



In Her Boots

MOSES ORGANIC FACT SHEET

Rural Women's Project

While the total number of farms has been declining for many years, the number owned and operated by women is on the rise—up nearly 30 percent, according to the 2007 Census of Agriculture released by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Women launching small-scale, sustainable, locally focused enterprises are driving this increase in new women-owned farms. Additionally, according to the Center of Women's Business Research, businesses owned by women continue to grow at two times the rate of all companies (42% versus 24%).

As the number of women-owned businesses and farms climbs, opportunity abounds for women of all backgrounds, ages and interests to craft a livelihood in sustainable and organic agriculture that both supports the planet and transforms our food system. This growing trend of women "ecopreneurs" creatively build successful businesses around their passion for conservation, community and leaving this world a better place. Some of these women traded urban roots for the rural lifestyle while others are recrafting the family farm lifestyle they grew up with. Yet they all share a passion to help educate others about the importance of healthy land, food and community connections.

This positive growth of women farmers comes after decades of discrimination and lack of representation within the agriculture community. The USDA currently is settling claims from women farmers for past-denied farm loans because of gender discrimination. Women also qualify as "socially disadvantaged farmers" (SDA) within some Farm Bill and other USDA programs. While the "disadvantaged" label is unappealing, it means women farmers can qualify for special funds through the Farm Service Agency (FSA) for a farm purchase or operating expenses.

Accessing information about special loans or finding resources in general that are specific to women farmers was an issue for this group until MOSES launched its Rural Women's Project in 2008.

The MOSES Rural Women's Project supports women farmers and food-based ecopreneurs with resources, networking and collaborative opportunities to champion food system change. The Project aims to increase the voice and impact of women in the organic and sustainable farming and food community.

The Rural Women's Project is based on the documented model that women farmers learn best from each other in a peer-led format. Through programming based on collaboration and building local connections, the Rural Women's Project brings together women passionate about transforming our food systems on all levels. Rural Women's Project events particularly support beginning female farmers: approximately 60% of workshop attendees have not yet launched businesses and another 30% have been in business one to three years.

The networking, connections with other women and general openness and candidness of the presenters is a key component of Rural Women's Project programming. *"This is the best event I've attended of its kind in a long time. The interchange of ideas with other women has been invaluable. Thank you!"*



Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES) | PO BOX 339, Spring Valley, WI
715-778-5775 | info@mosesorganic.org | www.mosesorganic.org

Rural Women's Project Programs

In Her Boots:

Sustainable Farming For Women, By Women

- mosesorganic.org/womensprojectinherboots.html

These full-day workshops take place on women-owned farms throughout the Midwest. Farm tours and topics vary by site, but address topics such as business diversification, family integration/balance and challenges of specific groups of women farmers (i.e., single women, seniors/retirees, etc.).

Women Caring for the Land:

Conservation Learning Circles

- womencaringfortheland.org/wisconsin

This project, in partnership with the Women, Food & Agriculture Network (WFAN), addresses the fact that nearly 50% of rural land is owned or co-owned by women, increasingly sole owners of senior and widowed women who inherited family farmland. This day-long workshop includes a facilitated format that enables these landowners to meet with female conservation professionals regarding resources, to engage in different activities that teach conservation principles and to participate in a guided tour of area farmland to see these principles and practices in action.

Soil Sisters: Wisconsin Women in Sustainable Agriculture Farm Tours

- www.soilsisterswi.org

The free Soil Sisters farm tour highlights a cross-section of women farmers in south central Wisconsin who prioritize small-scale, diversified, community-focused agriculture. This annual event gives families a chance to see (and buy) what's growing on the farms.

Media Outreach

- mosesorganic.org/womensproject_media.html

The Rural Women's Project shares the inspiring stories of women farmers who practice sustainable and organic agriculture. These stories have been featured by media outlets such as Wisconsin Public Radio, NBC-15 Madison, Wisconsin Electric Cooperative News Magazine, Agri-View, Edible Madison, and Public News Service.

Women's Leadership in Food System Change

- mosesorganic.org/womensprojectplatetopolitics.html

The Rural Women's Project works in various collaborative capacities to lead national efforts to support women working on food system change, provide education and training on policy issues and grassroots organizing. One such effort is the Plate to Politics initiative in partnership with the Women, Food & Agriculture Network connecting women committed to transforming our food system.

MOSES Organic Farming Conference

- mosesorganic.org/conference.html

The Rural Women's Project facilitates a pre-conference special session for women farmers and a conference workshop session covering topics such as ergonomics and tools for women. The Project also facilitates lunchtime networking sessions by state and region.

Useful Links

MOSES Rural Women's Project

- www.mosesorganic.org/womensproject

Describes the project, its key components and includes workshop details and schedules plus information on the growth of women in sustainable agriculture

Women, Food & Agriculture Network

- www.wfan.org

National women in sustainable agriculture network with a free e-newsletter and listserv

Contact Information

- www.mosesorganic.org/womensproject
lisa@innserendipity.com

Lisa Kivirist coordinates the Rural Women's Project for MOSES. She is a Kellogg Food & Society Policy Fellow specializing in women in sustainable agriculture. She also runs Inn Serendipity Farm and B&B with her family in Browntown, Wis. Lisa is the co-author of the award-winning books *Ecopreneuring*, *Rural Renaissance* and *Farmstead Chef*.



The Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES) provides education and resources to farmers to encourage organic and sustainable farming practices. To learn more, please see:

www.mosesorganic.org