

Annie's Project is making farming women's work

By WENDY MARTIN
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Annie's Project - Education for Farm Women, was originally launched in February 2003 as a one year program at Kaskaskia College. There were ten women in that charter class.

Today, nearly 15,000 women have participated in the project in 34 states.

It was Annie Fleck's ability to do the books and keep extensive records for her family farm to influence some of its biggest decisions based on the critical information that she tracked.

Her recommendations were not always popular and there was no small amount of tension in the family at times due to the strength of her convictions about the best path to take.

That may be why the goal of the newest version of the Annie's Project Education for Farm Women is not just to teach participants about financials, loans, insurance, commodity marketing and the like, but to make friends and network with other farm women.

One of the people crucial to the creation of the program was her daughter Ruth Hambleton who used the internet to introduce the 2018 version Tuesday, March 13 to a dozen women in Mason County, while addressing six women in Decatur in person.

The small groups allow for open discussion and connection with others, Ruth indicated

The "vision" of Annie's Project is to enhance the lives of rural women.

"The Mission is to empower farm women to be better business partners through networks and by managing and organizing critical information," Ruth said.

Experience has shown that participation in Annie's Project provides more than an education on farm financials, leasing, loans, insurance and commodity marketing.

It provides a path to learning these things in a supportive environment with other women learning the same things.

"Discovery is when things start making sense that did not make sense before," Ruth said. "And the shared experience is something we pride ourselves on. You'll find women in the group may know more about a topic than the presenter. Maybe they sell insurance, or they are a supreme record keeper," Ruth said.

The first step for the Mason County women was to get to know themselves and one another better by going through a presentation on the Real Colors communication program to learn more about their own way of thinking and how others may think differently.

What they will learn

Participants in Annie's Project in Mason County will be attending programs on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 6 to 9 p.m. through the month of March.

The first session on Tuesday night was an

introduction and overview of the program.

Additional topics coming up will be: Commodity Marketing; Crop Insurance; Leasing and Drones;

—Marketing;

Balancing

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Who is Annie's Project for?

Mason County class will be held through March

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The dozen women who attended the introductory meeting of Annie's Project in the basement of the Mason County Farm Bureau building likely reflected the composite of nearly 15,000 women who have already taken part in the program.

According to Ruth Hambleton, daughter of Annie Fleck for whom the project is named, 8 out of 10 are married. Ten percent are widows and the remaining 8% or so are either single or divorced.

Most of the farms they come from are sole proprietorships, with 20% being partnerships and the rest an assortment of trusts, S-corporations and LLCs.

Ruth noted that in terms of income, Annie's Project participants seem to be spread across the spectrum, equally divided from small garden farms to mega farms. "Anyone can gain from Annie's Project," she said.

Seventy percent of those who have

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