

Survey of Women Direct Market Farmers in Wisconsin, 2009

Environmental Resources Center; 445 Henry Mall, Rm. 202A, Madison, WI 53706-1577

General survey information

Sample size and response rate: 601 surveys were sent out in January 2009 through the WI Ag Statistics Service (WASS) to all those in their database from 2002 and 2007 Ag. Census. Of these, 373 complete surveys were returned, a 62% response rate. We used a modified Dillman survey technique, where each potential respondent received 4 contacts from us (preliminary letter, first survey with letter, reminder postcard, and second survey with letter). We mailed two different versions of the survey, one to women farmers who use direct marketing and another to women dairy farmers. In this report we will discuss the results from the survey sent to women direct market farmers. During the course of this project we also interviewed women and held a discussion group. Results from that data will be available later.

Type of farm operation

Respondents were asked to check each category that applied. The most frequently mentioned products raised were vegetables (40%), poultry and eggs (35%), beef (31%) and tree fruit (30%). Also mentioned were berries, fish, grains, and several minor crops. Less than half (37%) of the women described their farm operation as conventional, and the remainder described their farms as non-certified organic (30%), certified organic (6%), sustainable (16%), transitional organic (3%), biodynamic (1%), or other. Only a small percentage of the women participate in government programs, with the most (16%) enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) or Conservation Enhancement Program (CREP). Many (at least 42%) were not aware of other similar programs.

Information sources

When asked about people consulted in the past year, direct market, non-dairy women farmers overwhelmingly listed other farmers (83%). They also consulted farm suppliers, equipment dealers, or producer coops (57%). University Extension was mentioned by only 36% of the women, and FSA by 30%. Other sources were consulted less often. Following the text are tables describing the information behavior of this study population.

Discussion

Most (72%) women who operate non-dairy direct market operations in Wisconsin farm fewer than 100 acres. They get their information from a wide variety of sources, but only 36% consult UW Extension and only 23% rate UW Extension "very important". The most important source of information is other farmers. The internet is increasingly important but is often difficult to navigate and can be overwhelming. Extension and other agencies can better serve women farmers by increasing our understanding and awareness of their participation in agriculture, targeting outreach and programs to smaller scale farms and beginning farms, working with farmers (as educators) to give programs, developing farmer-to-farmer information networks, improving the ease of use of websites, and seeking out these farmers and developing one-on-one relationships with them. Wisconsin has many successful programs for women farmers (Heart of the Farm, Annie's Project, Connecting Threads Conference, See Jane Grow, Gathering Circles, etc). We recommend taking advantage of these programs. We can also learn what information farm women need from evaluations of these programs.

During the past year, did you consult with any of the following when making decisions about your farm?

Table 1. Source of information	“Yes”
Other growers or farmers	83%
Farm supply dealers or producer coops	57%
University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension	36%
United States Farm Service Agency (FSA)	30%
Grower Association or Farmer Organization	26%
Bankers, financial consultants, or private paid consultants	21%
WI State Department of Agriculture	20%
County Conservation Department	19%
United States Natural Resources Conservation Service	12%
Organic certifier	12%

How important is each of the following as a source of information for your farm?

Table 2. Source of information	“Very Important”
Other growers or farmers	65%
Family members	47%
Internet	41%
Conference or workshop	31%
Farm magazine or newspaper	28%
Univ . of WI Extension publications	23%
Field days and demonstrations	21%
Equipment dealers or supplier brochures	10%
(Radio and TV were listed on separate lines and each received 7%)	7%

Do you want information or training on the following topics?

Table 3. Type of information	“Yes”
Government programs	53%
Sustainable or organic farming practices	50%
Marketing	49%
Environmental improvement and conservation	43%
Financial record keeping	38%
Business planning	37%
Animal husbandry	29%
Crop production methods	28%

Would you use any of these internet-based ways to receive farm-related information?

Table 4. Way to receive information	“Yes”
Information summary sheet or full reports	66%
Training modules	50%
Interactive on-line class	50%
PowerPoint or slideshow	47%
Video presentation (YouTube)	42%
Audio presentation	41%