense of isolation from other women</td>
<td>(check one)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of isolation from other farmers</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for child care</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of computer knowledge</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of web/email access</td>
<td>Considerable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of family support for your role in managing the farm</td>
<td>(check one)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of farming background</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense that women are not welcome in many ag groups</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense that women producers are not taken as seriously as men</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify):</td>
<td>Considerable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Help us understand who we are reaching by answering the following questions:

10 Please indicate your main farm product(s) (check all that apply)

- Livestock (i.e., meat and fiber)
- Fruit and Vegetable
- Row crop (i.e., corn, wheat)
- Dairy
- Other (specify): ____________________________________________________________________

11 How many years have you been farming? ________________________________ years

12 Which marketing strategies have you used in the last 2 years? (check all that apply)

- Direct (farmers' market, farm stand)
- Retail (restaurants, grocers)
- Wholesale (cooperatives, processors, wholesalers)
- Subscription (pre-order)
- CSA (farm share)

13 How do you identify yourself? (check all that apply)

- Sole operator
- One of main operators
- Farm partner (business or domestic)
- Agricultural helper
- Business manager
- Not involved in the operation
- Other (specify): ____________________________________________________________________

14 What is the zip code of your home address? ____________________________

15 Please indicate your age group: (check one)

- Up to 24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65-74
- 75 or more

We greatly appreciate your time and effort and value your thoughts about farming in Pennsylvania! Thank you!
Visit PA-WAgN on the web:
http://wagn.cas.psu.edu