



Women Harvesting Opportunities in Agriculture

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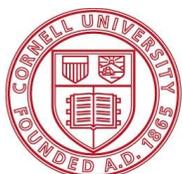
You may have noticed there are more female faces behind the windshield of a tractor and more mascara in the ag meeting room. There is no denying that the face of agriculture is changing. To give you some perspective, the number of farms operated by women has more than doubled since 1978 according to the USDA (2012 Census). This does not include the women who work in the agricultural industry, which is an infinitely broad and growing field.

Across the country, nearly 300,000 women serve as principal operators on 62.7 million acres of farm and rangeland, accounting for \$12.9 billion in farm products in 2012. Countless more women live, work, and raise families in rural America. The USDA supports projects designed to help women in agriculture improve production, develop good business and risk management practices, and transfer knowledge to other women agricultural leaders.

“Better representation of women in agriculture means more than just an increase in the amount of food produced on women-owned or women-operated farms and ranches. It means expanded opportunity for today’s women agriculturalists to access credit and grow their operations, assume leadership roles at the local, state, and federal level, and perform cutting edge research that will help ensure the future food security of our nation and the world.” Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack

This trend is due a great deal to the fact that more young women are pursuing animal science, environmental science, sustainability, food science, etc. degrees. Between 2004 and 2012, the largest percent increases of bachelor degrees awarded to women included Environmental Science (128%), food science and technology (98%), animal sciences (52%), agricultural mechanization and engineering (49%), and fisheries and wildlife (45%).

As a young woman myself, I am personally experiencing this shift. After graduating from a college that was 65% female, I went on to an agricultural research internship in which all 12 interns were female. Since beginning my position with Extension in agricultural outreach less than a year ago, I’ve worked closely with the newly formed NNY Regional Ag Team, which has seven members, five of which are women. The 2016-17 Dairy Prospects class, a group of local high school students exploring careers in the dairy industry, is comprised of seven young women and only one young man. These numbers show that females are a growing force in the future of local agriculture.



Cornell University
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**THE JEFFERSON—Farm and Food E-News
November-December 2016**

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