



Extension programming targeting women in the dairy industry

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Introduction

The University of Missouri – Extension Dairy Team has a rich history of providing educational programming to the dairy industry. However, surveys suggest the majority of participants involved are male (69.44%).

Women dairy operators in Missouri have recently eroded. The 2012 census reflects a sharp decline of 39% when compared to 2007. The “on-farm” women, which have no off farm income or work ≤ 99 days off farm, have decreased at a slower rate: 9% and 2% respectively.

The establishment of the “Women in Dairy” program targets women as primary operators and/or active women participants on the farm to address this educational gap. The objectives of the program were to provide a non-confrontational learning environment for women operators to obtain best management practices (BMP).

Objective

Women in Dairy began in 2016 to enable dairywomen across Missouri to access educational opportunities and social activities.

Program content delivered by University of Missouri Extension specialists included topics selected by a producer panel:

- Udder Dissection
- Taking care of you: Stress Management
- Farm Succession Planning
- Farm Tour: Focus Agrotourism
- Get ‘em on the bus: Time mgmt. soln in the morning
- Records: Are you profitable?
- Calf Care



Materials & Methods

GROUP LOCATION

Two Southwest, Missouri locations identified to develop meeting groups. This was due to the proximity to the dairy dense counties in the state. The goal was not to exceed 1 hour one way trip time.



PROGRAM DELIVERY

Topic offerings were developed to engage all females with an active role within the dairy farm, regardless of age. Unlike *typical* PowerPoint presentations, rooms are deliberately arranged to facilitate discussion. Often, discussion wonder within topic to discuss individual circumstances and on farm solutions.

The “East” and the “West” groups meet together a minimum of 3x/year.

To accommodate for advance scheduling, meeting dates always fall on the 2nd Wednesday, Content meetings alternate with “Social Lunch” which has allowed for a deepened sense of community.



Results

Post program surveys reflected a 57% increase in understanding of farm succession and a 94% increase in knowledge and skill for dealing with stress and stressful situations. Many women participants reported plans for implementing best management practices on the farm such as decreasing age at first calving and scoring teat ends.

Altered from traditional extension format of the program delivery, meetings deliberately engage interaction. Women participants reported the most enjoyable part as:

- “the ability to chat freely”
- “learn so much (while) meeting other dairy wives”
- “it was nice to learn new things”
- “the interaction with other women in dairy.”
- “information from all different types of dairy operations”

The comradery of the group is tangible, yet difficult to quantify. By educating a previously underserved audience, we anticipate increased productivity of Missouri dairy farms.

Summary

Through education and social networking, we anticipate women operators to become more effective contributors to their operations and therefore the families’ livelihood.

Additionally, the group will serve as a network of like-minded individuals providing friendship and resources with mutual goals and challenges.