



PERENNIAL SYSTEMS CONSERVATION: Reaching Women Landowners & Farmers



Why Women Landowners?

Nearly 50% of Iowa farmland is owned by women, many of whom are non-operating landowner. Additionally, women farmers are on the rise, with women and other historically underserved producers making up a majority of new and beginning farmers. Given these trends, it is crucial for agricultural organizations to support women landowners and farmers as active partners in conservation. The following data was gathered from American Farmland Trust Women for the Land Learning Circles, which sought to determine the conservation needs of women. The program combined research-based, participatory methods to create peer-to-peer spaces for women in agriculture to share their expertise and experiences with one another.

Motivations for Adopting Prairie

Women are excited about the potential for prairie strips, with many specifically interested in a multitude of benefits, including:

- Pollinator and other wildlife habitat
- On-farm diversity
- Grazing potential
- Utilization of marginal land
- Aesthetic appreciation



"I stopped by to show the [prairie] strips to a friend and she took a delightful photo of me drowning in a sea of monarchs."

Women Face Distinct Barriers

Women navigate various challenges, some of which are barriers related to gender, while other factors might directly influence their ability to manage prairie on their land. One of the biggest challenges for many women landowners is dealing with landowner/tenant dynamics in addition to navigating different priorities when managing land with a spouse or other family members.

Women landowners also face management challenges that all landowners and farmers might face while adopting prairie strips, including:



Establishing and maintaining the prairie, particularly in the early years.



Navigating conservation programs and resources at state, federal, and local levels.



Scaling prairie to fit diversified production systems that are not conventional row crop operations.



"My kind of frustration is that it seems like ... there's a lot of overlap in a lot of different programs and organizations. And you can kind of get overwhelmed or fall in a rabbit hole when you're trying to find which one's more appropriate, which ones fit?"

Outreach Strategies

Women farmers and farm landowners have particular training needs and a strong desire to learn more. Many obstacles point to universal challenges and motivations, while some are unique to their experiences as women. Targeting outreach specifically designed with women in mind can improve their confidence and motivate them to take a greater number of conservation actions. To reach women landowners and farmers more effectively, consider the following:

- Design outreach programs with women in mind and conduct targeted outreach with them.
- Strategize with women landowners on how to engage tenants or family members who may be skeptical about adopting new practices. Consider inviting the landowner and tenant to a meeting to learn more about the practice.
- Support them in navigating institutional programs that could assist them in adopting prairie strips. Consider sitting "second chair" with them as a guide as they apply for new programs and explore relevant resources.



"I have enjoyed watching how the inclusion of diversity has brought animals around, now I have fewer problems with the screen that is right next to my house. It just looks much nicer. It really does. And by the way, those beneficial animals and insects and whatnot, they helped me in making my farming situation better."



"For me the toughest part is talking to our tenant to saying 'Hey, this is what we want you to do for us.' And it's kind of a difficult conversation to have, considering the first and only time I've actually met him was at my dad's funeral."



For additional programs, check out:

- [American Farmland Trust: Women for the Land](https://www.farmland.org/women)
 - [<https://www.farmland.org/women>]
- [Iowa State University Extension: Women in Agriculture](https://www.extension.iastate.edu/womeninag/)
 - [<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/womeninag/>]
- [Pheasants Forever: Women on the Wing](https://www.pheasantsforever.org/Participate/Women-on-the-Wing.aspx) initiative inspiring women conservationists
 - [<https://www.pheasantsforever.org/Participate/Women-on-the-Wing.aspx>]
- [Reaching Women in Agriculture: A Guide to Virtual Engagement](https://www.sare.org/resources/reaching-women-in-agriculture-a-guide-to-virtual-engagement)
 - [<https://www.sare.org/resources/reaching-women-in-agriculture-a-guide-to-virtual-engagement>]
- [Women Caring for the Land](https://wfan.org/women-caring-for-the-land): Curriculum for reaching women landowners on conservation
 - [<https://wfan.org/women-caring-for-the-land>]
- [Women Owning Woodlands](https://www.womenowningwoodlands.net/): Resources to support women forest landowners
 - [<https://www.womenowningwoodlands.net/>]

Other Resources:

- [1]: [Iowa Farmland Ownership and Tenure Survey](http://bit.ly/3ZRvpqG)
[<http://bit.ly/3ZRvpqG>]
- [2]: [Socially Disadvantaged, Beginning, Limited Resource and Female Farmers and Ranchers](http://bit.ly/3T4jHXu)
[<http://bit.ly/3T4jHXu>]
- [3]: ['From a Circle of Introductions': Empowerment of Women Agricultural Landowners](https://bit.ly/3FhQh2x)
[<https://bit.ly/3FhQh2x>]

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