

March 2, 2015

Comments by 2014 Spencer Award recipient Leigh Adcock

It was my privilege to serve as the executive director of Women, Food and Agriculture Network for six years. This is an organization that was born 18 years ago in Iowa, directed for many years by organic farmer Denise O'Brien, and now a national nonprofit with more than 5000 members across the US.

I've met some of the most amazing women since getting involved with WFAN. Women truly are the drivers of the healthy food and farming movement, as producers, consumers, landowners and staff at the organizations that support the movement.

I grew up on a corn and soybean farm in Pocahontas County, and I know it isn't always easy to base management decisions on conservation values. But it is possible, and farmers and landowners are doing it, and some of the most passionate conservationists I've ever met are the 65 and 70 year old women in Iowa and around the Midwest who are inheriting farmland and working with their tenant farmers to manage their land sustainably.

Our program, Women Caring for the Land, has brought a peer-discussion based model of conservation education to thousands of women across the upper Midwest since 2009, women who now own 47 percent of the farmland in Iowa. Between half and two thirds of the women who attend any given meeting will take at least one conservation action within the next year – from meeting with their tenant to talk about management, to getting in touch with the NRCS, to signing up their acres for conservation programs at the state and federal levels.

We're also pleased this year to be taking on management of the state's Women, Land and Legacy program, which will complement Women Caring for the Land and let us reach even more women landowners in Iowa.

WFAN provides opportunities for education, networking and leadership development to all women engaged in healthy food and farming, and to do that, we work closely with other organizations in the state such as the Leopold Center, Practical Farmers of Iowa, Iowa Farmers Union, and agencies like the Department of Natural Resources, NRCS, and the Department of Ag and Land Stewardship to provide resources to them. Thanks to our WCL curriculum developer Dr. Jean Eells for making it the premier program in the US for conservation outreach to women landowners.

Although I'm no longer ED of WFAN, our new director Bridget Holcomb has hired me back to coordinate the annual conference, so I hope you'll all mark your calendars for Nov. 6 – 7 and join us in the Quad Cities for the 2015 WFAN annual conference!

I am so grateful to the WFAN board members, especially board chair Angie Carter, for putting together the nomination that led to this award. (Please stop by the poster area and take a look at Angie's research project on how women landowners make conservation decisions about wetlands – the project is called Navigating the Waters.) I'm accepting it on behalf of WFAN and all of the women who are passionate about healthy food and farming in Iowa and across the country.