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WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE: A NEGLECTED AUDIENCE FOR EXTENSION?

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ABSTRACT

The agricultural component of the Cooperative Extension Service, both in the United States and other countries, has been accused of targetting primarily male farmers who have medium to large operations. The "small farmer" may be overlooked as a possible audience, so may the female farmer or the woman working in agriculture-related businesses. In the Spring of 1985, with the support of local extension personnel, a small group of women who defined their primary occupation as agriculture began meeting on a regular basis in Dade County, Florida. This group was envisioned as a net-working organization, as a vehicle to promote local agriculture in the urban areas of greater Miami and as a source of scholarship funds for women interested in careers in agriculture. Since its inception, Dade County Women in Agriculture has grown to over 80 members who represent a wide range of occupations in agriculture oriented fields. Details of the group's membership composition, its activities and interactions with both the agricultural and urban communities will be discussed. The potential for similar local organizations to aid in the production and promotion of locally grown "new crops" will be proposed.

INTRODUCTION

U.S. land grant institutions, particularly the agricultural extension components thereof, have been accused of targeting primarily male growers who own medium to large sized farms. "Small farmers" and female farmers are seen as neglected audiences for extension activities. In Florida, as in many other states, attempts are being made to reach previously unidentified audiences. One such a group is that comprised of female farmers and other women involved in agriculture-related professions. The situation in Dade County, Florida, will be described as an example of a successful extension effort which has not only identified a "new" audience, but has involved this audience in educational activities.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF DADE COUNTY WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

In March 1983, an organization, now known as Dade County Women in Agriculture, was formed in the Homestead area of Dade County, Florida, by a female county extension agent and two local women who were employed in agriculture, one of whom had complained that there were no other women farmers. The first meeting was called to see: (a) whether there really were enough local women whose primary occupation was agriculture or agriculture-related to even form such a group and (b) whether there was interest in establishing a network of and for women in agriculture. Eight women attended the organizational meeting: 1 vegetable farmer, 1 grove owner, 2 women in agricultural finance, 1 woman in agrichemical sales, and 3 extension agents (1 agriculture, 2 home economists).

This initial group invited friends and acquaintances to subsequent meetings and within two months there was a general consensus to organize formally and to call the new group Dade County Women in Agriculture (DCWIA). The group now has over 80 members. Four major objectives evolved from these early meetings: (a) to be a support and networking group for women involved in agriculture, (b) to promote agricultural products grown in Dade County through education programs and to participate in events that educate consumers about Dade County's agriculture, (c) to encourage women to become involved in and to pursue careers in agriculture, and (d) to establish a scholarship fund to assist anyone seeking to pursue formal training in agriculture. The Dade-IFAS Cooperative Extension supported this effort by providing meeting facilities and a vehicle for communication under the auspices of the female commercial agriculture agent who became editor of the DCWIA Newsletter.

DCWIA AS A NETWORK

One of the reasons for forming Dade County Women in Agriculture was to establish a network among women working in agriculture. Some members have traditionally been active in several local agriculture-related organizations such as Dade County AGRI-Council, Florida Mango Forum, Florida Nurserymen & Growers Association, Florida Foliage Association, Lime and Avocado Growers Association and other fairly commodity-specific groups. Other DCWIA members have not really participated in these groups, though they are fairly active in DCWIA. The group is unique in that it is comprised primarily of growers (as opposed to bankers, realtors, politicians, and so on as with AGRI-Council) and it encompasses the full spectrum of agricultural commodities as well as support industries and institutions.

Table 1 lists the occupation, number of members per occupation and percentage of members in a given occupation.

Table 1. Occupations of Dade County Women in Agriculture
(as of 8/86)

Occupation	Number	Percent
Agriculture Related	4	5.00
Animals	4	5.00
Education	2	2.50
Extension	5	6.25
Finance	5	6.25
Food Utilization	2	2.50
Government	5	6.25
Groves	18	22.50
Marketing/Sales	3	3.75
Nursery	23	28.75
Research	4	5.00
Vegetables	5	6.25

The DCWIA network functions in several ways: (a) some members have become acquainted with people they had never met before, in some cases

friendships have been formed, (b) people have learned about DCWIA by reading about friends who are members; (c) members have helped other members find jobs and plant material; (d) members have donated goods and/or services to projects on which other members are working; and (e) members have sources of information on which to call when they have questions about many different things. The network has also helped to acquaint the members about the various facets of local agriculture, thus making everyone a better spokesperson.

DCWIA PROMOTES LOCAL AGRICULTURE

The group's "public debut" was a booth at the Mango Festival in July 1985. Seventeen members (grove-4, nursery-4, marketing-2, research-2, extension-2, finance-1, agrichemicals-1, food utilization-1) participated. DCWIA received favorable publicity from two local newspapers ("The Miami Herald" and the "South Dade News Leader"), which in turn led to the group being listed in "Connections: A Directory of Dade County's Women's Organizations," a publication of the Dade County Commission on the Status of Women. Extension home economists provided recipes for some of the food prepared by DCWIA members as examples of utilization of local tropical fruits.

The second major event was a one-day display at a local shopping mall where locally grown tropical fruits, vegetables and nursery products were featured. Twenty-four members and friends participated in the display (nursery-5, grove-4, research-4, extension-4, finance-2, marketing-2, food utilization-1, agrichemicals-1, vegetables-1). DCWIA members answered shoppers' questions about availability of the items, how to grow them and how to use them. Some of the fruits and vegetables were provided by staff of the University of Florida's Tropical Research and Education Center. Dade-IFAS Cooperative Extension provided publications on the growing and use of many of the products in the display.

Dade County Women in Agriculture provided packets made up of point-of-purchase materials from the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to cafeteria managers in over 100 Dade County public schools during Farm-City Week. The cafeteria managers were shown slides of the most important fruits and vegetables grown in Dade County and were encouraged to use them in their menus whenever possible. They were given quantity recipes developed by a local packinghouse and were referred to Extension Home Economists for more specific questions on food preparation. DCWIA members also made posters featuring locally grown produce which were placed in the lobbies of the Homestead area eleven banks during Farm-City Week.

The group also staffed tables at three local winter festivals, answering questions about the organization and telling the urban public about agriculture. In addition, Dade County Women in Agriculture cooperated with another local group, Dade County AGRI-Council on the latter's Agriculture Tour. This is designed primarily to acquaint local politicians with the problems faced by farmers. DCWIA members took part in the tour itself and also assembled "tote bags" featuring local products which were given to tour participants. The tote bags featured items from nine state and local companies and organizations.

DCWIA EDUCATES ITS MEMBERS

Dade County Women in Agriculture have had guest speakers at several of their monthly meetings. The first was a state Senator who discussed legislative issues affecting women, M.A.R.T.A. (an act concerning land use) and day care issues. She gave an example of how local citizens could impact statewide legislation.

Three other speakers have been Dade-IFAS Cooperative Extension staff: (a) The Commercial Ornamentals agent described that industry and his interactions with it. (b) The County Extension Director spoke on three issues: the role of Extension; present issues and future problems facing extension; and a challenge to women to be known as themselves. (c) The Commercial Tropical Vegetable Agent, described her interactions with that industry as well as the Women in Horticulture Working Group which is part of the American Society for Horticultural Science.

Two members who are involved in produce sales described their approaches to selling tropical fruits and vegetables. They talked about the differences between the types of commodities and the different methods of communicating with produce buyers on both the wholesale and retail level.

Another DCWIA member talked about various techniques for drying locally grown tropical fruits. Samples of different fruits and fruit leathers were distributed.

In addition to talks by outside speakers and various members, DCWIA has had two tours to places where members work. One was a fertilizer company where members were able to see different types of fertilizers and the machines used to blend them. The second tour was to the University of Florida's Tropical Research and Education Center where four members work. Tour participants were able to see various laboratories and meet some of the local researchers.

One educational program which is planned for the future is a leadership training workshop which will be offered by the County Extension Director. DCWIA members have also expressed an interest in receiving further training in specific subjects related to plant and animal sciences, including entomology, pathology, and culture and management.

DCWIA ESTABLISHES A SCHOLARSHIP FUND

In November 1985, one of the early members passed away after a brief illness. Since she had been such an enthusiastic supporter of Dade County Women in Agriculture and symbolized the group's potential for allowing local women to become active spokespeople, the members voted to establish a scholarship fund in her memory. The Fund Raising Committee decided that it was in the group's best interests to have 1-2 major fund raisers per year rather than several smaller ones. They chose a barbecue as the Spring fund raiser. One member owns an Arabian horse ranch which she offered as the site. Other members made arrangements with a caterer and still others solicited donations to be used as door prizes. Thirty-two members plus families and friends worked to make the event a success. Almost 500 tickets (@\$12.50/each) were sold and 400 people were served. The group

raised over \$3000 towards a scholarship. At present the application forms have not yet been distributed, but a decision was made that candidates could be either degree-seeking or persons who need an stipend to attend special training classes, including conferences.

IMPLICATIONS FOR OTHER PLACES

The success of this particular local organization certainly does not insure that other similar groups will fare as well. A similar group in another Florida county has had trouble getting started because the members are spread out over a wider geographical area than the women (and a few men) in the agricultural area of Dade County. DCWIA meetings are at noon and last about one hour. If potential members need to travel long distances to attend a meeting, noon may not be a good time. On the other hand, efforts are now under way to establish a multi-county organization in Central Florida. Presumably their meetings will be either at night or on weekends.

In some places there may be few women who are actually involved to agricultural production, but many who sell fruits and vegetables. An organization comprised of these women could be trained to promote locally grown products to tourists who would then associate these commodities with particular geographical areas. One Homestead packinghouse has developed color brochures which explain what the various products are, how to handle them (postharvest), and how to use them. These brochures are included as point of purchase material in packing containers for many specialty items. A local group of growers and/or sellers could pool their efforts in developing similar promotional material which could in turn be both given to tourists and included in packing containers.

Local groups could become active in education by having displays similar to DCWIA's mall display, placing them in hotel lobbies or patios during major holidays or festivals. Static displays featuring local produce, particularly "new crops" or other export items could be permanently located in major hotels. In addition, any promotional literature could be included with other tourist information.

RESUMEN

El componente agrícola del Servicio de Extensión, tanto en los Estados Unidos como en otros países, ha sido acusado de dirigir sus programas principalmente a los agricultores masculinos que tienen fincas grandes o de tamaño intermedio. El "pequeño agricultor" puede ser omitido como posible cliente e igualmente el sector femenino o la mujer que trabaja en la agricultura o en ocupaciones que la relacionan con la agricultura. Durante la primavera de 1985, con el apoyo de los agentes del Servicio de Extensión local, un pequeño grupo de mujeres que trabajan principalmente en ocupaciones agrícolas comenzaron a reunirse cada mes en el Condado de Dade en el Estado de Florida. Este grupo se visualiza como una red de comunicaciones, como un vehículo para promover la agricultura local en las áreas urbanas del Miami metropolitano y como una fuente de recursos para becas para mujeres que se interesan en profesiones agrícolas. Desde su comienzo, este grupo conocido como Las Mujeres en Agricultura del Condado de Dade ha crecido hasta contar con más de 80 socias. Ellas representan una gran

diversidad de ocupaciones en la agricultura y en los negocios agrícolas. En este artículo se presentan detalles de las ocupaciones de los miembros, sus actividades hasta hoy y las interacciones con la comunidad agrícola y la comunidad urbana. Se propondrán las posibilidades para otros grupos locales que puedan ayudar en la producción y promoción de "cosechas nuevas" locales.