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Then and Now: Ten Years of Arkansas Women in Agriculture

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THEN AND NOW: TEN YEARS OF ARKANSAS WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE



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INTRODUCTION

Women in agriculture are tremendous contributors to American society, especially within rural communities, because of the roles they play on and off the farm. In Arkansas alone, 19,856 women now make up 28.6 percent of the farm operators, and nearly 25 percent of those women are principal operators (USDA NASS, 2004b).

More women are choosing agricultural based careers. Between 2002 and 2012, the number of women operators in Arkansas grew 14 percent from 19,856 to 22,637 (USDA, NASS, 2004, 2014). Many surveys of agricultural women have been conducted both nationally and internationally. However, most provide information for only one point in time. Little is known, especially for Arkansas, if and how agricultural women's roles, challenges and important job attributes have changed over time.

OBJECTIVES

Using survey data of Arkansas agricultural women collected between 2005 and 2014, this study compares women's perceptions across time (in 2005, 2009 and 2014) regarding:

- Factors important to choice of jobs
- The challenges they face in their jobs
- How their roles have changed over time

METHODS

Survey data were collected during the nine statewide Arkansas Women in Agriculture (ARWIA) annual conferences, which took place between 2005 and 2014 (no 2013 conference). Surveys were developed following Salant and Dillman (1994) and Dillman, Smyth and Christian (2009). Summary statistics for all 190 variables were generated by survey year and across time. Statistical tests (Student's t-tests, chi square tests and Fisher's exact tests) were run two ways: 1) to determine if differences existed across years for all respondents and 2) if differences existed between types of respondents (owners of farms and agribusinesses vs employees) in any given year. Variables tested for significant differences were: 1) their roles in the business, 2) the challenges faced, and 3) the importance of various job attributes.

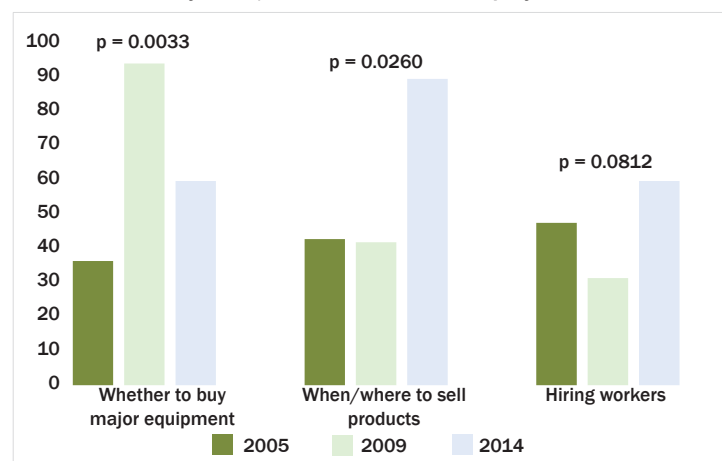


TABLE 1. Top Five Satisfaction Factors and Challenges In Agriculture Across The Years

In my business it is important to me that...	2005	2009	2014
I can apply my talents and skills directly	90.63	92.68	87.50
I am able to meet current financial needs	76.99	63.41	87.50
I can try new ways of doing things	85.60	78.05	85.00
I am excited about my work	87.28	90.00	90.00
I can balance my work and free time	70.32	80.00	77.50
I can be involved in my community	87.60	87.50	87.18
I improve my standard of living	83.20	85.00	77.50
In my business activity, I have problems...	2005	2009	2014
Networking with others in similar activities	21.10	33.33	26.70
Finding information about government programs related to my type of business	32.11	30.77	32.26
Qualifying for government programs related to my type of business	29.63	38.46	25.81
Knowing where/how to market my products	37.27	38.46	19.36
Keeping up with environmental regulations related to my activity	36.36	30.77	25.80
Finding/affording a good lawyer	38.53	46.15	38.71
Keeping good employees	43.12	36.11	41.94
Handing my cash flow	27.10	37.84	26.67
Being respected in my industry as a female business person	41.45	34.21	31.04

SCALE OF COLOR. Number 1 Number 2 Number 3 Number 4 Number 5

FIGURE 1. Significant Differences In Decision Making Power By Farm/Business Women Employees



RESULTS

A total of 239 conference participants completed the surveys in 2005, 2009 and 2014. First, all respondents were analyzed together. Of the 14 job attributes listed, seven were ranked in the top five across the years (Table 1). Applying talents, being excited about the work and being involved in the community were consistently rated as important. Of the 13 problems listed, nine were ranked in the top five across the years (Table 1). Finding/affording a good lawyer and keeping good employees were consistently rated as the largest problems, yet were never faced by more than 47 percent of respondents.

Respondents were then placed into categories of farm/agribusiness owners or employees. Very few differences were found between owners and employees across the years; in nearly all cases, differences found were for attributes or problems that were not ranked in the top five.

Owners and employees were asked about their decision making power in seven areas: (buying equipment, selling products, hiring workers, buying/renting land, business practices used, borrowing money, and household expenditures). The greatest changes in decision making power over time were for employees (Figure 1). Between 2005 and 2014 employees decision making power in the first three areas listed increased. Changes between 2005 and 2009 as well as between 2009 and 2014 suggest that changes in decision making power is not consistent across areas where decisions need to be made.

CONCLUSION

This research provides some of the first insights into the extent of roles and perceptions of Arkansas' women in agriculture over time. It is hoped that this information can be useful not only to researchers and educators interested in addressing needs of local women but help to illustrate the where and how women's roles are changing and thus the need for extended research over time to address these needs.

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